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Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
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University of California
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March 4, 2019

**JANET NAPOLITANO, PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

Re: Politicization of Research Funding and Science

Dear Janet,

At its February 27, 2019 meeting, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the attached letters from the University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP) and the University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) urging the University to take a strong stand against the ongoing politicization of research funding, and to monitor and document cases of interference that undermine scientific discovery and academic freedom.

UCORP and UCAF reiterate the UCSF Division's concerns (endorsed by Council and transmitted to you in a February 1, 2019 [letter](#)) about politically-motivated restrictions on fetal tissue research, and expand those concerns into broader statements about the ongoing politicization of science and attacks on academic freedom that extend to climate research, primate research, stem cell research, and other areas.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "R. C. May".

Robert C. May, Chair
Academic Council

cc: Academic Council
UCORP Chair Baird
UCAF Chair Rauchway
Senate Directors



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH POLICY (UCORP)
Andrew Baird, Chair
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January 18, 2019

ROBERT MAY
CHAIR, ACADEMIC COUNCIL

RE: Restrictions on Fetal Tissue Research

Dear Robert,

We would like to express our deep concern regarding the emergent politicization of scientific research that is reflected in an article entitled “Fetal Research is Curtailed by Trump Administration” that appeared in the *New York Times*¹ and another entitled “Trump officials move to limit human fetal tissue research” published in *Science*². These reports add to a disturbing list of proposed federal restrictions on research that bear directly on academic freedom. They also risk severe unintended consequences to America’s leadership in science, technology and innovation. These restrictions include limiting the exchange of information and materials between scientists under the guise of “export control,” challenging peer-reviewed research on climate change, limiting embryonic stem cell research, decreasing the use of primates in biomedical research, prohibiting gun violence research and now, targeting the legal use of fetal tissues.

In the most recent incident that prompted UCORP concern, we note that fetal tissue research is at the very foundation of our past – and highly successful – ability to conquer the HIV/AIDS epidemic, our present ability to investigate diseases like Zika virus, valley fever, and our future capacity to address emerging infectious disease. The ancillary contributions of fetal tissue research to understanding immune failure, cancer, and diabetes are too numerous to mention. The research is also invaluable, and indeed irreplaceable, for our capacity to overcome devastating and currently incurable inherited diseases that result in paralysis, childhood developmental abnormalities, neuro-degeneration, muscle and bone defects.

UCORP consulted with numerous UC faculty through the committees on research (COR) of all 10 UC campuses. There was unanimity in our concern that academic freedom must be protected, noting in particular that the proposed restrictions to fetal tissues will compromise

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/12/health/fetal-tissue-research-trump.html>

² <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6420/1223>

our ability to study serious illnesses that cause needless suffering and result in a debilitating loss of health to millions of Americans. To this end, UCORP would like to add a voice of solidarity to that of our colleagues at UCSF and our colleagues throughout the country who are, and will be, affected by these attacks on the research enterprise and the egregious politicization of peer reviewed, federally-funded and non-partisan scientific research. We are convinced that these attacks will precipitate an unnecessary decline in the biomedical capacity of the US because UC faculty are at the forefront of numerous scientific discoveries aimed at the improvement of human health. Furthermore, the chilling effects of these anti-science restrictions threaten to undermine the core capacity of our nation to lead in innovation and technological prowess.

Arguably, the American tradition of academic freedom is at the very foundation of our nation's economic prosperity and indeed, our country's proven capacity to innovate like no other. With the proposed restrictions on fetal tissue, the US government is again constraining legitimate research by obfuscating legal scientific activities. It is effectively blocking access to, and research on, materials that are highly regulated, subject to significant oversight, legal, peer reviewed and non-partisan. Most importantly, the government's actions threaten to set the advancement of knowledge in our country back a generation. Unintended consequences include (1) hindering development of new medicines in US academia and biotech, (2) stimulating the export of knowledge and know-how to boost the capacity for innovation elsewhere like Europe, Canada, Russia and China at the expense of the United States, (3) negatively impacting the economic boon that American universities generate on economies of local, regional and national stages and (4) compromising America's status as the world leader in science, technology, engineering and medical fields.

It is in light of our findings, we urge that the UC Academic Senate take a strong and unequivocal stand to counter these clear and present threats to academic freedom and with it, our nation's ability to lead in science, technology and innovation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Baird
Chair, University Committee on Research Policy

cc: Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Academic Council Vice Chair
Hilary Baxter, Academic Senate Director
UCORP members



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (UCAF)
Eric Rauchway, Chair
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February 5, 2019

**ROBERT MAY, CHAIR
ACADEMIC SENATE**

RE: RENEWED UCAF STATEMENT ON POLITICIZATION OF RESEARCH FUNDING

Dear Robert,

On May 9, 2018, Academic Council endorsed a letter (attached) from the University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) expressing grave concerns about the politicization of research funding and its effect on academic freedom. In that letter UCAF noted that the US Department of the Interior and Environmental Protection Agency adopted new protocols for reviewing grant applications to ensure that research funded by these agencies would "promote the priorities" established by the political appointees of the administration. We observed that the shift away from a research agenda defined by the scientific disciplines and toward the concerns of the party currently in power represented a serious threat to academic freedom. At the time of writing that letter, we sought to determine whether this shift toward political protocols had affected funding and were unable to produce conclusive evidence.

As you know, clearer evidence has now emerged. The University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP) reported in a letter of January 18, 2019, on the administration's funding cuts for research using fetal tissues. UCORP notes that limiting support for these studies imperils research that provides the basis for successful measures to combat infectious and inherited disease and suggests the administration's actions undermine academic freedom.

UCAF members agree. The liberty of a community of researchers to determine, by scientific and humanistic inquiry, the proper ends of research in their discipline, provides the foundation of academic freedom. Medieval monarchies and modern states alike have recognized the importance of scholarly independence from political influence, understanding that the progress of knowledge depends on it.

We renew our expression of alarm at this evident disregard for academic freedom, and the dire consequences for the production of knowledge it will entail, and we renew also our suggestions that the University begin a more systematic inquiry into, and documentation of, such cases.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Rauchway".

Eric Rauchway, Chair
UCAF



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