April 19, 2024

James Steintrager
Chair, UC Academic Senate

Re: (Systemwide Senate Review) Proposed Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units

Dear Chair Steintrager,

The divisional Executive Board (EB) appreciated the opportunity to review the proposed Regents policy on public and discretionary statements by academic units, a revision of their proposed policy on the use of university administrative websites about which the division provided comments in March 2024. EB reviewed the current proposal and divisional committee and council responses at its meeting on April 11, 2024.

Members voted unanimously in favor of a motion to decline to endorse the proposal, concluding that the Academic Council-endorsed University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) guidelines are sufficient for helping academic units, that implementation of the proposed policy would be challenging, and that the long-standing practice where faculty indicate they are not speaking for the institution, should continue. (One student representative voted in favor of the motion.)

Members appreciated the improvements in this latest proposal, particularly the clarification that it would not include faculty research and teaching, and hoped that there was a shared understanding that faculty determine what constitutes research and teaching. However, they expressed concern that the current definitions of an academic unit and a discretionary statement retain a lot of ambiguity that may prove both hard to define and potential harmful to faculty research. Some members were specifically concerned that the proposed policy referred to laboratories, as it was unclear whether or not this included websites for individual PI laboratories.

Members pointed to the American Association of University Professors’ Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, highlighting the following quotation:

College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.
Lastly, the Executive Board observed that robust shared governance requires faculty involvement in these important decisions about public and discretionary statements. Thus, they affirmed the UCAF guidelines, which the Academic Council concluded “affirm the freedom of campus academic departments to issue or endorse statements on political or controversial issues, and outline processes that will ensure the judicious and transparent use of statements.”

Sincerely,

Andrea Kasko
Chair
UCLA Academic Senate

Encl.

Cc: Kathleen Bawn, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, UCLA Academic Senate
Jessica Cattelino, Immediate Past Chair, UCLA Academic Senate
April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate