



Steven W. Cheung
Chair, Assembly of the
Academic Senate
Faculty Representative,
UC Board of Regents
Academic Senate

Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

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April 7, 2025

Michael V. Drake, M.D.
President, University of California

Re: Statement on Politicization of Research

Dear President Drake,

On behalf of the Academic Council, I write to convey Council's endorsement of the attached University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) statement on the politicization of research and research funding. Given the increasing threats to academic freedom posed by political intervention in university governance and research funding, Council urges UC leadership to affirm the principles articulated in the statement and to take proactive steps to safeguard the scholarly autonomy of UC faculty.

Recent federal actions, including the cancellation of research grants issued to UC faculty due to their scholarship content and directives to impose oversight on academic departments, signal a troubling escalation. The authority of faculty to determine curricula, admissions criteria, and scholarly standards is a foundational principle of the University of California. If these freedoms are eroded by political influence, UC's ability to pursue and disseminate knowledge will be fundamentally compromised.

Council also supports UCAF's recommendation that the University work to mitigate the impact of these interventions on affected faculty by exploring temporary adjustments to the merit review process to ensure that scholars are not penalized for the politicization of their academic work.

We appreciate your leadership and partnership in defending academic freedom at UC, and we look forward to working with you to uphold these principles.

Sincerely,

Steven W. Cheung
Chair, Academic Council

Encl.

cc: Provost Newman
Academic Council
UCAF
Senate Division Executive Directors
Senate Executive Director Lin



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UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (UCAF)

Sean Gailmard, Chair
gailmard@berkeley.edu

March 20, 2025

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Steven W. Cheung
Chair, Academic Senate

RE: UCAF Statement on Politicization of Research

Dear Chair Cheung,

In recent years, UCAF has monitored the increasing politicization of government funding for academic research, and political intervention into academic institutions more generally. UCAF issued statements to Council on these matters in [2018](#) and [2019](#). The recent actions of the US government represent a sharp increase in federal government intervention, not only in the funding of research, but directly into the core academic operations of universities. As you know, the federal government has recently cancelled research grants due to the content of scholarly investigation. It has demanded that Columbia University alter its admissions practices and impose administrative control on specific academic departments. Further, the recent letters from the US Department of Education, including to several UC campuses, strongly suggest that these actions by the federal government will not stop with Columbia.

We are writing to explain UCAF's perspective at this moment. We urge that Council reaffirm the principles articulated below, and seek the same affirmation from UCOP:

The central pillar of academic freedom is the authority of the University's faculty, as a body, to determine courses of study in the University; the fitness of students to enter those courses; and the standards of scholarship by faculty in these fields of study. Academic freedom cannot exist if these

freedoms are controlled by political actors outside the university. At the University of California, APM-010 reminds us that the grant of these freedoms to the faculty is necessary for the University to fulfill its purpose in society. A university without these freedoms cannot be a place for unfettered search for knowledge or its communication to students and the public.

Academic freedom requires the UC administration to support and defend the scholarly autonomy of the UC faculty as a body. The government's tactic is to create financial duress for some segments of faculty, which can only be resolved by curtailing the scholarly autonomy of other segments. Because academic freedom inheres in the faculty as a body, government incursion into any part of the faculty's scholarly autonomy necessarily undermines the academic freedom of the whole faculty. Therefore, UCAF's view is that negotiated reductions in the autonomy of any part of the faculty in response to government duress are unacceptable.

Further, freedom of scholarly inquiry is only meaningful if scholars have the resources and support requisite for the inquiry. Scholars at UC have been adversely affected by the government's actions not due to the merits of their research but its politicization. UCAF urges UCOP to work with the Academic Senate to develop guidelines for temporarily adjusting the merit review process for Senate faculty adversely affected by these actions. For example, the COVID-19 offset policy for merit reviews is a promising model to build on. The University can prevent many years of damage to its scholarly enterprise by providing reasonable adjustments in this area.

UCAF would welcome further consultation on these matters. Thank you for your partnership in addressing them.

Sincerely,



Sean Gailmard
Chair, UCAF

cc: Academic Senate Vice Chair Palazoglu
Academic Senate Executive Director Lin
Academic Seante Associate Director LaBriola
UCAF Members