

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Minutes of Meeting

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

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

Action Taken: The agenda and minutes were approved as noticed 8-0-0.

II. **Chair's Report**

Chair Farrell Ackerman

Chair Ackerman reported that he spoke with Senate Chair Steintrager about the Regents' proposal regarding statements on department websites. He also listed to the Regents' discussion on the topic.

The Chair said that the day's meeting would be largely devoted to discussion how to get CAFs on local executive committees and UCAF onto Council. He observed that many decisions are being made at the University that affect the faculty but have not had adequate faculty consultation. He cited examples such as the decision to no longer use the SAT and discussions about remedial courses. He said that issues such as these have a definite effect on how the campuses perform in terms of their teaching and research missions.

III. **Contracts for the Development of Online/Remote Courses**

Chair Ackerman asked Professor Lake to lead the discussion on how contracts for online courses are impinging on faculty prerogatives.

Professor Lake explained that the issue at hand was administrative control over course content. The administration would own the course content and would have the authority to approve which courses would be taught online and which would not. There is considerable administrative discretion in selecting (and perhaps vetoing) courses. This impinges on academic freedom in that faculty are not entirely free to structure their courses or include material in their courses on their own.

Chair Ackerman added that UCSD suspended all contracts until this issue was better understood.

Vice Chair Gailmard explained that all traditional syllabi go through a review by the Senate body. For online courses, there is also an administrative approval process. He observed that if a faculty member leaves the University, UC can still offer the class as long as there is someone to grade assignments and hold office hours.

Committee members discussed the issue at length with questions about UC Online and course ownership. It was noted that there is currently a presidential task force on online education.

IV. Status and Role of CAFs at the Divisions

The Chair remarked that he was aware that some members had been engaged with their local senates on this topic and asked for updates. Some members expressed mild receptivity to the inclusion of CAFs on the divisional councils, but no actual changes had been made. Questions were raised as to whether inclusion would require a bylaw change.

Chair Ackerman reminded the group that UCAF had been told it needed to make a compelling argument regarding its inclusion onto systemwide Council. He observed that UCAF's sensitivity to academic freedom issues is needed on that body.

V. Consultation with the Academic Senate Leadership

James Steintrager, Academic Senate Chair

Steven Cheung, Academic Senate Vice Chair

Chair Steintrager discussed the proposed Regents' policy about statements on department websites. He noted that the original proposal that came before the Regents was weak, and the item was tabled. He said that he had pressured for a systemwide Senate review of the policy, which has been granted. Unfortunately, it is an extremely expedited review, but a fast review is preferable to no review. Chair Steintrager shared that the next steps of the process are ambiguous. The draft policy is likely to change before it gets to the Board again, and it is unclear how a systemwide review of a policy that is going to change would be handled. He has brought this question up with some of the Regents and with the Regents' Secretary. It may be that what goes to the Board in March is not finalized and it gets postponed again.

The Senate Chair told the committee that there is a related item and that has to do with whether a unit can have free speech rights. He noted that this is something UCAF could address. He said that the systemwide Senate guidelines try to address that issue, but it is complicated. There is 1970 policy regarding the use of University resources for political purposes, however the University counsel said that the interpretation of that policy had to do with electoral politics.

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

VI. Regents' Proposal on Departmental Websites

Members discussed various options to address this proposal such as links to department positions on a department's landing page. They shared actions and discussions that had taken place at their respective campuses. The Chair said he would draft a letter that he would circulate before submitting it to the Senate Chair.

VII. Graduate Contracts for GSRs and TAs

Ruth Hellier, UCSB

Professor Hellier said that this topic had been raised by her campus CAF in early Feb by two faculty members who felt inundated and incensed by the effect of the contracts on

faculty and their relationships with graduate students. She cited a document she had shared outlining faculty concerns about the contracts, the foremost of which being the lack of faculty representation in the negotiations. Relatedly, the implementation of the contracts has fallen to faculty who have not received any training or assistance in this arena. She asked that UCAF take action as a systemwide committee to make the administration aware of the significant impact the previous negotiations had on teaching and research.

Chair Ackerman asked members to take this topic back to their CAFs for discussion and report back at the next meeting.

VIII. Campus Reports

Time did not allow for the campus reports.

The committee adjourned at 12:01 p.m.