



Remarks to the UC Board of Regents

Ahmet Palazoglu, Chair of the Academic Senate

January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Regents, President Milliken, faculty, students, staff, and all members of the University of California community.

Let me first start by acknowledging and honoring Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., as we celebrate his life and his legacy. Dr. King was a pivotal force for social change. His strategies, rooted in moral courage, economic justice, and strategic nonviolence, continue to inspire global movements for human rights and systemic change today. We have made significant strides since the Civil Rights era of the 1960's, and yet at the same time, we still seem stuck in our old ways....

I think it is human nature to view a change in the calendar as an occasion to restore one's hopes and aspirations and begin anew. We'd rather forget this past year and pretend that it never happened with all its trials (literally) and tribulations. But a realist spoils the party. We cannot be expected to believe any change really happens as we go to bed on December 31st and wake up on January 1st. Yes, we do carry the challenges and threats that we faced last year over to the new year. But I argue that a new year does offer the opportunity to reflect and perhaps see our problems in a different light. Hence, a reason for optimism and a chance for reinvigoration.

As Colonel Sherman T. Potter says in *M.A.S.H.*, “Here’s to the new year. May she be a damn sight better than the old one.”

Let me take you back several centuries and share the following quotes:

“No one is more hated than he who speaks the truth.”

"I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing."

Yes, they belong to Plato. The author of the *Republic*.

On January 7, 2026, the *New York Times* reported that Martin Peterson, a professor of philosophy at Texas A&M University, was told on January 6 that he could not teach Plato as he intended in his course syllabus. He was given the choice by his department head to either comply and curtail the course material or be reassigned to another course. The department head argued that the new policies enacted by the university’s regents limit discussion of race and gender in a classroom. In an interview, as reported in the *New York Times* piece, Dr. Peterson said that he “would reluctantly alter the course and replace the disputed modules with ‘lectures on free speech and academic freedom.’”

This is one of many instances where the Trump Administration’s grand vision to subjugate and alter higher education institutions manifested in threatening the academic freedom that faculty value and cherish.

At the University of California, academic freedom principles are encoded in the Academic Personnel Manual, specifically in APM section 010 on *Academic Freedom*. Such principles are also in the

Policy of the Regents, initially approved on January 19, 1970 and now covered in Regents Policy 2301 – *Policy on Course Content*. In addition, the Regents Policy 4403 – *Statement of Principles Against Intolerance* includes the following in the policy text:

“Freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry are paramount in a public research university and form the bedrock on which our mission of discovery is founded. The University will vigorously defend the principles of the First Amendment and academic freedom against any efforts to subvert or abridge them.”

The current language in APM – 010 dates to its latest revision in 2003. In that regard, former UC President Richard Atkinson’s account of how that process unfolded is especially poignant. He notes in his selected works entitled, *Academic Freedom and the Research University*, that the policy was first articulated by then-President Robert Sproul in 1934 and formally adopted as University policy in 1944.

Coming out of the Great Depression and facing the “Red Scare,” President Sproul’s directive saw the faculty’s role as being limited to a dispassionate examination and dissecting of the facts. This intended political neutrality was to be rewarded with political support by the state, a *quid pro quo*. In 2003, however, dealing with a conflict regarding the teaching of a Palestinian poetry class at UC Berkeley, President Atkinson said, “Neutrality, the principle that undergirds the Sproul policy, does not constitute a sufficient criterion on which to decide cases of academic freedom.” And added, “Academic freedom is concerned with protecting the conditions that lead to the creation of sound scholarship and good

teaching, not with maintaining political neutrality.” Of course, these points strike a familiar chord with the challenges we have been facing over the last couple of years in balancing the aim to maintain an inclusive campus climate while allowing for viewpoint diversity, in the midst of ongoing threats from the federal government.

After a review process that involved contributions by then-Berkeley Law Professor Robert Post, UC Academic Senate Chair Gayle Binion and UC General Counsel James Holst, the University’s academic freedom policy was revised to what it is in the APM today. The new policy was noteworthy in two respects. First, it said: “The University also seeks to foster in its students a mature independence of mind, and this purpose cannot be achieved unless students and faculty are free within the classroom to express the widest range of viewpoints in accord with the standards of scholarly inquiry and professional ethics.” By foregoing political neutrality, the new language firmly connected freedom of expression in a classroom with scholarly and professional standards. And second, it went on to say, “The exercise of academic freedom entails correlative duties of professional care when teaching, conducting research, or otherwise acting as a member of the faculty. These duties are set forth in The Faculty Code of Conduct (APM – 015).” Therefore, the new language was not only grounded in seeking a balance between speech and responsibility, but also explicitly tied in The Faculty Code of Conduct with respect to high professional and ethical standards that the faculty set for themselves and their peers in performing their duties to the University and to our students.

Learning from our history and understanding our present, we shall continue to stay true to and resolutely defend our fundamental values.

As Plato said, “If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life.”

At the University of California, we will be teaching Plato.