

# Academic Freedom

*at Wake Forest University*

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What Wake Forest AAUP Has Been Working On

# Academic Freedom Under Unprecedented Threat

50%+

of faculty report  
self-censoring

\$584M

in federal funds threatened  
to coerce UC system

100%

of universities refused  
Trump 'loyalty compact'

- Federal funding used as ideological coercion — AAUP led coalition won preliminary injunction blocking Trump admin (AAUP Legal Watch, Winter 2026)
- UNC Board just redefined academic freedom — AAUP warns it "will chill speech and lead to more retaliation" (Inside Higher Ed, Feb. 26, 2026)
- Yale AAUP (Feb 2026): demanded explicit academic freedom definition in Faculty Handbook, faculty input in revisions, protection from departmental closure — a potential model for WFU (Yale Daily News, Feb. 18, 2026)
- AAUP membership surging nationally as faculty organize against coordinated attacks on higher education (AAUP, 2025–26)

# Who Lacks Academic Freedom Protection at Wake Forest?

## A Spectrum of Precarity

Source: WFU Faculty Handbook 2024, §§1–3

- Adjunct faculty: Hired course-by-course; no long-term contracts, no notice of non-renewal
- Visiting Assistant Professors (VAPs): Fixed-term 1–3 year positions; easily non-renewed
- Full-time NTT (PFTNTT): Teaching Professors, Professors of the Practice — permanent but non-tenure-track; dismissal governed by 1990 BOT policy
- Untenured TT faculty: On the tenure track but pre-tenure — vulnerable to non-renewal and denial of tenure for undisclosed reasons

## What They Share

Source: WFU Faculty Handbook 2024, §3.6.11

- None has the full protection of tenure — the bedrock of academic freedom as defined by AAUP since 1940
- All can be non-renewed, denied promotion, or removed under policies that do not require cause or faculty peer review
- All are vulnerable to chilling effects — especially those teaching subjects now politically targeted: race, gender, immigration, LGBTQ+ issues
- WFU's academic freedom FAQ covers all of them — but the actual protections do not

# What the Faculty Handbook Actually Says

*"The procedure for the removal of other full-time faculty members prior to the expiration of a term of appointment will be... except that the hearing will be conducted by the President of the University, the requirement that the dismissal be for cause is inapplicable, and the decision of the President is final without review by the Board of Trustees."*

**Source:** Faculty Handbook §3.6.11.2.2 — Non-tenured Faculty (mirrors BOT Policy Resolutions in Implementation of Bylaws, 10/5/90)

## NO CAUSE

Can be fired for any reason — or no reason

## NO PEERS

Only the President hears the case

## NO APPEAL

President's decision final — no BOT review

# A 1990 Policy Still Governing 2026 Faculty

1990

BOT adopts Policy Resolutions in Implementation of Bylaws — NTT dismissal language created with almost no permanent teaching faculty in existence

1991

Language first appears in Faculty Handbook; PFT/NTT lines barely exist at this time

~2000s

Provost Fetrow creates permanent full-time teaching lines (Teaching Professors, Professors of the Practice) — an entire new faculty class, never covered by an updated policy

2026

**The 1990 BOT resolution still governs. The policy was never designed for the faculty it now covers.**

*Research by Teaching Professor Eric Ekstrand confirms this language originates from a 1990 BOT resolution and has never been updated to reflect modern teaching faculty lines.*

# WFU Claims NTT Faculty Have Grievance Rights. They Don't.

## What WFU's FAQ Says

*"Non-tenured faculty members do have access to a grievance process for certain types of sanctions or employment actions."*

— freeexpression.wfu.edu FAQ (updated after AAUP engagement, Dec 2025)

*We engaged Provost-level administration in Nov–Dec 2025 and pushed back on this framing. The update doesn't fix the underlying problem.*

## The Reality

- Grievance §3.7 has a BOT carve-out: any faculty may grieve "except as provided otherwise by the Board of Trustees"
- For dismissal, the only "hearing" is with the President — who needs no cause and whose decision is unreviewable
- NTT faculty are being lulled into a false sense of security about protections they do not actually have
- This also creates legal exposure for WFU — faculty told they have rights they actually lack

# Intersectionality: Who Is Multiply Marginalized Here?

Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," *Stanford L. Rev.* 43 (1991)

## The Intersection: Precarity × Controversial Teaching

- Crenshaw: being at multiple intersections creates a qualitatively different situation — not just the sum of the parts (p. 1244)
- At WFU in 2026: faculty who (1) lack tenure protection AND (2) teach on race, gender, immigration, LGBTQ+ issues are doubly exposed
- These vulnerabilities intersect — an adjunct teaching Critical Race Theory or an untenured prof teaching gender studies is in a categorically different position than a tenured full professor teaching medieval history
- Their academic freedom concerns cannot be addressed by policy designed only for the most protected

## The Policy Implication: Margins-to-Center

- Policy designed around the most protected (tenured faculty teaching uncontroversial subjects) will fail those at the intersection
- "Margins-to-center" approach: design policy starting from the most vulnerable case (applied from Crenshaw, p. 1245)
- Policies that protect an adjunct teaching CRT will definitely protect a tenured professor of history — but the reverse is NOT true
- Better academic freedom policy for the most marginalized = better academic freedom policy for the entire institution

*Policies that work for multiply marginalized people tend to also cover those with more dominant identities — but the opposite is less likely to be true. Better policy for the most vulnerable means better policy for everyone.*

# Two Routes to Reform

## PATH 1: BOT Resolution

### Via Faculty Senate + Provost

- Senate + College Faculty draft revised dismissal and non-renewal language for PFTNTT
- Provost presents to BOT as a resolution for a vote
- Senate President Steve Virgil is a Law Professor — a natural ally!
- Aligns with AAUP best practice on shared governance

OR

## PATH 2: Tenure Teaching Faculty

### The Law School Model

- WFU Law School tenured Clinical Professors — a full teaching class
- Once tenured, NTT dismissal policy simply doesn't apply
- Sidesteps the BOT policy question entirely
- Would bring WFU fully in line with AAUP best practice and resolve voting rights issues too

**A third model:** Yale AAUP (Feb 2026) won a Provost-backed committee to write explicit academic freedom protections into the Faculty Handbook — demanding defined rights, faculty input in Handbook revisions, and protection from departmental closure. Could WFU do the same?

# A moment for influence!

## Why This Search Is the Leverage Point

- The Faculty Senate has meaningful influence over who becomes the next WFU president — a once-in-a-decade opportunity
- The next president's early decisions set institutional norms that last for years — or decades
- A president who genuinely values academic freedom can champion a BOT resolution. One who doesn't will close this window.
- Interest convergence: the next president will want to signal WFU's values to faculty recruits, accreditors, and donors — genuine academic freedom is a powerful signal
- Don't let a new president inherit this problem and call it someone else's — make it a hiring criterion

## Ask Candidates:

### 01 Track Record

Have they protected NTT faculty — or all faculty — from political pressure at prior institutions?

### 02 Policy Commitment

Will they bring NTT academic freedom reforms to the BOT, not just issue statements?

### 03 Shared Governance

Do they believe all faculty voice — including NTT — is essential to institutional excellence?

*Academic freedom reform doesn't happen on its own — it happens when the powerful decide it is in their interest too.*

# What We're Asking of the Faculty Senate

## 01

### Acknowledge the Problem

Formally recognize that current NTT dismissal policies are outdated and incompatible with academic freedom

## 02

### Draft Revised Language

Work with AAUP to draft revised dismissal/non-renewal terms for PFTNTT faculty to present to the BOT

## 03

### Engage the Provost

Champion this with the Provost — administrative sponsorship is needed to bring any resolution to the BOT

## 04

### Consider the Law School Model

Explore tenuring teaching faculty — this resolves academic freedom AND voting rights issues at once

*Together, we can make Wake Forest a model of academic freedom for NTT faculty — not a cautionary tale.*

And keep all of this in mind as you help choose Wake Forest's next president — that choice is your greatest lever.

# Wake Forest AAUP

*Working for Academic Freedom for All Faculty*

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Questions & Discussion

**Tess Wise, AAUP VP**  
wise@wfu.edu

# **Report from the Committee of College Senators**

## **March 18, 2026**

- **Feb 16: ODOC Topical Town Hall – Envisioning Faculty Roles in Pre-Major Advising**
  - Planning for transition to professional staff in OAA as the key Lower Division Advisors for students prior to declaration of their major
  - Ideas include: First Year Seminars providing additional advising, coordinated (e.g. “block”) courses for enhanced engagement, etc.
- **Feb 25: Meeting of the Committee of College Senators, report from Amanda Griffith, Associate Dean for Academic Planning, on enrollment growth planning.**
  - Planned growth, possibly up to 55 UG student increase per year for the next five years, is being evaluated relative to needs in core, divisional, and major courses and departments/programs of the College.

- **Planning for transition of standard Tenure Track teaching loads from 9 courses every 2 years to 4 courses per year.**
  - Standard Teaching Professional loads remain at 6 courses per year.
  - Current stage: Departments/Programs are internally assessing strategies that can meet the needs of students and major/minor requirements with this change in course offerings.
  - Some departments/programs already operate with the framework as a result of structures such as offering graduate degrees or other unusual responsibilities.
- **Planning for transition of Study Away application and acceptance process for students.**
  - Intended in part to balance spring/fall ratio of students studying off-campus.
  - Loosely: students will apply one year in advance, with curricular needs and semester/location preferences, and GPS will distribute applicants into programs.
  - Resident professors will retain influence in selection for those programs (e.g. Flow House, Casa Artom, Worrell House, etc.).
  - Summer programs not affected.

# March 16<sup>th</sup> College Faculty Meeting

- Proposed bulletin change to remove limit on summer online courses: postponed until Oct
- Proposed Handbook change (in section 7.8, “Organization of the Faculty of Wake Forest College: Constitution and Bylaws and Statutes”) from Committee on Undergraduate Orientation to align their committee membership with current structure and office titles in the University: delayed until next meeting
  - In general, no handbook changes are planned to be implemented this year. Similar “realignment” edits are needed throughout the handbook.
- Discussion of proposal to adjust the rights and responsibilities of Teaching Professional faculty: delayed until later meeting
  - Right to vote on hiring TT faculty and equalizing dismissal procedures
  - Relevant across schools of the University that use this, or similar, statuses.

## Senate Fringe Benefits Committee Report

The six members of the Senate Fringe Benefits Committee who serve on the University Fringe Benefits Advisory Committee (FBAC) were invited to attend an orientation for the FBAC held on January 20. The public summary of that meeting is attached. The final page of that document presents a summary of the changes to fringes benefits made in the previous year. It was also noted that nationally medical costs are projected to rise 8-10% this year and prescription costs to rise 10%. The first meeting of the full FBAC will be held on February 18. Public summaries of FBAC meetings are posted on the HR website <https://hr.wfu.edu/benefits/fbac/> and are included with Senate committee reports. Last year the FBAC decided that this year it would consider the possibility of offering a High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) with Health Savings Account (HSA).

The Senate Fringe Benefits Committee met January 23 and agreed to meet February 17 when the agenda for the February 18 FBAC meeting is known. The committee sent to HR a request that the university consider offering domestic partner benefits. WFU offered domestic partner benefits before legalization of same-sex marriage but no longer offered these benefits once same-sex couples could legally marry.

Concerns about WFU fringe benefits can be addressed to any member of the Senate Fringe Benefits Committee.

Senate Fringe Benefits Committee members:

Michaelle Browers

Jennifer Claggett

Ellen Kirkman, Chair

Christopher Knott

Sarah Morath

Kiran K Solingapuram Sai

Whitney Simpson



# Fringe Benefits Advisory Committee

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*February 18, 2026*

# Agenda

- Welcome
- Recap of 2026 Benefit Plan Changes
- Annual Benefits Evaluation Calendar
- FY26 Financial Update
- CY27 Renewals & Considerations
- What's Next & Updates

# CY26 Benefit Plan Changes

## **MEDICAL**

- Premiums increased by 1.5% (Low Plan) and 3% (High Plan)
- Added a new Chronic Disease and Medication Management program with Tria Health
- Increased infertility benefit lifetime max from \$10k to \$15k
- Added Social Preservation (i.e. freezing eggs for future use) to infertility benefits
- Diagnostic Lab & X-ray subject to copay if performed in a provider's office
- Stop-Loss Renewal: 13% rate increase (down from 20%), while keeping a \$300k annual deductible

## **DENTAL**

- Premiums increased by 7%

## **VISION**

- Increased frame frequency to every 12 months; increased frame and contact lens allowance to \$225

## **FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS**

- Health Care annual limit increased to \$3,300 (carry forward increased to \$660)
- Dependent Care annual limit increased to \$7,500 (no carry forward)

## **LEGAL**

- Expanded services for parents & grandparents on the Ultimate Advisor Plus plan

## **EDUCATION**

- Offered a new student loan, education, and financial wellness program with Fiducius.

# Annual Benefits Evaluation Calendar

Jan.	Feb.	March	April
<u>FBAC Orientation</u>	<u>1st FBAC Mtg</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial update</li> <li>• Review benefit considerations;</li> <li>• Review renewal(s)</li> <li>• RFP update(s)</li> </ul>	<u>2nd FBAC Mtg</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial update</li> <li>• Finalize benefit considerations</li> <li>• Review medical &amp; rx plan design</li> <li>• Review dental plan design</li> <li>• Review peer data</li> <li>• Renewal update(s)</li> <li>• RFP update(s)</li> </ul>	<u>3rd FBAC Mtg</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial update</li> <li>• Benefit plan recommendations</li> <li>• Medical plan recommendations</li> <li>• Dental plan recommendations</li> <li>• Renewal update(s)</li> <li>• RFP update(s)</li> </ul>
May	June - Aug.	Sept.	Oct. - Dec.
<u>4th FBAC Mtg</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial update</li> <li>• Renewal update(s)</li> <li>• RFP update(s)</li> <li>• Communication strategy &amp; timing</li> </ul>	<u>Summer</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor medical claims</li> <li>• Finalize medical &amp; dental premiums</li> <li>• Recommend premium changes to Budget / Finance</li> </ul>	<u>5th FBAC Mtg</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial update</li> <li>• Share medical &amp; dental premiums</li> <li>• Communication plan</li> <li>• Annual Benefits Enrollment resources</li> <li>• Flu shots</li> </ul>	<u>Benefits Administration</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Benefits Enrollment</li> <li>• Eligibility files</li> <li>• Contracts</li> <li>• Id cards</li> <li>• Annual Stop-Loss RFP</li> </ul>

# FY26 Financial Update - as of 12/31/25

- Medical was favorable in December, however high cost claims have increased in 2026.
- Dental is slightly favorable compared to budget.

# CY27 Renewals & Considerations

## **Third-Party Administrator Contract Renewals (required)**

- New York Life Insurance
  - Life Insurance; Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance; Long-Term Disability Insurance
- MetLife Dental Insurance (moved to fully-insured 2025)
- Medical Plan Stop-Loss Insurance (renews annually; late Fall)

## **Medical and Pharmacy Plan Evaluation (reviewed annually)**

- Cost-sharing (i.e. premiums, copays, deductibles, out-of-pocket maximums)
- Network utilization

## **Voluntary Benefit Considerations (manageable & quick wins)**

- Employee Discount Program and/or Pet Insurance
- Supplemental Health Offerings (Aflac alternatives)
- Whole Life with Long-Term Care (replace Genworth)

## **Potential Analysis (requires considerable time & resources)**

- Last year, discussed the potential of implementing a High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) with a Health Savings Account (HSA).
  - A High Deductible Health Plan with an HSA remains a priority and we will continue this evaluation once our new Executive Director of Compensation and Benefits has arrived.

# What's Next & Updates

- Continue to monitor medical claims
- Evaluate RFP results
- Mobile Mammography
  - Tuesday, March 10
  - Monday, March 30
- FBAC Meetings
  - March 18 at noon
  - April 15 at noon
  - **April 23 - 24: Board of Trustees Meeting**
  - May 20 at noon
  - September meeting TBD