

To: Chairs, Boards of Trustees

CC: Peter Hans, President, UNC System  
Chancellors  
Wade Maki, Chair, Faculty Assembly  
Campus Board Professionals

From: Wendy Murphy, Chair, Board of Governors  
Terry Hutchens, Chair, Committee on Educational Planning

Re: Report on Waivers for Exceeding 120-Credit Hour Limits

Date: February 17, 2025

We ask that your board of trustees review *at your next regularly-scheduled board meeting* and report to us promptly on the continued need, if any, for waivers granted by your board of trustees for the award of undergraduate degrees requiring more than 120 semester credit hours. Exhibit A reflects available statistics on existing waivers.

We also ask you to identify any undergraduate degree programs that require more than 120 semester credit hours *without* having obtained the necessary waiver from your board.

Membership of boards of trustees has changed since 2018. Therefore, we write briefly on the context for our request. In 2018, the Board of Governors amended [Section 400.1.5](#) of the UNC Policy Manual to cap at 120 the number of semester credit hours required to award undergraduate degrees. Waivers by boards of trustees are allowed for compelling reasons. Compelling reasons include: programmatic accreditation standards; licensure requirements; and other state, federal, or professional regulations. See [Section 400.1.5\[R\]](#) of the UNC Policy Manual.

At the time the 120-credit hour cap was imposed, campus approaches varied—some programs required as many as 134 semester credit hours for an undergraduate degree. Others required less. The 2018 policy change imposed system-wide structure where none had existed.

Since 2018, the Board of Governors, the System Office, and campus administrations have redoubled efforts to lower the whole cost of education. Consistent with the UNC Strategic Plan, few stones have been left unturned on ways to drive down the costs of a college degree. That effort, among many, has resulted in

the UNC System keeping in-state, undergraduate tuition flat for eight successive years.

Sound policymaking requires a reassessment of the need for these waivers. Once a waiver has been granted, there appears to be no formal mechanism to revisit periodically the continued need for that waiver. We do not presume that your reassessment will prompt discontinuance of any waivers. However, the 2018 policy was passed over seven years ago, and the drive to continually improve our operations counsels a degree-by-degree reassessment of the need for these waivers.

Separately, if programs exist where a needed waiver has not been obtained, we need to know that, too. Therefore, we ask you to look into these matters and report back to us.

Please lead your boards in undertaking the reassessment we have requested *at your next regularly-scheduled meeting*. You will need to work with your chancellors and chief academic officers. Please assess whether compelling reasons for current waivers still exist and whether there are other programs for which a waiver is needed. Promptly following your meeting, please make a written report to us detailing why your board has concluded that each existing waiver does or does not remain necessary and identifying non-compliant programs for which a waiver is needed.

Thank you for your work to continually improve the University of North Carolina. It takes a “whole of System” effort to maintain the University’s status as the best public university system in the United States. If in the course of this work, you have other ideas on ways the System can improve to further that goal, please let us know.

## EXHIBIT A

### **UNC System 120 Credit Hour Exempted Programs**

<b>Count and Percent of Exempt Programs</b>			
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Count of Programs</b>	<b>Count of Exemptions</b>	<b>% Exempt</b>
Appalachian State University	78	2	2.6%
Elizabeth City State University	27	0	0.0%
East Carolina University	80	2	2.5%
Fayetteville State University	36	2	5.6%
NC Agricultural and Technical State University	59	3	5.1%
North Carolina Central University	35	5	14.3%
NC State University	91	19	20.9%
UNC Asheville	32	0	0.0%
UNC-Chapel Hill	72	10	13.9%
UNC Charlotte	71	1	1.4%
UNC Greensboro	66	2	3.0%
UNC Pembroke	37	0	0.0%
UNC Wilmington	57	3	5.3%
UNC School of the Arts	5	1	20.0%
Western Carolina University	66	10	15.2%
Winston-Salem State University	34	1	2.9%
<b>UNC System</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>7.2%</b>