

2023 Budget Requests

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Budget Code:

School of Civic Life and Leadership (SCiLL)– Priority

FY 2023-24: \$5M Recurring

FY 2024-25: \$5M Recurring

Description:

The pressing issues of our day are complex, requiring reasoned debate that proceeds from a strong foundation of basic knowledge in a spirit of open intellectual inquiry. These values are at the heart of higher education and are reiterated in Carolina’s strategic framework, *Carolina Next: Innovations for the Public Good*, and in the strategic plan of the College of Arts & Sciences.

Endorsed by the Board of Trustees on January 30, 2020, *Carolina Next* includes Strategic Initiative 5, “Promote Democracy.” Objective 5.2 is to “work constructively across differences in society, starting by promoting respect and listening.” Here several strategic opportunities are listed to support the goal of “build[ing] the capacity to engage constructively across differences with evidence, intellectual humility, and respect” – including to “develop the Communication Beyond Carolina capacity requirements in the IDEAs in Action General education Curriculum” and “conceptualize and develop the UNC Program for Public Discourse, emphasizing respectful dialogue in classes and public events.” Objective 5.3 calls for exploration of the relationship between “humanity’s highest purposes” and democratic life.

In order to fulfill these objectives in light of the increased challenges of political polarization, \$5M recurring is requested for FY 2023-24 to create a new School of Civic Life and Leadership (SCiLL) within the College of Arts & Sciences. The new school will operate as a division within the College, along with Fine Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences and Global Programs. SCiLL will include the department of Civic Life and Leadership and the Program on Public Discourse, which will report to the director of SCiLL.

In 2023-24, the \$5M appropriation will be used to support development of the school, hiring of leadership, faculty, programming, staff, and expansion of the curricular work of the existing Program for Public Discourse. The sum of \$5M represents the full annualized amount of these needs. There is expected to be around \$6M of additional needs (annualized) required to develop the school in FY 2025-27, for which the university will be working to identify a source of funding over the coming year. We expect State funds to be matched with private support.

Expense category	Year 1 (2023-24)	Year 2 (2024-25)	Year 3 (2025-26)	Year 4 (2026-27)
Faculty, PPD Support, & School Leadership	\$3,000,000	5,500,000	\$7,275,000	\$9,525,000
Course enhancements / Residential experience	\$125,000	\$300,000	\$400,000	\$500,000
Operating expenses and support	\$400,000	\$1,062,500	\$1,750,000	\$2,625,000
Total	\$3,525,000	\$6,862,500	\$9,425,000	\$12,650,000

Justification:

Political polarization in the United States has reached alarming levels in our society and at Carolina; it is by many metrics getting worse. According to the 2022 study *Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue in the University of North Carolina System*, “campuses do not consistently achieve an atmosphere that promotes free expression.”¹ While a majority of students across the political spectrum report a desire for constructive disagreement, there have been significant declines since 2019 in the number students who are willing to have members of their political outgroup as friends, enjoy them as classmates, and see them as important members of the campus community. These ideological forces further fray a campus culture in which many students struggle to find an intellectual community where they can experience belonging, trust, and the space for reflection required to build the capacities, virtues, and knowledge necessary for a life of leadership, service, and action.²

These troubling trends mirror those in our polity as a whole: Among both Democrats and Republicans, those with strongly unfavorable opinions of the other party have more than doubled since 1994, at approximately 45%; today, clear majorities in both major political parties see members of the other party as immoral.³ The resulting costs have been steep: Recent studies have shown that the rate of polarization in America has grown faster than in all other major democracies world-wide.⁴ The increasingly polarized and relationally fraught office-cultures of major businesses, firms, and other institutions have impeded our collective capacity to solve our most urgent problems.

As America’s first state university, Carolina is well positioned to become the national leader among public universities in counteracting the forces of polarization, isolation, and distrust that impede the educational mission of our leading universities nation-wide and hinder them from producing graduates who have developed the capacities and knowledge base to emerge as future leaders. Building out from the communications and democracy requirements in the IDEAs in Action general curriculum, SCiLL will provide the needed space to develop a culture of reflection and intellectual friendship sufficiently robust to combat the powerful forces of distrust, isolation, distraction, and narrow careerism. It will offer any first- and second-year student intending to pursue a course of study in its curriculum the option of a residential academic experience. By living and learning alongside their classmates, students will build the “rapport,” trust, and intellectual friendships necessary to have constructive disagreements in the classroom,⁵ thereby inspiring the “culture of listening, respect, and civil discussion for advancing democratic values and effectiveness in our campus community, North Carolina, and the world.”⁶

A new Civic Studies major and minor will prepare students to become active citizens and thoughtful leaders in corporations, government, and the academy in North Carolina and around the world by cultivating the capacities necessary to conduct good-faith dialogue with those with whom they disagree. All Civic Studies majors and minors will take introductory, foundational classes on civil discourse modeled after nationally recognized courses including the Duke Civil Discourse Project’s, “[How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization](#),” and the [Allred Initiative/Chancellor’s Science Scholars](#) communication course “Think, Speak, Argue.” Versions of these courses will be taught at scale through PPD to help fulfill the communications requirement. Other courses will be primarily thematic, providing the opportunity to bring into critical conversation different viewpoints from literature, art, science, and philosophy from around the globe in addition to the intellectual sources that shaped and continue to inspire the American political tradition.

¹ See Timothy J. Ryan, Andrew M. Engelhardt, Jennifer Larson, and Mark McNeilly, *Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue*, https://fecdsurveyreport.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22160/2022/08/FECD_Report_8-21-22.pdf

² See Ryan, Engelhardt, Larson, and McNeilly, *Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue*, p. 48. These trends partly manifest themselves in the daunting mental health challenges for students at our leading public and private universities. The challenges began well before COVID and have greatly accelerated in recent years.

³ See study here: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/08/09/republicans-and-democrats-increasingly-critical-of-people-in-the-opposing-party/>

⁴ Boxwell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro, “Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization,” <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26669>

⁵ See Ryan, Engelhardt, Larson, and McNeilly, *Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue*, p. 48.

⁶ <https://democracy.unc.edu/>.