

Chancellor Folt and the Double Bind of Women Leaders in Higher Ed

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

One of the biggest controversies in my small town revolves around a statue, a female university chancellor who just left in a firestorm and a board of governors that has the university system—and our chancellor—in a stranglehold.

I'm talking about Silent Sam—a 17-foot Confederate monument installed on the upper quad of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1913 by the Daughters of the Confederacy. During the speeches at its dedication, Julian Carr, a UNC trustee and primary donor to the statue, gave a speech that included these words: "The present generation ... scarcely takes note of what the Confederate soldier meant to the welfare of the Anglo Saxon race during the four years immediately succeeding the war... Their courage and steadfastness saved the very life of the Anglo Saxon race in the South." The statue, like the Confederacy, was a monument to white supremacy.

And everyone knew it. As early as the 1960s, there were protests to remove Silent Sam. But the statue stood until 2018, when it was torn down in a protest where no one was hurt—but many were charged with crimes, and many powerful white people were up in arms.

But this article isn't about the Silent Sam protests or the legal challenges. It's about **Dr. Carol Folt**, the chancellor who left UNC Chapel Hill on Jan. 31, 2019.

Silent Sam

Folt—a woman leader in higher education—found herself in an incredible bind. She inherited a racist statue, one she herself wanted gone—she said so—in a state that passed a law forbidding its removal. (In 2015, the heavily Republican North Carolina legislature passed a law with the not-so-very hidden intent to protect Confederate monuments, essentially forbidding their removal.)

On one side, students, liberal faculty and activists demanded that Folt do more to get rid of the statue. On the other side, the conservative board of governors (BOG) severely limited her ability to take action. There was no way she could do the right thing and stay at UNC—so she didn't. After months of trying to keep the BOG happy and protect UNC students at the same time, when it became apparent her job was impossible, she left.

When Folt first urged the BOG to "move" Silent Sam, her argument seemed like one of appeasement to those around her: She argued that the statue be moved (not removed entirely) and that it be moved for the safety of students because it draws protests (not because it is racist). Sure, we might prefer Folt to have said, "Silent Sam must be destroyed because it represents racism." That statement is true, but it would have also gotten her fired. And I'm guessing she knew then, like we all know now, that the person the BOG will hire to replace her will have to pass the litmus test of Silent Sam.

A Game of Chess

I don't know what Folt was thinking, but I do know what she did after protesters pulled down Silent Sam.

The BOG was very angry at Chancellor Folt when the statue came down. They demanded the statue be put back up—they demanded all sorts of things, but mostly they demanded a solution.

Chancellor Folt came up with a proposal for the statue. Remember, by law, the statue had to stay on UNC's campus. She proposed that Silent Sam be housed in a new historical center on campus—one that would cost over \$5 million to build.

Those who were against anything having to do with Silent Sam thought the proposal was preposterous: How dare we memorialize the statue any further? The BOG's reaction was also predictable: They thought it was an exorbitant amount of money, and they rejected it.

But in private, I thought: Doesn't this proposal seem like a giant bluff? Isn't it possible that this proposal is so outlandish that somehow Folt knew the BOG would never accept?

The BOG turned down the high-cost proposal, which meant Folt was in the position to say, "I gave you an offer. You rejected it."

Because here's the deal: If you're a woman in a top leadership position, you don't have many choices. One of your only choices is to play a really dynamite game of chess. We might wish Folt, and all of us like her, could have just said "No, your racist statue is going into a box into the basement." We wish she could have said, "I'm making this call because I'm the boss of UNC; that's why you hired me—to make good decisions for the life of the university."

But that's not what happens when you're a woman in charge. What happens is the BOG, whose members reflect neither the population of the state nor the population of your school, tells you what to do. They micromanage your job. They badmouth you to the press. And so, you have to play chess. Gamesmanship is the only option when you're a woman in charge.

Checkmate

After protesters tore down Silent Sam, the statue's giant pedestal remained in the middle of the quad, a further lightning rod for protests, often by white supremacists. Folt again made multiple requests to the BOG to tear it down for the safety of campus, which the BOG denied.

Then, in mid-January, Chancellor Folt turned in her resignation—she'd be leaving at the end of the school year. That very same night, she sent cranes to uproot the pedestal on the quad.

In its coverage of the story on Jan. 15, 2019, *The Washington Post* interviewed a graduate student who noted Folt's double bind: "It is telling that Chancellor Folt suddenly

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Women on the Move,
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information officer and associate VP for information technology services at Florida State University.

- **Dr. Rianna Lloyd** becomes director of the Power of Nursing at the Remen Institute for the Study of Health and Illness at the Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine OH.

- **Dr. Philomena V. Mantella** moves from senior VP and chief executive officer of the Lifelong Learning Network at Northeastern University MA to president of Grand Valley State University MI, beginning in July.

- **Dr. Anne P. Massey** moves from professor and Ruth L. Nelson Chair of Business at the Wisconsin School of Business at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to dean of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, beginning in August.

- **Laura McAleer** becomes associate VP for federal and Washington relations at the University of Notre Dame IN.

- **Cecilia M. McCormick, JD,** moves from vice provost for academic strategy and special programs at Thomas Jefferson University PA to president of Elizabethtown College PA.

- **Ann McCorvey** moves from deputy executive VP and treasurer at George Washington University to VP for finance and administration and chief financial officer at Davidson College NC.

- **Dr. Karen Chance Mercurius** moves from director of alumni relations at Harvard Law School MA to associate VP for alumni and constituent relations at the University of Rochester NY.

- **Kimberly Mutcherson, JD,** moves from vice dean and professor of law to co-dean of Rutgers Law School NJ over the Camden campus.

- **Diana Napolitano** becomes content marketing manager for the College of Arts and Sciences at Syracuse University in New York.

- **Joanne Ritter-Teitel** becomes associate dean of clinical practice in the College of Nursing at SUNY Downstate Medical Center NY.

- **Julie K. Rosenthal** moves from executive director of enrollment management in the Department of Admissions to VP for enrollment management and external relations at Rocky Vista University CO.

- **Julie Smith, JD,** moves from assistant to the chancellor for external affairs at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke to assistant vice chancellor for external affairs, partnerships, and economic development at North Carolina State University.

- **Dr. Tracee Smith** moves from interim to director of the Office of Student Records and university registrar at Alcorn State University MS.

- **Dr. Ann Huff Stevens** moves from professor of economics at the University of California, Davis to dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas.

- **Sylvia Stinson-Perez** becomes director of the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center at Mississippi State University.

- **Dr. Sarah Swager** moves from interim VP for student affairs at Carlow University PA to vice provost for student

success at the University of Montana.

- **Jameia Tennie** moves from interim to director of undergraduate admissions at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

- **Dr. Titilayo Ufomata** moves from special advisor to the president and board of trustees at Hobart and William Smith Colleges NY to provost and senior VP for academic affairs at Saint Mary's College IN.

- **Dr. Juli Wade** moves from associate provost for faculty and academic staff development at Michigan State University to dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut, beginning in July.

- **Dr. Allyson Watson** moves from dean of the College of Education at the University of South Florida to dean of the College of Education at Florida A&M University.

- **Sheneui Weber** becomes vice chancellor of workforce and economic development for the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

- **Dr. Lindia Willies-Jacobo** moves from assistant dean for diversity and community partnerships at the University of California, San Diego to associate dean for admissions at the forthcoming Kaiser Permanente Medical School CA.

- **Heidi Woodbury** moves from assistant dean for external relations at the David Eccles School of Business to VP for institutional advancement at the University of Utah. 

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found the courage to act once she was no longer beholden to the politics of self-preservation," said Jerry Wilson, a graduate student. He continued, "What does it say about the culture of the university that neglecting the well-being of black students is a requirement for job security?"

Wilson's second point is dead on, because the BOG forced Folt to choose whether the statue would stay and continue to harm students or she would leave. She chose the latter and took the pedestal down with her.

And yet, as to his first point, I don't think her motives were (all) about job security. She faced the double bind every woman in a leadership position at a university faces. She is supposed to cajole, appease and nurture. But when she does, she's not courageous enough. She's not a strong leader. And then there was the matter of her likely replacement, who would likely be a BOG puppet rather than someone who would fall on a sword for the school and its students.

The Double Bind

What is it about our work that places women in higher ed in this double bind?

That's the question I keep asking myself as I read about the letter Folt sent just before tearing down that pedestal. Because I believe that she wanted to tear down Silent Sam. But she couldn't—because her hands were tied.

She knew that her playing chess with the BOG was better than her not playing chess with the BOG until they knocked all the pieces off the board.

I understand Folt's position, and I'm not trying to

diminish what Silent Sam was—a monument to white supremacy. And yet, Folt tried again and again to do the right thing, and the BOG stood in her way. The only way she could do the right thing was to leave. That shouldn't have been her only option.

Why is it that women are only allowed to fight once the fight is over? 

Pregnancy and Sports: The Next Frontier, *continued from page 10*

At the time of Williams' research, there was no concrete research data on pregnant athletes at the collegiate level. Her goal was to "impact them and make them human beyond just being a number on a jersey."

Self-care as a Priority

When Williams first got her position at The Trust, she initially quit work on her dissertation. Realizing she could handle both responsibilities, her weekends were spent writing.

"Any progress was good progress, even if it was a sentence or two," said Williams. She enlisted a dissertation coach; the NCAA grant helped her keep her focus on the finish line.

Williams also had a good support system that would encourage her to take a break. After completing the writing and earning her degree, Williams took 2018 to figure out "who I was."

She spent time working out, eating right, seeing a therapist and not doing anything outside of work. "It's really refreshing to use it as a recovery time for myself," says Williams.

With "speculation that 10 percent of the student population are parents," Williams seems to have found her calling. "You have a desire to do something, but it often chooses you," she says.

"I know who I am and what my life's work is," she says. "I want to be leading the charge on this type of work."

Her goal is to publish her research, develop programming around the topic and speak at conferences. She says she's "looking at ways of being an asset to the academic community, athletic departments and the NCAA." 

PROFILE: Pratt-Clarke Creates Sustainable Institutional Transformation, *continued from page 11*

university with that as a core value is critically important for Pratt-Clarke. The university also has a set of principles of community that grew out of protests from the African-American community in the 2000s. It's a shared sense of values, respect, affirmation and equity that the institution affirms.

"If you have some core values grounded in a sense of humanity, that's a foundation upon which diversity, equity and inclusion can rest," says Pratt-Clarke.

When Pratt-Clarke arrived on campus, there was only the Black Cultural Center. Now, there are cultural centers for the Latino/Latina community, Asian community and Native American and indigenous communities, and an

LGBTQ resource center. These centers create visibility. It's a physical presence that erases the invisibility of marginalized groups.

"These are sustainable things as we go forward as an institution," Pratt-Clarke says. "If we can start having these conversations and partnering with white men in more intentional ways, we can start to see sustained institutional change." 

PROFILE: Hancock Recognized as a Force in Adult and Continuing Education, *continued from page 12*

There is a large number of military and veteran students, and there is a division focused on understanding their needs. "They can be in remote locations without internet access," says Hancock. "As they move, the course can go with them. Our academic policies are very much trying to keep them moving forward."

While TESU is a New Jersey institution, students are everywhere in the world. Going forward, she's working on ways to enhance student engagement and build student-to-student interaction.

"We're looking at our academic programming to make sure it reflects the growing industries across the U.S. and internationally," says Hancock. 

PROFILE: A Woman Leader's Ethic of Care, *continued from page 13*

"I'm there to represent my institution and build opportunities for my students," says Tomaneng, noting that Berkeley is "a very progressive environment."

The "ethic of care" has been uppermost in her mind this past year. When Tomaneng surveyed male colleagues at other schools about their experiences, they were surprised to learn she has members of the college community wanting to walk her to her car.

"They feel the need to be heard," she says. Many employees also expect Tomaneng to do "hands-on mediation" between professionals, and even between departments.

"I have to shift roles during the day," she acknowledges. "My door has to be open for those interpersonal communications."

Uber Mom

When she's not at work, Tomaneng "really enjoys" spending time with her family and friends. Her husband is on the faculty at USF, and her son is an "avid, competitive" basketball player.

"I turn into Uber mom on the weekends," she admits. "It's very enjoyable but also stressful depending on how invested you get in the game."

She's currently teaching a graduate course at USF on her dissertation topic. "It's very different from undergraduate teaching," she notes, "but being back in the classroom reaffirms why I am in a leadership role in a community college system.

"I really enjoy it. I find it's so important to [be] serving our students." 