Executive Board

Academic Senate Leadership Letter on Academic Freedom

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UCLA Academic Senate

September 16, 2026

Dear Chancellor Frenk,

We are writing to express our concerns and reservations about the press release you issued on September 11, 2026, titled "Chancellor Julio Frenk comment regarding media coverage on Sept. 10." The document contained several statements that have been interpreted as criticizing the law school event "25 Years After 9/11: Reimaging Freedom, Justice, and Security" and its organizers.

The University of California's (UC) policy (APM 010) on academic freedom is clear and unequivocal:

> The principles of academic freedom protect freedom of inquiry and research, freedom of teaching, and freedom of expression and publication. These freedoms enable the University to advance knowledge and to transmit it effectively to its students and to the public.
>
> Academic freedom requires that teaching and scholarship be assessed by reference to the professional standards that sustain the University's pursuit and achievement of knowledge. The **substance and nature of these standards properly lie within the expertise and authority of the faculty as a body**. [emphasis added]

The AAUP has long affirmed "its belief that the freedom to hear is an essential condition of a university community and an inseparable part of academic freedom" and that "the right to examine issues and seek truth is prejudiced to the extent that the university is open to some but not to others whom members of the university also judge desirable to hear."

The UCLA Senate's Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) laid out guidelines last year for dealing with challenging material in the classroom, which also apply to other academic endeavors:

> Classroom materials dealing with sensitive topics such as religion, nationality, ethnicity, or deeply held political views may sometimes be taken as disrespectful and hurtful. Those materials dealing with violent, even horrific, events may be emotionally disturbing and their sudden introduction may retraumatize survivors.

In a November 2025 response to CAF's May 2025 statement "In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University," you and EVCP Hunt wrote:

> We fully agree that academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and shared governance are essential to the University's mission of discovery, learning, and public service. These values have long enabled UCLA to advance knowledge across disciplines and foster open, rigorous, and respectful debate in the pursuit of truth.
>
> We recognize the challenges currently facing higher education, both nationally and globally, and share the committee's concern for preserving an environment in which faculty, students, and researchers can pursue their scholarly work free from undue interference. UCLA remains

committed to these core values and to working collaboratively with the Academic Senate to ensure that they continue to guide our community.

As elected leaders of the Los Angeles Division of the UC Academic Senate, we reiterate and reinforce these foundational policies and values related to academic freedom. Particularly during times of grief, stress, political division and pressure, it is of the utmost importance for the UCLA Administration and Senat faculty to work collaboratively to uphold our deeply held principles and protect academic freedom. As you observed, "When we face difficult challenges and tough decisions, we find strength in staying connected."

Sincerely,

Tim Groeling	Catherine Sugar	Megan McEvoy
Chair	Vice Chair	Immediate Past Chair

UCLA Office of the Chancellor

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September 17, 2026

Dear Chair Groeling, Vice Chair Sugar and Immediate Past Chair McEvoy,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. I take the concerns you raise seriously, particularly because they touch upon one of the most fundamental principles of a university: academic freedom.

Let me begin unequivocally: UCLA is committed to academic freedom. It is a core tenet of our mission and a bedrock of higher education. My September 11 statement does not change that fundamental commitment or the protections it affords faculty, symposia organizers, speakers and participants.

Faculty must remain free to pursue difficult questions, organize academic programs, select speakers and engage ideas that may be controversial or deeply contested. Those protections are essential to the work of a great university, including the role of the School of Law in examining consequential questions of law, justice and policy.

The School of Law symposium operated within the protections of academic freedom and proceeded as planned, with its program, speakers and academic content unchanged.

The statement expressed my support for Professor Judea Pearl and others in our community who carry their own lived experiences of September 11 and its aftermath. It also reaffirmed UCLA's opposition to antisemitism and terrorism.

I chose the words of my statement carefully and deliberately. Some subsequent accounts have characterized it as a condemnation, rebuke or repudiation of the symposium. A careful read of my statement will fail to find any of those words. Furthermore, the statement did not criticize the School of Law or question the validity of legal representation, including for individuals accused of horrific acts.

My statement underscores that UCLA's protection of academic freedom does not constitute institutional endorsement of every speaker's viewpoint or program presented under those protections. That principle applies broadly to events across our campus, and we will make that distinction clear in our communications.

The key point of my statement is that we can uphold academic freedom while also expressing support for members of our community who are hurting. A university is more than a collection of individual rights and freedoms. It is a community, and community carries with it obligations of reciprocity.

What do we owe one another, particularly when we profoundly disagree? For me, the answer begins with mutual respect, empathy and recognition of one another's humanity. Academic freedom protects our ability to engage the most difficult ideas. It does not require indifference to one another or to the impact felt by members of our community. We must safeguard the freedom to pursue scholarship, invite speakers, test assumptions and express views that others may find deeply objectionable. At the same time, we must foster a culture of reciprocity in which those freedoms coexist with respect for the dignity and humanity of others.

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At this moment of extraordinary polarization, reciprocity is essential to what holds a university community together. I am committed to safeguarding academic freedom and preserving free expression. I am equally committed to sustaining the mutual respect, care and reciprocity that allow those freedoms — and our community — to flourish.

Sincerely,

Julio Frenk
Chancellor