Committee on Academic Freedom

In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University

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November 20, 2025

Dear Chair McEvoy,

Thank you for sharing the Committee on Academic Freedom's statement, *In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University*, and for the Executive Board's endorsement of its thoughtful reflections. We greatly appreciate the committee's dedication to upholding the principles that sustain UCLA's excellence as a public research university.

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.

We appreciate the Committee on Academic Freedom's engagement on these important issues and thank the Academic Senate for its continued partnership in defending and advancing the principles that define the University of California.

Sincerely,

Julio Frenk
Chancellor, UCLA

Darnell Hunt
Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, UCLA

UCLA Academic Senate
Executive Board

May 27, 2025

To: Michael Meranze
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

From: Kathleen Bawn
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Re: In Defense of Academic Freedom

At the May 22, 2025, meeting of the Executive Board (EB), members reviewed the Committee on Academic Freedom's (CAF) proposed statement about the defense of academic freedom at UCLA.

Members voted in favor of a motion to endorse the statement. We will share the letter and EB's endorsement with Chancellor Frenk and Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost Hunt. We will also post it on the Senate webpage.

EB appreciated CAF's ongoing advisement on matters of academic freedom.

Cc: April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate
Tara Hottman, Senior Policy Analyst, UCLA Academic Senate
Andrea Kasko, Immediate Past Chair, UCLA Academic Senate
Megan McEvoy, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, UCLA Academic Senate

UCLA Academic Senate
Executive Board

May 28, 2025

Julio Frenk
UCLA Chancellor

Darnell Hunt
UCLA Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost (EVCP)

Re: In Defense of Academic Freedom

Dear Chancellor Frenk and EVCP Hunt,

At the May 22, 2025, meeting of the Executive Board, members voted in favor of a motion to endorse and transmit the attached statement from the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) in defense of academic freedom at UCLA.

Would you please share the statement with your peers and direct reports? Also, the Executive Board requests that you please provide an update to the Academic Senate by October 31, 2025, of concrete campus and university efforts to protect academic freedom.

Sincerely,

Kathy Bawn
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Encl.

Cc: April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate
Yolanda Gorman, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor and Chief of Staff
Tara Hottman, Senior Policy Analyst, UCLA Academic Senate
Andrea Kasko, Immediate Past Chair, UCLA Academic Senate
Megan McEvoy, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, UCLA Academic Senate
Michael Meranze, Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Emily Rose, Assistant Provost and Chief of Staff to the EVCP

UCLA Academic Senate
Committee on Academic Freedom

May 1, 2025

To: Kathy Bawn, Chair
UCLA Academic Senate

Re: In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University

Dear Chair Bawn,

Bylaw 80.1 states that the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) "studies and reports to the Division any conditions within or without the University which, in its judgment, may affect the academic freedom of the University, its faculty and students…" The 2024-2025 academic year has posed a series of challenges to academic freedom at UCLA. As you know, in the fall, there was extensive discussion of the new Time, Place, and Manner Policies as well as the administration's unilateral creation of a new office of campus safety.

The Committee on Academic Freedom discussed recent federal actions and policy changes, and their implications for academic freedom at its meetings on March 7, 2025 and April 11, 2025. At both meetings members shared serious concerns and discussed sending a letter to the Executive Board.

In anticipation of the University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) "Statement on the Politicization of Research," CAF members agreed to wait to share their comments until after reviewing UCAF's statement. At the April 11, 2025, CAF meeting, members endorsed the UCAF statement and agreed to send a letter expressing the committee's specific concerns to the Executive Board.

You will find enclosed the Committee's statement "In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University." It seeks to articulate both fundamental principles and concrete steps for UCLA in ensuring academic freedom at UCLA. The committee requests that the Executive Board endorse the statement and its recommendations, and share the statement with the Administration. We also request that the statement be shared with the Division.

The committee appreciates the Executive Board's attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at meranze@history.ucla.edu or via the Committee's analyst, Tara Hottman at thottman@senate.ucla.edu.

Sincerely,

Michael Meranze, Chair
Committee on Academic Freedom

Encl: In Defense of Academic Freedom and the University Statement

cc: April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Tara Hottman, Senior Policy Analyst, Academic Senate
Andrea Kasko, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
Megan McEvoy, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, Academic Senate
Committee on Academic Freedom Members

May 1, 2025

The Centrality of Academic Freedom in a Moment of Crisis

Higher education is facing a global crisis. Internationally, regimes from China to Hungary, India to Nicaragua, Turkey to Iran, have sought control over their universities. In the United States, state governments from Florida to Ohio, and North Carolina to Texas have intruded into what can be taught in classrooms and reduced faculty authority over the educational process. These efforts to assert political control over scholarly activity have dramatically intensified under the current Federal administration. The Trump administration's ongoing effort to intervene in the internal affairs of universities and attack the processes of shared governance, its reduction of the infrastructure of scientific research, especially, but not only, in the biosciences, its attempt to restrict teaching and scholarship on history, culture, and society, its hostility to the international nature of scholarly life, and its declared policy of removing international scholars and students for what amount to "thought crimes" pose a deep and intensifying threat to American colleges and universities in general and the University of California and UCLA in particular.

We wish to be clear here. We are under no illusion that this is the first time that state or federal governments have intervened in the scholarly life of universities or that the current Administration is the first to attempt to leverage federal authority or funding to impose its politics on higher education. CAF stands opposed to partisan intrusion—of any sort—into teaching and learning at the university or any political tests imposed on scholarship or science.

But the breadth and depth of the Trump administration's attack on faculty, on scholarly knowledge and on institutional autonomy are unprecedented. Even in the early Cold War, when individual faculty faced government and institutional repression, there was not such a full-scale assault on higher education and production of knowledge.

The principles at stake here are of more than the moment. For over a century higher education in the United States has served as a source of creative research and teaching that has enriched society in both material and cultural forms. As the AAUP put it in 1915, the university:

> should be an intellectual experiment station, where new ideas may germinate and where their fruit, though still distasteful to the community as a whole, may be allowed to ripen until finally, perchance, it may become a part of the accepted intellectual food of the nation or of the world. Not less is it a distinctive duty of the university to be the conservator of all genuine elements of value in the past thought and life of mankind which are not in the fashion of the moment.

Essential to fulfilling this role has been academic freedom. Academic freedom—the authority of the scholarly community to govern itself according to academic standards without being compelled to sacrifice knowledge production to outside pressures—has helped ensure that American colleges and universities have continually created new knowledge of the natural world, deepened understanding of human cultures and societies, and provided services to their communities all while educating growing

number of students. Colleges and universities can remain colleges and universities only when the academic freedom of scholars and scientists is upheld.

Unfortunately, it is this academic freedom which is under attack today. As states seek to intrude into the teaching and hiring of universities, the current administration has, under the guise of civil rights law, made demands on universities that threaten the intellectual and academic autonomy of higher education. In addition, they have sought to impose political litmus tests on research funding far greater than any seen in the past. *In this moment we call upon the UCLA Division and the UCLA administration to strongly reaffirm the necessity of academic freedom for scholars and scientists.*

We also propose that they take concrete steps to make sure that faculty, scholars, and students are able to continue their academic work without fear.

First, we call upon the UCLA and UC leadership to defend the academic mission with all of the tools at their disposal. Where there are legitimate civil rights issues that need to be addressed, address them. But there are clear cut legal avenues to take up those issues. We have seen too many institutions take steps in response to investigations by state and federal actors that were not legally required and that harmed their core values. Indeed, one of our sister campuses reportedly provided personal faculty information to EEOC investigators without consulting with the faculty in question. One of the saddest moments in UC history was the Loyalty Oath of the early Cold War period when UC Regents and administrators chose to obey in advance. We call upon faculty and administrators not to make the same mistake twice.

Second, we call on the UCLA administration to provide legal aid and advice to international students and scholars whose status may be under threat. UCLA has long been a part of the international Republic of Letters and we must defend those students and scholars who, based on their academic qualifications and interests, we have invited to join us.

Third, we call on the UCLA administration to articulate clear plans to help enable those faculty and students whose research funding has been reduced unexpectedly to continue their work. In the interest of transparency, the administration should make clear to the Divisional Council on Research the extent of the reductions and work with both the Council on Research and the Council on Planning and Budget to develop ways to support endangered science and scholarship.

Fourth, we call upon the campus, systemwide, and regental leadership to reaffirm the authority of faculty expertise. We have been troubled by the widespread effort to diminish the authority of expertise and deeply troubled by the fact that at least some Regents have expressed hostility to long-standing practices of shared governance.

Fifth, we propose that the Senate Leadership and the 2025-2026 Committee on Academic Freedom hold a series of events explaining and highlighting the centrality of academic freedom to the ends of the university. It is our worry that the idea has become a shibboleth, trotted out when useful, but ignored far too often.