

Pervasive Sex Discrimination at North Carolina Universities

By Adam Kissel

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The University of North Carolina has been coed only since 1963. African American men had been admitted eight years earlier. Wake Forest University had already been admitting women since 1942, and Duke University since 1897—60 years after its founding as a male-only preparatory school.

Sometime between 1963 and today, however, sex discrimination at UNC has turned in the opposite direction. This is not due to numbers—UNC has 1.4 women undergraduates for each man, and it has 1.2 women on its faculty for each man. Disparate outcomes are not clear evidence of discrimination. But the university does maintain many programs that actively discriminate against men by providing opportunities exclusively for women.

While discrimination on the basis of race might remain legal, for a while, in the area of college admissions, there is no excuse for discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs. Universities themselves ban this kind of discrimination, and so do city, county, and state laws. At the federal level, sex discrimination violates Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in any

education program or activity at any university that receives federal financial assistance. Sex discrimination involving faculty and staff also likely violates labor law.

Unfortunately, UNC is far from the only university in North Carolina that discriminates unlawfully. The three largest public universities (and the two largest private universities) in the state maintain dozens of discriminatory programs, as discussed in this report.

Tens of thousands of male students, staff, and faculty members at those five universities alone are limited in their access to education programs and activities that are for women only. Some of these programs even discriminate in favor of girls and against boys in the local community.

Accordingly, I have filed discrimination complaints with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and at Charlotte, North Carolina State University, and Wake Forest University.

There are too many violations to describe them all. This report provides an introduction to the full list.

Public Universities

There are many examples of sex discrimination at North Carolina's public universities.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

At least a dozen UNC programs discriminate on the basis of sex. These programs mainly involve business programs and STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) programs that are for women—but not men.

- UNC's [Center for Faculty Excellence](#) holds a monthly "Women ADVANCE Leadership" educational program, "a workshop series to encourage and support mid-career women faculty."
- UNC's [Womxn of Worth Initiative](#) "creates and sustains a community for womxn of color and womxn who identify as members of underrepresented racial and ethnic populations [but not other races and ethnicities, and no men] that will promote academic preparedness, holistic student wellness and success, identity development, and sisterhood."
- [Carolina Women in Business](#) (CWIB), in UNC's business school, has a mission "to create a lasting impact for women in the workplace [not similarly situated men] by providing opportunities for career and personal development." The program states, "We create events that bring value to women [not men] in their current pursuits and future careers."

- More broadly, the business school [states](#) that it is proud of its work to "cultivate a rich learning environment for women" through multiple programs for women. These include the annual CWIB Conference, the Women's Workshop, and the 100 Women program. No such programs are available for similarly situated men.
- The [mission](#) of UNC's chapter of Girls Engineering Change "is to address female underrepresentation in the engineering field by showing young girls they can change the world through engineering."

These are just the beginning. UNC's business school also is a member of the [Forté Foundation](#). UNC states that women [not men] who are admitted to the business school "will automatically be considered for a Forté Fellowship." UNC's Learning Center offers female, but not male, undergraduates exclusive educational opportunities in the upcoming spring semester through the [STEMpire](#) seminar series. And the [Women and Science Program](#) provides exclusive opportunities for "women interested in science." This program notes the existence of several additional discriminatory programs across the university: "Many Departments have reading and/or interest groups for women in a particular fields [sic]."

But wait—there's more. I am not the first to submit such a complaint against UNC. [The National Coalition for Men Carolinas](#) has submitted a complaint about [BRIDGES](#), yet another professional development program for women—not men; [Women in Economics](#); the business school's [Women at Work](#) program and its [UNC Kenan-Flagler Women's Weekend](#); the [Carolina Women's Leadership](#)

Council; and the [University Awards for the Advancement of Women](#).

Individually, these programs unlawfully deny male students, staff, and faculty members many educational opportunities and benefits that are available exclusively to women. Taken together, UNC appears to have a systemic, institutional bias toward women and against men on the basis of sex.

Note, too, that according to College Factual's [diversity report](#), UNC's undergraduate body is 58 percent female, and the university has a 55 percent female faculty.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

College Factual [reports](#) that UNC-Charlotte has an overall balance of 52.6 percent male undergraduates and 54.3 percent female faculty members. Nevertheless, UNCC maintains several sex-discriminatory programs.

- UNCC's Bridges Program in the university's Division of Academic Affairs is exclusively "for women," [as its logo represents](#). For example, its Academic Leadership Program "offers UNC Charlotte female faculty and staff the opportunity to develop and strengthen their leadership skills, knowledge, and networking." The program states: "Who should participate? Women from four-year institutions of higher education, both public and private, who want to position themselves for advancement in the academy."

- UNCC's [Women's Leadership Development Program](#) is "a cohort-based women's leadership conversation series...for students who identify as women and currently act as leaders."
- The mission of UNCC's [WE Engage!](#) program is "to promote the development of women in engineering, engineering technology, and construction management through programs that enhance the recruitment, retention and graduation of women in the William States Lee College of Engineering." Its first objective is to "increase the number of women who apply to, enroll, and graduate from the College of Engineering." As expected, the program's website includes [photos of only women](#).

Further evidence of UNCC's apparent bias appears on UNCC's website for the [North Carolina Junior Engineering and Technology Society](#), which states, "Science and engineering related careers are still dominated by white males. If a female or minority candidate is available for hire, and meets all the requisites for the position, they have a very good chance of getting the job."

Like UNC, UNCC appears to have a systemic, institutional bias toward women and against men on the basis of sex.

North Carolina State University

With more than 36,000 undergraduate and graduate students, NC State is the state's largest college. College Factual [reports](#) a 50/50 male/female faculty in Raleigh, with a 55 percent male undergraduate body.

NC State's [Virtual Women of Color Retreat](#) was a discriminatory event held on October 28, 2020. The university's event page for program states, "The retreat is open to people who identify with the statements below:

- Women of color (transgender women, cisgender women, non-binary people, two-spirited and other minoritized genders) have experienced gender-based marginalization while also experiencing the current and historical effects of racial and ethnic-based marginalization.
- The terms people of color and women of color are political, personal and universal terms that bring together many people based on the different but common and similar experiences of racial marginalization within the United States and abroad. The experiences of racial and ethnic marginalization differ based on structural issues like class, income, nation, gender and sexuality, religion, skin color, etc."

By "identify with the statements," the program clearly signaled that people who were "women of color" were welcome, while the program was not "open" to those who were not. That is, in addition to discriminating on the basis of sex this program discriminated on the basis of color. The event page includes a photo of 100 percent women of color.

Sex discrimination need not be so blatant to be unlawful. In *Teamsters v. United States* in 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court noted that discrimination is [not limited](#) to direct signs that people will see (like "open to women of color only") but can include "actual practices" such as

how the opportunity is publicized and "recruitment techniques." That is an additional reason why so many of the programs listed in this report are unlawful.

In this vein, additional discriminatory programs at NC State are:

- The [Women in Technical Leadership](#) program for "high-potential businesswomen."
- The [Advanced Women in Technical Leadership](#) program, which explicitly claims to be sex-exclusive: "Join an exclusive community of female senior executives ready to fundamentally transform the way they lead."
- The [Women in Engineering Programs \(WIE\)](#), including WIE's [ESCAPE Camp](#), "an annual program in which "hundreds of newly admitted female engineers are invited to participate in this summer bridge program, where they interact with female engineering faculty members, visit industry sites and get an early start on their membership in the engineering family."
- [Women in Science and Engineering \(WISE\)](#), "a living and learning community created for first- and second-year women engineers, mathematicians, statisticians and scientists" while no such opportunity exists for male students.
- [Girls Engineering Change](#), in which NC State students "assemble small engineering devices with young girls aged 8-14 from the Triangle area." The program's mission is "to show girls that they can change the world through engineering."

Private Universities

The three universities above are North Carolina's three largest public universities, and all part of the UNC System. North Carolina's private universities are also subject to Title IX. Nevertheless, Wake Forest University and Duke University, the state's largest private universities, both discriminate on the basis of sex.

Wake Forest University

These universities' programs follow the same discrimination patterns as the many programs listed above.

- Wake Forest's [Women in Medicine and Science](#) program, at WFU's School of Medicine, describes its mission as "to develop, promote and support a nurturing environment for women [not men] to enhance recruitment, retention, professional development, and promotion of women faculty, residents, fellows, and students. For example, its mentoring program "for early-career women faculty," the [Early Career Development Program for Women](#), is explicitly for "Early Career women faculty (Instructor and Assistant Professor)," for the purpose "to promote the careers of women faculty."
- WFU's [Women's Forum](#) is "open to all women faculty and senior women administrators at Wake Forest University and Wake Forest School of Medicine."

- Women in Medicine and Science also has established a discriminatory [Women in Medicine and Science Fund](#) to "develop programming aimed at empowering women [not men] in medicine and science," arguing that "This is a critical time for education programs supporting women in medicine and science across the United States, and our Women in Medicine and Science (WIMS) program at the Wake Forest School of Medicine is no exception."
- WFU's [Women's Center](#) works "to create an educational and professional environment that supports women and promotes gender equality," yet the Women's Center itself discriminates against men. The website prominently and favorably features a quotation from a faculty member stating, "The Women's Center at WFU gathers women from every corner of campus for mutual support and critical engagement with women's issues." The website's photos appear to be entirely of women. A man viewing the website would reasonably conclude that he is not included, and that he certainly is not included on an equal basis with women, at the Women's Center.

Wake Forest's undergraduate student body is 53 percent female, and its faculty is already [more than 60 percent female](#). The faculty imbalance, together with these discriminatory programs, suggests pervasive, systemic sexism at WFU.

Duke University

I submitted no complaint against Duke University because American Enterprise Institute scholar and University of

Michigan-Flint economist Mark Perry already did so. With 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students, Duke is one of the state's largest universities. Like Wake, Duke also has a [60 percent female faculty](#).

Perry's research shows that the university's Girls Exploring Science & Technology program, its FEMMES (Females Excelling More in Math, Engineering, and Science) program, and its [Girls STEM Day@Duke](#) all have operated exclusively for girls—at least until he notified OCR. Perry and *The College Fix* [have reported](#) on the [successful results](#) of Perry's complaint so far. Duke has signed a resolution agreement with OCR under which Duke must fix its discriminatory programs by late January 2021.

Conclusion

This report examines just five of North Carolina's largest universities. It seems likely that other universities in the UNC system follow the same pattern, providing evidence that systemic sexism is rampant across the entire system. Those discriminatory programs probably violate not just federal nondiscrimination law, but also state and local nondiscrimination laws and the universities' own nondiscrimination policies.

In the name of diversity, equity, and inclusion, North Carolina universities have often chosen inequity and exclusion.

To file an OCR complaint, go to <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>.

About the Author

Adam Kissel was deputy assistant secretary for higher education programs at the U.S. Department of Education, vice president and defense director at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, senior program officer at the Charles Koch Foundation, and director of civic and higher education programs at The Philanthropy Roundtable. He lives and works in West Virginia, is a senior fellow at the Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy, and has clients in higher education policy and philanthropy.

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