

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Notice of Meeting

Tuesday, December 19, 2023

I. **Approval of the Agenda and Minutes**

Action Taken: *The agenda and minutes were approved as noticed, 10-0-0.*

II. **Chair's Report**

Chair Farrell Ackerman

A. Update on the Number of UCAF Meetings in 2023-24

Chair Ackerman reported that he had received a message from the Senate Executive Director about the request for additional meetings. UCAF has been approved for three additional meetings for 2023-24; the November meeting counts as one of those. The Chair said that at least one meeting needs to be devoted to UCAF's progress in getting onto Academic Council. The Senate Chair and Vice Chair advised that the committee look at the past two to three years of Council minutes to see where the presence of UCAF would have been helpful. On a side note, Analyst Harms will see if the addition of meetings requires a change to the Bylaws.

The committee discussed the issue of the recording of the meetings. Members decided that the recording would be stopped during campus reports and during the discussion of anything sensitive.

III. **"Viewpoint Neutrality"**

Chair Ackerman explained that UCAF had decided to respond to President Drake's comments about viewpoint neutrality. He noted that the President had issued subsequent "clarification" on his remarks. Furthermore, the Provost sent out a letter on the topic. She had agreed with the Senate leadership not to send her response until UCAF had looked at it, but her staff did not get the message and sent it out without UCAF review.

IV. **Consultation with the Academic Senate Leadership**

James Steintrager, Academic Senate Chair

Steven Cheung, Academic Senate Vice Chair

Senate Chair Steintrager referred to an article that had appeared in *Forbes* which he said was "an immensely serious concern." He said that he would be talking to a reporter from *Inside Higher Education* about it and that it would probably be a "front burner" issue for the Regents' January meeting.

The Chair told the committee that there is going to be a Presidential task force on instructional modality and undergraduate online degrees. He said that he believes it will address the questions the Regents have about the place of online education while also

fully respecting the role of shared governance. The task force is balanced between the Senate and administrative sides and will bring data to bear on discussions about resources. The hope is that it will generate some recommendations. He noted that some of the campuses feel they would be very impacted by online educational degrees being offered by other, more established campuses.

Chair Steintrager said that he had had several conversations with the Provost about her letter on viewpoint neutrality. He stated that one of the items that he helped get into that letter was the assertion that campuses will need to distribute the money in keeping with academic freedom. He told the committee that he is “fairly pleased” with the situation as it stands now.

Senate Vice Chair Cheung remarked that the Regents approved a 4.2 percent increase to the salary scales at their November meeting. The .2 percent is to help offset the considerable increase to the cost of healthcare premiums. With regard to UCRP, employee contributions will remain the same and the employer contributions will go from 14 to 18.5 percent in increments over the next eight years. There remains pressure from some Regents to increase employee contributions to 50 percent, which is common for California employees. The investments portfolio was quite worrisome in the first quarter; UCRP is funded by earnings from the investment portfolio. However, the Federal Reserve is signaling that rates are going to decrease, and the CIO is feeling positive. Vice Chair Cheung added that UCM’s medical education building was approved by the Regents as was reconstructed housing at UCLA.

Members had questions for the Senate leadership and there was considerable discussion.

V. How to Argue for Inclusion of CAFs Onto Local Executive Committees

Chair Ackerman discussed the parallels between getting divisional CAFs onto the local councils and UCAF’s efforts to get on the systemwide Academic Council. He noted that Senate Chair Steintrager is very eager for UCAF to pursue this effort. He encouraged members from campuses that do not have a separate CAF to investigate why this is the case and if a local CAF can be established.

Members discussed the issue.

VI. How to Create Better Understanding of the Role of Academic Freedom and Shared Governance on Individual Campuses

Members held an impassioned discussion on the value of academic freedom and shared governance, including the importance of tenure. Chair Ackerman expressed a concern that young faculty coming to UC are not aware of the importance and protections of academic freedom. The Chair suggested that new faculty be given a general statement about academic freedom and shared governance at their onboarding. Members shared their suggestions and there was continued discussion.

VII. The Public and Media Response to the Testimony of the Three College Presidents (Penn, Harvard, and MIT) in Congress and the Challenges Posed to Public Understanding of Academic Freedom

This topic was addressed indirectly in the previous item.

VIII. Plan for the Initiative to Promote UCAF onto Academic Council

Chair Ackerman said that a small group of members will need to go through the past two years of Council minutes to find arguments for UCAF to join Council. He stated that he and the Vice Chair would be happy to work on it, but that it might be good to have other volunteers on the task. Vice Chair Gailmard remarked that the 2020 decision about standardized testing was an important instance where the input from UCAF would have made a considerable difference. The Chair added that the next meeting should include a discussion of what statements the committee wants to put forward regarding academic freedom and shared governance.

IX. Follow-Up on Issues Reported from Individual Campuses or that Members Believe are of Common Concern and Campus Reports

Members reported on issues of academic freedom on their campuses.

The committee adjourned at 1:06 p.m.