



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Academic Senate

University Committee on Academic Freedom 2024-25 Annual Report

TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE:

Under Senate Bylaw 130 and consistent with [Bylaw 40](#), the University Committee on Academic Freedom shall (Am 28 May 2003)

Study and report to the Assembly upon any condition within or outside the University that, in the committee's judgment, may affect the academic freedom of the University and its academic community. (Am 15 Jun 71; Am 23 May 1996; Am 28 May 2003)

Executive Summary

The University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) had a particularly active year in 2024–2025, addressing wide-ranging issues affecting faculty rights, academic integrity, and shared governance. Key areas of focus included the impact of federal and state legislative actions on academic freedom, the role of DEI statements in hiring and evaluation, and the University's response to politically charged campus climates. The committee also engaged in ongoing collaboration with UC leadership and external bodies to promote and protect academic freedom across the UC system.

Major Topics and Actions

1. Academic Freedom Guidance and Education

UCAF discussed the creation of a systemwide guide or primer on academic freedom to educate faculty about their rights and responsibilities. Chair Gailmard committed to drafting a foundational outline, and the committee worked throughout the year to define its scope and dissemination strategy.

2. Federal and State Political Developments

UCAF monitored the evolving political landscape and its impact on academic freedom:

- SB 108: A California law restricting UC's management of expressive activities on campuses; UCAF reviewed its implications and urged careful implementation.
- Federal Executive Orders and DOE Task Forces: UCAF examined recent federal actions, including the Department of Education's investigations into antisemitism and the chilling effect on campus discourse.
- The committee expressed interest in publishing statements defending faculty autonomy and academic expression, encouraging UCOP to respond firmly to external political pressures.

3. DEI Statements in Hiring and Reviews

DEI statements remained a prominent topic. UCAF examined:

- Campus practices regarding DEI statement requirements in hiring and merit reviews.

- Concerns that mandatory statements may infringe on academic freedom if enforced without faculty oversight.
- Plans to draft a statement on best practices and consult UCAADE on joint guidance.

4. Political Statements by Academic Units

Building on its 2022 guidance, UCAF revisited the roles of academic units making political statements. The Committee supported the compromise expressed in the Regents' decision of July 2024, that such statements are permissible given they follow rules governing their adoption, included disclaimers, and do not appear on the landing page of the unit's website.

5. UC Congress on Academic Freedom

UCAF co-hosted a systemwide congress on academic freedom, collaborating with the Provost's Office to shape the agenda and recommend speakers. The congress was well-attended and was a success.

6. President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program (PPFP)

The committee examined the use of PPFP in faculty hiring. Concerns were raised that reliance on PPFP hiring might bypass shared governance or distort departmental priorities. UCAF invited PPFP Director Mark Lawson for dialogue, gaining clarity on selection processes.

7. Legal Representation and Shared Governance

Deputy General Counsel Allison Woodall briefed the committee on UC Legal's role, emphasizing the Senate's right to seek legal advice when interests diverge from UC administration.

8. Mutual Aid and Defense of Autonomy

The committee explored forming or supporting inter-university mutual aid pacts (e.g., similar to Big Ten initiatives) to defend academic institutions from political interference. UCAF agreed to draft a letter recommending formal Senate involvement in any future strategic legal responses.

Conclusion and Future Directions

UCAF made substantial contributions to the protection and understanding of academic freedom during a turbulent year for higher education. Looking ahead, the committee aims to:

- Finalize and distribute the academic freedom guidance document.
- Continue evaluating the intersection of DEI practices and academic freedom.
- Monitor political developments and advocate for faculty protections.
- Collaborate with other Senate bodies and UC leadership to strengthen shared governance.

Acknowledgements

The committee gives thanks to Academic Senate Chair Steven Cheung, Vice Chair Ahmet Palazoglu, and Senate Executive Director Monica Lin.

Respectfully submitted,

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