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Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate  
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University of California  
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor  
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May 9, 2018

**JANET NAPOLITANO, PRESIDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Concerns over Politicization of Science Research Funding**

Dear Janet:

At its April 25, 2018 meeting, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the attached letter from the University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) expressing grave concerns about recent changes in federal agency grant award procedures that may affect academic freedom.

The Academic Council shares UCAF's concerns about the politicization of science, particularly environmental science, and agreed that it would be valuable to circulate UCAF's recommendations to a broad set of campus constituencies for consideration. I am also asking Senate Division Chairs to forward UCAF's letter to campus CAP chairs, Vice Chancellors for Research, and others with an interest and stake in these issues.

UCAF is troubled that government appointees have been interfering to an unprecedented degree in specific decisions about science research funding proposals and denying grant applications for political reasons. The politicization has the potential to harm UC faculty who depend on federal grant funding to further their research. It could also impede their ability to advance through the merit review system, to the extent that CAPs might be constrained in their ability to recommend promotion and tenure to otherwise outstanding researchers who have been denied grants because of political considerations. UCAF's letter offers suggestions to CAPs, UC administrators, and UC Offices of Research for tracking and mitigating the impact of these governmental directives.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shane N. White".

Shane N. White, Chair  
Academic Council

Encl.

Cc: Academic Council  
Senate Executive Directors



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (UCAF)  
Christopher Elmendorf, Chair  
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April 3, 2018

**SHANE WHITE, CHAIR  
ACADEMIC SENATE**

**RE: UCAF CONCERNS OVER CHANGES IN SCIENCE FUNDING**

Dear Shane,

We are writing to express concern about recent changes in federal agency procedures for awarding grants—changes that may adversely affect academic freedom. This letter briefly summarizes the changes and their potential impact, and offers a couple of suggestions.

The [Department of the Interior](#) and the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) have adopted unprecedented protocols for review of grant applications by political appointees who reportedly are charged with ensuring that research funded by these federal agencies reflects “the priorities” of the current presidential administration.” These protocols exemplify a new tenor in the federal government’s approach to science, one documented with great specificity in a November 2017 AAUP report, [National Security, the Assault on Science, and Academic Freedom](#). As the AAUP report explains, it has long been the case that funding priorities change from one administration to the next. What is new is the present administration’s open hostility toward science, particularly science that touches on climate change, that examines the impact of fossil fuels on public health, or that entails international collaboration.

Dating back at least to the AAUP’s 1915 [Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure](#), academic freedom has been understood to consist of the freedom to pursue scholarly inquiry in accordance with disciplinary standards. Robert C. Post, [Democracy, Expertise, and Academic Freedom: A First Amendment Jurisprudence for the Modern State](#), ch. 3 (Yale University Press, 2012). Professors are held accountable to disciplinary norms through the tenure and promotion process, through peer-review of books and papers, and through peer review of grant applications. The government’s use of political criteria and political appointees not simply to determine general research priorities (for example, whether to increase funding for cancer research at the expense of climate research) but *to decide which specific grant applications shall be funded*, represents a significant threat to academic freedom. In the new order, the traditional principle of accountability to discipline-based standards of truth-seeking could give way to a “principle” of producing results that a political grants administrator happens to favor. That is an Orwellian freedom, not academic freedom.

Earlier this year, members of UCAF reached out to their respective campus communities in an effort to understand whether and if so how changes in federal grants administration are affecting research within the U.C. system. The evidence on hand is currently inconclusive. Research Vice Chancellors responded with various degrees of limited detail, while faculty members were often reluctant to talk at all.

UCAF discussed these matters during our March 20, 2018 meeting and in light of that discussion, we offer the following suggestions:

- 1) Funding changes and advancement through the tenure system. The committee expressed deep concern that sources of research support for some faculty will disappear or already have disappeared, negatively impacting their ability to carry out and further their research. Grants are often an important factor in tenure and promotion decisions. The principles of academic freedom certainly do not guarantee anyone a favorable tenure decision, but they do require a *merit-based* tenure decision, and in a world of politicized grants administration, one's ability (or inability) to bring in research funding is an unreliable signal of scholarly promise. We recommend that UCAP encourage each campus CAP (or equivalent) to take these governmental directives into account when evaluating faculty research output (and the dollars brought in), and that CAP report back any evidence they see in research profile, impact and stature in the field as a result of these directives. We also recommend that the council strongly urge the university administration to build or reinforce safeguard mechanisms such as targeted bridge funding as a means to counteract these negative allocations.
  
- 2) Improved analytics. The discussions we had with the leadership of the research administrations on various campuses suggested that the type of data we were looking for is distinct from the normal tracking of research funding on the campuses. It is often unclear whether particular grant applications were denied for legitimate or political reasons. Yet telling patterns may emerge in the aggregate. We recommend that offices of research be encouraged to refine their data collection and analytics to better track changes in funding levels and funding administration in specific disciplines, such as climate science and renewable energy, in order to better understand and report on the impact on both established or newly initiated research programs on their campuses.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,



Christopher Elmendorf, Chair  
UCAF