



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

September 1, 2026

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Brian Cole

Chancellor,
University of North Carolina
School of the Arts (UNCSA)

By **Elly Clary**

A Grammy Award winner from Wilson, NC, was prominent on a list of standouts from the North Carolina School of the Arts delivered by its leader.

Brian Cole has served since 2020 as the ninth chancellor of the Winston-Salem institution.

Music alum Mary-Mitchell Campbell is the Wilson native honored with a Grammy for producing the Broadway musical "Some Like It Hot." She accepted a career achievement award at the 2026 Tonys.

Prominent alums and faculty abound, Cole said as he listed many.

"Every year UNCSA is ranked among the very top arts institutions in our country," Cole added. "Currently, that includes, from the Hollywood Reporter, the number-eight-ranked School of Filmmaking in the United States and the number-three-ranked School of Drama in the world."

Winston-Salem business leaders and arts supporters raised \$850,000 in 1964 to beat out five other cities vying to establish the school as part of the University of North Carolina System. That resulted in the state claiming the nation's first public arts conservatory.

Most other prestigious arts schools are private institutions, with triple UNCSA's out-of-state tuition, Cole said. Full-time in-state tuition is one-twelfth of private

institutions.

“The comprehensive experience our students get is unparalleled,” he said. “UNCSA provides a top-tier liberal arts education coupled with elite-level training to practice their craft as a career. Our students learn by doing.”

He bragged of near-99-percent job placement, in industries from entertainment to museums to space exploration. A senior official of SpaceX is a 1999 graduate of UNCSA’s School of Design and Production.

“Many of our alumni find great success in non-arts-related professions,” Cole said, “because arts training, especially the highly focused, disciplined training at UNCSA, provides a critical skill set that any CEO would highly value. Artists, by their very nature, are entrepreneurs.”

Providing a head-start for young artists is UNCSA’s high school component. For Tar Heel residents, it’s tuition-free. About half the class of 2025 pursued higher education at UNC System schools, picking them over such institutions as Johns Hopkins, Vanderbilt and Rhode Island School of Design.

The economic impact of the arts is impressive, Cole said, citing figures from a recent study by “Americans for the Arts.”

- The arts and culture sector generated \$151.7 billion in US economic activity.
- This activity supported 2.6 million jobs, provided \$101 billion in personal income and generated \$29.1 billion in local, state and federal government revenue.
- North Carolina’s nonprofit arts and culture industry generated \$2.23 billion in economic activity through 38,000 full-time jobs.

“If you add up the numbers throughout arts and entertainment...you’ll very quickly see the deep impact that UNCSA alumni are having...on the local, state and national economy,” Cole said, “and on the daily lives of people throughout the United States and the world.”

The recording can be found here:

With slides: <https://vimeo.com/1223139283?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Without slides: <https://vimeo.com/1223140023?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Chancellor Cole’s introduction begins at about 25 minutes.