

2023-24
Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications

Name of Accredited Unit: **UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media**

Name of Institution: **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

Name of Unit Administrator: **Dean Raul Reis**

Date of Original Site Visit: **Oct. 10-13, 2021**

Revisit Date: **Jan. 22-23, 2024**

Revisit Team Chair: **Peter Bhatia, CEO, Houston Landing**



Revisit Team Member: **Hub Brown, Dean and Professor, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida**



Revisit Team's Recommendation: **REACCREDITATION**

1. List each standard found in noncompliance and the reasons as cited in the original team report.

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

The original team found the Hussman School out of compliance on diversity citing:

“Several faculty members and staff, in particular those of color, said morale is low and they are considering leaving the school. They said the (Nicole) Hannah-Jones decision and the aftermath is the latest in a series of incidents in which they have felt undervalued and not heard/understood. Faculty and students complained about the lack of resources, in particular funds for personnel, recruiting, curriculum development and programming. They also want time for training. Several students of color complained that the school takes credit for some of their accomplishments though they received little if any support from the program. “They want to showcase our diversity, but it’s mainly superficial,” one student said.

“The previous site team stated that the school’s faculty and students ‘aspire to be inclusive.’ Aspiration is not a strategy. The naming of a director and the recent work of the ABIDE committee is a step in the right direction. The group has conducted listening sessions with students and faculty, created an inclusive curriculum toolkit, worked with students to establish a Hispanic journalists association and LGBTQ student organization. It also has plans to update the diversity plan.”

The site team recommended reaccreditation for UNC as did the Accrediting Committee. The Accrediting Council reversed those decisions and placed the school on provisional reaccreditation, citing the controversies around the changing offers to Hannah-Jones by the university and the actions of the university trustees and Walter Hussman himself.

While the school had made progress in its percentage of faculty of color (one-third of color, half female) and diversity within its student body (numbers remain generally steady for faculty and students today), the site team report noted issues in the school’s execution of its diversity plan.

From the site team report (edited down for the purposes of this document):

The UNC Hussman School has a written diversity plan that includes its mission and vision statements, how it defines diversity and six overarching goals. The school has had a plan since the 1990s and the current version, with the help of an outside consultant, integrates input from multiple stakeholders.

However, the UNC Hussman School is dealing with an existential crisis both internally and externally. The controversy surrounding the decision by Nikole Hannah-Jones to turn down a tenured, endowed chair at the school exposed long-standing problems. Many stem from inconsistencies in executing the goals in the 2016 Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.

Goal 1 was to “clearly define and publicize the school’s commitment to diversity.” The school did an effective job of visibly identifying courses, highlighting diversity in syllabi, activities and research, but comments from students and faculty indicate that much of it has been superficial. Several students referred to many of the diversity initiatives as going through the motions.

However, in the months after the Hannah-Jones incident, the school's diversity committee, renamed the Access, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity committee (ABIDE), has taken on this issue and others related to diversity and inclusion.

Goal 2 of the 2016 diversity plan addresses the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff, students and administrators. The numbers indicate a slight increase in minority faculty, but only increased from four to six among African American faculty members. The previous site team report stated that students and faculty "bemoaned the lack of diversity." Similar comments were made during this site visit. One junior student heading into his senior year said he had never been taught by a faculty member of color. Several faculty members complained that recruiting faculty of color has been haphazard and ineffective. They also voiced concern about the selection of search committee members. Several minority faculty members said they are reluctant to recruit people of color to the school because of the climate. However, faculty members recently approved a requirement that all new applicants provide a diversity statement. (*Note: This has subsequently been banned by state legislation.*) In the area of student recruitment, the director of diversity and inclusion said there has been marginal success (up 10 points), but recent racial issues on campus and in the school may have had a negative impact on enrollment. One current minority student said, "If I could go back, I would not be in Hussman."

The school has been effective in providing diversity training for faculty and staff under Goal 3, but it is on a voluntary basis unless you are new to campus or a member of a search committee. Those required programs are offered through the university. About 25 percent of the faculty and staff have participated in campus trainings. The school also has partnerships with professional organizations that offer training to students. There are strong diversity-related courses in the curriculum that are popular with students, but diversity and inclusion is lacking in many of the required courses. Several students complained that the introductory skills classes utilize examples that are what one described as "culturally insensitive, bordering on racist." Many faculty members said that more work is needed to diversify the curriculum.

Goal 4, which addresses climate, is the most problematic. Throughout the site visit, faculty and students acknowledged the damage caused by the Hannah-Jones decision. Some faculty members and school leaders said it brought them together. Others said it brought to light DEI issues that had been dormant for years. Faculty and students of color said they were not surprised by her decision not to come to UNC Hussman. One senior minority student said, "I expected to experience racism when I came here, but not to this extent." Every student interviewed said the educational experience at UNC Hussman is invaluable, but for students of color it comes with a price. Several said they are expected to shoulder the burden of teaching diversity and inclusion. Often, they are the only person of color in class and in those rare instances when race or culture is the topic, they are called on to respond. "Teachers are lackluster about learning other cultures. It is not our responsibility." Several majority students also spoke of having to press for conversations about diversity. "Oftentimes, we bring it up. It's not a part of the curriculum. It's more organic." Several faculty members of color also voiced their frustration with shouldering the burden of educating faculty and students on DEI issues, counseling students who are traumatized by cultural insensitivity while worrying about their own futures in the school and university.

2. For each standard that had been in noncompliance, provide a summary of the revisit team’s findings regarding corrections.

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Summary of findings:

“DEI is a core ingredient in all we do. It’s baked in.”

– Faculty member to revisit team.

“Everyone in the building feels more included.”

– Member of ABIDE Committee

“There’s a greater sense of purpose in the school.”

– ABIDE member

The school’s new dean, in place since summer 2022, has worked hard to address issues around diversity and inclusion and is moving the school forward quickly and effectively. To say there is a turnaround in the overall mood of the school is an understatement. A time of anger and recrimination has given way to a spirit of optimism and satisfaction, expressed by even the most harsh critics when the original site team visited. While no place is perfect, there is a palpable sense of calm and a commitment to continue the tradition of excellence it has long represented. Minority faculty feel free to bring forward issues. DEI work is front and center, thanks to the ABIDE team and the support it has garnered from the faculty and staff.

Students who belong to the dean’s Student Advisory Committee give the school credit for moving on DEI issues, though they say it should be moving more quickly. They expressed comfort with talking to the faculty about these issues, say the dean truly listens to them and gives the school credit for trying to make everyone feel welcome.

“There is effort, but there needs to be more, it has to go deeper,” one said. They had high praise for faculty, whom they said care deeply about DEI.

It is fair to say the original team visited at the worst possible time, at a time of frenzy, with the Hannah-Jones controversy still fresh, the perception of trustees meddling in her tenure decision and controversy around the school’s naming. As one faculty member put it: We’re really busy, but the frenzy is gone.

By any measure the school’s progress under the new dean is remarkable. Here is a sample of what has been done, from a list provided by the school and as observed by the revisit team:

- The school reframed its longstanding Diversity and Inclusion Committee in summer 2021 as the ABIDE (Access, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity) committee. Since the site visit in October 2021, the school promoted the ABIDE director position to the associate dean level and hired an ABIDE program coordinator in a new position dedicated to supporting programmatic planning, implementation, education and

development for activities, events and projects related to access, belonging, inclusion, diversity and equity.

- The ABIDE curriculum subcommittee and the Undergraduate Advisory Committee are working to establish an undergraduate DEI curriculum requirement. It will replace the Philosophical and Moral Reasoning/Ethical and Civic Values requirement within the Media and Journalism curriculum.

These current courses will be designated as the first courses fulfilling this requirement:

- *Cultural Competency in Journalism and Strategic Communication*. This is a new course developed as a basic competency class and launched after the site team’s visit in 2021.
- *The Black Press and U.S. History*
- *Diversity and Communication*
- *Gender, Race, Class and Media*

The curriculum subcommittee also has established criteria to guide faculty who want to create new courses or modify their current courses to meet the new DEI requirement. These include:

- Create a central focus on the development of “culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.”
- State explicit DEI goals in the course learning objectives.
- Use teaching materials aligned with the course’s DEI objectives and reflect diverse authorship.
- Employ evidence-inclusive teaching practices that promote equity in the classroom.
- Demonstrate and assess DEI learning objectives through assignments, exams, student evaluations of teaching and other class activities.

- The ABIDE climate and culture subcommittee introduced the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Funding Opportunities program for students, staff and faculty. The awards include:

- A DEI Research/Professional/Creative grant of up to \$5,000 to cover project expenses.
- A DEI Guest Speaker Fund of up to \$500 per class to support inviting professionals and academics from under-represented or minority groups into the classroom.
- A student organization DEI Event Fund to cover expenses related to hosting events that advance access/belonging/inclusion/diversity/equity for the school.
- A DEI Conference Travel & Professional Development Fund of up to \$1,500 for faculty and staff to enable attendance at conferences or workshops related to DEI issues.

There have been two rounds of funding thus far, and the next round of funding will include staff in the Research/Professional/Creative grant and DEI Guest Speaker Fund.

- Since August 2022, the school has organized and offered three staff and faculty training opportunities (available in-person and virtually) led by the university’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Topics covered by the training so far were “Navigating

Microaggressions,” “Contentious Conversations in the Classroom,” and “Building an Inclusive Community.” Topics have been chosen in consultation with faculty and staff.

- The ABIDE information-sharing subcommittee is enhancing distribution and access of a twice-monthly “Inclusive Insights” newsletter — first established in March 2021 — that provides links to resources and articles on current events across diversity-related topics.
- The dean reconfigured the school’s leadership team to ensure representation for the range of perspectives and disciplines within the school community, adding some positions and modifying others.
- The dean established four faculty affinity groups organized around the school’s disciplines and focus areas. Faculty chose the affinity group they wanted to belong to, and four volunteered to serve as affinity group chairs. The affinity groups were created to establish a new discussion and information forum in the school, giving faculty the opportunity to meet once a month to discuss issues facing the school, propose solutions and weigh in on upcoming decisions.
- The dean redesigned the school’s monthly faculty meetings as schoolwide meetings for both staff and faculty. Staff have also been included in retreats, cross-functional committees and training opportunities.
- The dean established the Dean's Student Advisory Council in fall 2022 semester, comprising a diverse group of undergraduate and graduate students. Through its monthly meetings and group chats and emails, the DSAC has opened a direct channel between the dean and diverse student groups.
- The DSAC planned the school’s first ever celebration of Martin Luther King Day last January, organizing an MLK Day of Action on January 17, 2023 — including a "Walk Out, Sit Down" event in which students, faculty and staff gathered to reflect on Dr. King's legacy; and a "Conversation with Frank McCain Jr.," the son of one of the North Carolina A&T students who led the February 1960 sit-in at the Greensboro Woolworth's. A similar celebration occurred for MLK Day 2024.
- The school’s Assessment Committee changed the measurables to evaluate DEI infusion throughout the school. DEI-related questions were added to the Knowledge Quiz, a direct measure administered to students as they are accepted into the school and seniors in their final semester. Questions were also added to the Student Experience Survey — an indirect measure administered to seniors in their final semester — that explore student awareness of DEI-related committees, activities and the inclusion of DEI in the curriculum and school events. Additionally, the assessment committee added ratings of capstone projects' sensitivity to DEI issues and demonstration of culturally proficient communication to the external reviews of capstone projects, a direct measure carried out after the final exam period of each spring semester.
- The school is revitalizing The Durham VOICE, a community journalism initiative in Durham, N.C., with the hire of a new professor. The Durham VOICE was originally created in 2009 to establish a stronger community voice in the Northeast Central Durham neighborhood, with UNC and N.C. Central University students and faculty working with area high school students and business, civic and church leaders in the community.
- The school enhanced its recruitment strategies with targeted advertising and promotion in venues that reach diverse audiences and encourage diverse applicant pools. The dean reviews applicant pools for each search for diversity and inclusion and certifies the pool before the search can move forward.

- The school created an improved workflow for recruitment, hiring and onboarding of diverse adjunct instructors. Each semester, adjuncts fill 40-50 teaching slots. Testing and implementation of the new workflow began in spring of 2022. As of November 2023, the school employs 95 adjunct faculty members, with 21 (23%) being non-white.
- Full-time faculty of color rose slightly from 32 to 34 percent in 2022-2023. Female faculty slipped from 50 to 49 percent. Minority undergrads dropped a percentage point to 30.4 percent. Two minority faculty hires are underway, including a Knight Chair in Sports, Race and Media.
- The school worked with the university’s Counseling and Psychological Services to embed a counselor in the school who is available only to UNC Hussman students. The counselor meets students in person and virtually.
- During the spring 2023 semester, the ABIDE curriculum subcommittee launched a Pedagogy Reading Group with the first book being “Inclusive Teaching” by two UNC professors. The group was open to all faculty, graduate students and staff and included 38 participants who met in small groups of 5-to-7 and later convened in three large group meetings. Books were provided to all participants, and the school set up an internal website with additional resources. Teaching tips and examples were distributed to the school’s mailing lists.
- The school has welcomed a wide range of guest speakers in classrooms and hosted events representing diverse perspectives and experiences.
- The school’s alumni and development team manage the relationship with the school’s three advisory boards — the Alumni Board, the Board of Advisers and the Foundation Board. The alumni and development team worked with leaders of each board to analyze the composition of the boards to ensure the members are representative of a wide range of experiences. New board members are identified and selected with the intent to build and maintain diverse perspectives.
- The university’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion conducted a climate audit in Summer 2022 including listening sessions with staff, which were done in collaboration with the ABIDE director and ABIDE committee chair. Recommendations that emerged for how to foster a greater sense of belonging in the school included:
 - Creating more opportunities and access to professional development and training.
 - Developing new programming to foster team building and dialogue.
 - Encouraging and facilitating greater engagement among staff.
 - Identifying ways to foster a sense of greater appreciation.

The vice provost for equity and inclusion gives credit to the “will and determination” of the dean to bring the school on a “180-degree change.” “People feel empowered to be part of the change” by the dean. The place, she said, is “almost calm” today and in stark contrast to the “clouds of distrust” when the original team visited two years ago. It felt then as if the school was going to implode, she said. The focus groups revealed some faculty didn’t feel they had the support of colleagues. That’s changed, she said.

She notes that all the deans at UNC remain dedicated to making progress on DEI issues, despite being limited by the Supreme Court and state actions. In North Carolina, for example, training cannot be required. But opportunities for staff and faculty continue,

including a certificate program under development that will cover communication and media.

- The school has increased programming geared toward building and maintaining a sense of belonging, launching annual events and activities including a series of “What’s Up Wednesday” social gatherings for faculty and staff; a lunch discussion with diverse faculty and staff; a Week of Welcome at the beginning of the school year; a Reading Day Reset at the end of the fall semester and the Week of Kindness at the end of the academic year.

3. Describe any other significant weaknesses cited by the site team in its report and/or any additional concerns cited by the Council in its letter to the unit regarding provisional status.

These weaknesses were cited:

- A faculty angered by controversies, resulting in what one called a “culture of complaint.”
- A fairly widespread faculty view that there is insufficient shared governance.
- A growing concern about trustee involvement and threats to academic independence
- Many faculty complain there is a need for more transparency by the dean and university leadership.
- A need for more Advertising/Public Relations faculty, in order to address an imbalance when compared to the student/faculty ratio for Journalism.
- Faculty/student complaints that video and sound equipment is out of date and often unavailable.

The dean is working effectively to address these concerns and it is safe to say much of what afflicted the school in the past is now in the rear-view mirror. There is a determined effort to make the school more collaborative and for leadership to be more responsive to issues however they may arise.

Several faculty expressed that they found the “culture of complaint” comment by the original site team hurtful and demeaning. One characterized it as a “cry for help.” Others said it unfairly characterized efforts to make the school better as it battled the series of controversies. Every person of color had some issues, one said. Many told the revisit team that since the visit, the school’s culture has become one where complaints can be aired. Faculty and staff members say they’re more confident that they will be listened to, and their concerns will be addressed.

The school cites:

- The Dean’s Cabinet was expanded significantly to include more representation of faculty and staff across the disciplines, ranks and functions of the school.
- While the school’s monthly meetings have long been open for staff to attend, the school made a concerted effort to make staff feel welcomed in those monthly meetings, which have been renamed as “School Meetings” instead of “Faculty Meetings.” The school’s Staff Leadership Council is re-envisioning and

reinvigorating its roles and developing a mission statement to elevate staff perspectives in schoolwide discussion and policy.

- When the dean was invited to submit a request for additional state funding in late 2022, the school’s faculty and staff were encouraged to share their priority funding needs that were then included in an overall augmented budget request. Among the funding needs were additional faculty lines to serve advertising and public relations students and equipment and technology support. The school was awarded three new faculty lines and one-time funding for equipment purchases.
- In response to discussions around the need for more advertising and public relations faculty, the school has recently begun developing a more data-informed process to identify needs for faculty hires. A task force has been established to move this initiative forward, which will inform the hiring of the three new lines.

The new interim chancellor of the university is the son of prominent journalists and a former state budget director. He has pledged a neutral approach to the university. The trustees have recently approved slates of tenure recommendations, thus eliminating the singling out of specific candidates as occurred in the Hannah-Jones situation.

While the calamities of the recent past are not forgotten, it is good news that the school is back to worrying about more “traditional” problems such as needing more ad/PR faculty to deal with growing enrollment in those disciplines.

Overall evaluation: COMPLIANCE

4. For the other significant weaknesses cited by the site team or concerns cited by the Council, provide a summary of the revisit team’s findings regarding corrections.

Answered above.

5. Summary conclusion and recommendation:

In response to an experience that many found to be devastating, the faculty and staff of the school set in motion a process that has brought diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging issues to the forefront of their discussions and decision-making. Led by a dean who made it a priority and sought and won support at the university level, the school went to work finding ways to strengthen the diversity environment – with new faculty and staff, new training, and changes to infrastructure. The faculty/staff ABIDE committee is focused on growing a culture of belonging, and individuals are responding, with many (notably many faculty of color among them) saying that they feel their work is valued more, and that they see more leadership and institutional support. There are still pain points to be sure, but many report that more of those discussions are in the open, and more people feel empowered to bring up issues and offer solutions. And there are dividends being realized – bringing staff into more discussions around inclusion has energized those conversations, and there is more willingness to be involved.

We recommend **reaccreditation** of the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media.