

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM 2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE:

The University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) met three times by videoconference (including one informal meeting) in Academic Year 2019-2020 to conduct business with respect to its duties as outlined in Senate Bylaw 130. Highlights of the Committee's activities and accomplishments are noted in this report.

PROPOSED DEFENSE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM STATEMENT

UCAF's 2015 statement about civility was prompted by President Napolitano's call for civility which the committee feared would stifle vigorous debate. By Fall 2019 the statement was outdated and did not adequately address the current pressures on academic freedom. The committee arduously crafted a new statement in defense of academic freedom, listing current threats from opposite political sides to clarify their shared dangers, but Council voted it down. Opinions then varied about the best way to proceed. One possibility is a yearly newsletter on current academic freedom issues, to stimulate conversation at the campuses. The newsletter could be posted on UCAF's website with the clarification that it reflects the committee's view and is not endorsed by Council. Another strategy is for each CAF to issue annual statements on current threats that are disseminated through each divisional Council, CAF websites or town halls. The committee may pursue the idea of a newsletter in the coming year.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM EDUCATION FOR THE UC COMMUNITY

In addition to bringing attention to pressing academic freedom issues, UCAF considered methods for actively educating members of the UC community about academic freedom. CAF websites should have resources related to academic freedom, and some do have very good ones, but websites speak only to those who go looking. It is important to widely publicize their availability. UCSF's CAF received a small amount of funding from the chancellor to support annual town halls focused on increasing awareness of academic freedom issues and resources; other campuses might follow suit. Additional ideas include providing academic freedom information in orientation packages for new faculty hires, and incorporating statements on academic freedom into classroom codes of conduct and on the syllabuses. UCAF prepared a brief, practical document about academic freedom to serve as a basis for stimulate discussion among small groups of students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Such discussions should be held annually in each department, even if for only 15-20 minutes. The statement was informally shared by UCAF members with relevant committees at their campuses and it was also sent to systemwide Academic Council in April.

STANDARD PROCEDURES FOR VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The UC system lacks standard procedures and mechanisms for faculty and others who want to report academic freedom violations. Currently, faculty can complain to campus CAFs, but this rarely occurs, and CAFs are powerless. The UCSD office for Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination has knowledgeable staff who might take on academic freedom, and this model could be replicated at the other campuses. Alternatively, a separate office could be set up on each campus for tracking and addressing academic freedom issues along the OPHD model. Another possibility: Each campus has an ombudsman familiar with the available resources and UCAF members were encouraged to explore how these offices might be involved with academic freedom complaints. Once these offices are in place, academic freedom violations can be better tracked, contributing to serious education efforts.

THREATS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In March, UCAF was joined by the chair of the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) to discuss concerns about threats from the People's Republic of China. CCGA had received a report from Human Rights Watch (HRW) about unsettling events happening in US classrooms, including at UC

campuses. HRW reported that Chinese students who have spoken in class about “sensitive” issues such as Taiwan, Tibet, the Uighur genocide, etc. have reported that their families in China were subsequently visited by the Party. Such intimidation is hardly unique to the Chinese government, as a Middle Eastern colleague pointed out. But the large number of Chinese students on our campuses who may be afraid to speak freely means that the PRC’s increasing attacks on academic freedom at home constitute an unprecedented threat to academic freedom in the UC. The Chinese government is present on our campuses through the Confucius Institutes and Chinese Students and Scholars Associations. In response to these concerns, the UCAF chair completed a long report on the issue, concluding that the Confucius Institutes of the UC operate independently of the PRC government (which is not true on all campuses across the US) and that the CSSA at UCSD, at least, is also doing no harm. Each CAF should stay in touch with both organizations where they exist to be sure that that continues to be so as control tightens domestically in the PRC, and should use those contacts to reach students directly with the message that the UC is a place for open, active discussion, and to encourage concerned students to talk to CAF about any related problems they face.

OTHER ISSUES AND ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

In response to requests for formal comment from the Academic Council, UCAF also issued views on the following:

- Proposed Revised Presidential Policy on Native American Cultural Affiliation and Repatriation
- Proposed Revised APM 120 - Emerita/Emeritus Titles
- UC Washington Center Review
- The Report from the Working Group on Comprehensive Access
- Systemwide Review of the Report of the Academic Council’s Standardized Testing Task Force
- Systemwide Review of BOARS Recommendation to Eliminate the ACT/SAT Essay Requirement
- The Requirement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statements for Applicants to Faculty Positions
- Statement on Grading, Online Teaching, and Shared Governance in Time of Crisis
- Systemwide Review of Proposed Presidential Policy Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Additionally, UCAF devoted part of each regular meeting to reports on issues facing local committees, including controversial speakers on campus, and resources on academic freedom.

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