



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (UCAF)
Brian Soucek, Chair
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Assembly of the Academic Senate
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May 13, 2021

**MARY GAUVAIN, CHAIR
ACADEMIC SENATE**

RE: ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

Dear Mary,

In the course of the pandemic, UCAF has twice written to Academic Council to express our strong concern that steps necessitated in an emergency not be treated as precedent afterward, especially to the extent that they are inconsistent with academic freedom.¹ Our statements, like yours,² have emphasized that responsibility for determining the proper mode of instruction in individual classes lies primarily with the faculty. As you recently wrote to President Drake, “It would be a violation of academic freedom for the administration to determine teaching platforms.”

Now that the University is gradually returning to in-person instruction, some may interpret our statements to mean that academic freedom protects faculty who do not want to return to the classroom. Generally, this is not the case. The return to normalcy should include a return to normal procedures for determining what modes of instruction the faculty deems appropriate for various classes. Faculty who have pedagogical reasons for wanting to continue teaching online should bring those to faculty committees charged with course approvals, just as they would have done prior to the pandemic. These normal mechanisms of shared governance are there to protect faculty’s academic freedom, now as before.

Of course, there are many other considerations, aside from academic freedom, that might justify continued online teaching. Health concerns, for example, should surely be given due consideration. These concerns are beyond UCAF’s purview. But we are grateful to you and our colleagues on other committees for the work you are doing to address these concerns and many others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Soucek".

Brian Soucek, Chair
UCAF

¹ https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/committees/ucaf/documents/ucaf-covid-3-5-2021-memo.pdf

² https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/reports/senate-recommendations-fall-reopening.pdf