

CHAPEL HILL - The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institute of Politics announced Jennifer Roberts and Barbara Jackson will serve as Fellows with the Institute for the Spring 2020 semester. As Fellows, each will lead their own series of not-for-credit seminars over the course of eight weeks.

Roberts, former Mayor of Charlotte, has titled her series “The Changing Climate: The Environment and Society in Politics,” and will focus on sustainability and environmental justice in contemporary politics, with added insights on local government and other topics close to her own experience. Jackson, who served for almost a decade as a Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, will examine the state judicial system in her series “Courts and Society: Where We’ve Been, Where We Are, and Where We’re Going” to give students a clearer picture of the role of the courts.

This semester marks the first time that both Fellows of the Institute’s Fellows have been women, and both Roberts and Jackson are excited to share their own unique experiences and insights with students. Said Roberts, “I look forward to the opportunity to share my insights and experience with students at my alma mater, UNC. We are at a turning point for our democracy and our climate, and I know with the right inspiration, the students of this generation can save both.” Jackson echoed Robert’s excitement to work with students, saying “As a graduate of UNC, I’m excited to be a part of the Institute of Politics. It’s so important for tomorrow’s leaders to learn about how all branches of our government function, as well as to promote civil discourse and collaboration as important values in our society.”

The Institute of Politics’ Fellows Program, now in its third year of providing programming to students and the broader UNC community, works to provide a space for constructive dialogue between students and experienced political practitioners. The Institute of Politics is a student-led organization founded to engage and inspire students, particularly undergraduates, to pursue careers in politics and public service. In addition to the Fellows Program, the Institute supports an array of other programming opportunities on campus, including the Tech Team, the Carolina Political Review, a semester-long Speaker Series, a Political Archive, the Civic Engagement and Action Coalition, and a robust and growing internship program in North Carolina and Washington, DC.

Mayor Jennifer Roberts

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Jennifer Watson Roberts has spent a lifetime in public service in a number of varied roles. A native of North Carolina, she graduated as a Morehead Scholar from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1982 with highest honors. She also holds two graduate degrees in international affairs from the University of Toronto and from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Following graduation, she served for several years as a Foreign Service Officer with the United States Department of State, working at posts and on assignments in and related to Latin America.

After her tenure abroad, she ultimately returned to her hometown of Charlotte where she worked as a corporate finance officer with First Union, and as an active and engaged volunteer in the Charlotte civic space, particularly around issues of international engagement and education. It was during this time that she worked as the Executive Director of the World Affairs Council of Charlotte and as the Chair of the Mayor's International Cabinet, a new committee organized to advise the Mayor and City Council on international development and cooperation at the local level.

In 2004 she ran her first campaign for public office, winning an at-large seat on the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners, a seat she held until 2012. From 2006-2011, she was also Chair of the Board. While a commissioner, Roberts was a champion for the environment and sustainability, for expanded access to and services through the county's parks and public spaces, and LGBTQ equality.

In 2012, she was the Democratic nominee in North Carolina's Ninth Congressional District, campaigning through a large segment of the Carolina Piedmont. She was later elected as the 58th Mayor of Charlotte, serving from 2015-2017, leading the city through some of its greatest challenges so far this century.

Mayor Roberts now works for ecoAmerica, a nonprofit working to build institutional leadership, public support, and political will for climate solutions in the United States, as the Director of its Path to Positive Communities Program. She has been recognized with the Maya Angelou

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Women Who Lead award, the National Association of Women Business Owners' Public Policy Leader of the Year award, and Equality North Carolina's Ally of the Year award.

Resident in Charlotte, Mayor Roberts enjoys hiking, skiing, and other outdoor activities with her family while not engaged in the never-ending work of advocacy and public service. She and her husband Manley have two children: one is a student at Georgia Tech and the other is a software engineer in Oakland, California.

Justice Barbara Jackson

Growing up in Wake County, Barbara Jackson has given a lifetime to the administration of justice in North Carolina. She holds both her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and was awarded a Master of Laws by Duke University in Judicial Studies in 2014.

Following her graduation from law school, her first job was as a law clerk at the Supreme Court of North Carolina. She later practiced law in an array of varied capacities for 14 years. Her experience includes time in private practice working with land use and local government law, in advocacy work on behalf of persons with disabilities, as General Counsel for the North Carolina Department of Labor, and in the office of Governor Jim Martin.

In 2004, she mounted her first campaign for public office, defeating an incumbent to win an eight-year term on the North Carolina Court of Appeals. In 2010, she ran a second successful state-wide campaign for a seat on the Supreme Court of North Carolina, a seat she held until 2018. Her election in 2010 marked the first time that a majority of the seats on the Supreme Court were held by women.

Off the bench, she has served as co-chair of North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice, charged with studying the impact of new and emerging technologies on the courts system. She has also served on the American Bar Association

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Appellate Judges Conference, on the Board of Governors of the North Carolina Bar Association, the Board of Directors of the Wake County Bar Association, and the North Carolina Courts Commission

Currently, Justice Jackson serves as a Senior Lecturing Fellow at Regent University School of Law. She lives in Wake County with her husband, Scott, and is an active member of Highland United Methodist Church. She has competed on the television trivia game show JEOPARDY!, and still enjoys a regular trivia night with several other current and retired appellate judges.