



University of Michigan Regents Communications:
Items for information

SUBJECT: Faculty Governance Update

DATE: March 2026

1. Resolution in Support of Foreign Language Teaching at the University of Michigan

At recent meetings both the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs and the Senate Assembly adopted the following resolution:

The University of Michigan's language teaching programs are a defining aspect of our curriculum and a resource that enriches students and citizens alike. Since the foundation of the Center for Japanese Studies in 1947, Michigan has been a national leader in the production of knowledge and education about the world. Michigan's language program has [equipped generations of students with the skills](#) they need to live and work in a cosmopolitan world. Interpreters are vitally important in the work of Michigan Medicine, which relies on their expertise to render medical advice to their patients. Today Michigan students can study Quechua, Swahili, Mandarin, Hebrew, Uzbek, and dozens of other "Less Commonly-Taught Languages." Much of this has been possible because of funding from the federal government, which under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965 has provided U-M and other American universities with financial resources to support foreign language teaching.

In September 2025 the United States Department of Education [informed the leadership of the International Institute](#) that their language and area studies programs "are inconsistent with Administration priorities and do not advance American interests or values." Some \$3.4 million annually have been withdrawn by this edict. At stake are the salaries of the lecturers who, by their knowledge and expertise, drive the language program. At stake also are the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grants that made it financially possible for dozens of U-M students to study foreign languages each year.

As leaders of the faculty at the leading public university in the United States, we are indignant at federal authorities' lamentably narrow vision for higher education. What are "American values" if not a commitment to teach and learn about the rest of the world? What are "American interests" if not the advancement of our students' capacity to communicate with and learn from people living in other places? The DoE edict deprives U-M and other universities of the resources we need to equip the next generation of Americans with the skills and knowledge to act meaningfully in the world.

Faculty government thanks the leadership of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, which has willingly taken on the salaries of most of the language faculty left marooned by the DoE edict. We call on the University's administration to ensure that the College of LS&A is provided with financial support sufficient to offset these additional

costs. We ask also for the creation of a funding stream that would offset the loss of FLAS funding for student learners. And we ask our University's leaders to work with universities across the country to stabilize their capacity to continue offering intensive foreign language instruction.

Faculty government calls upon our representatives in the United States Congress to press for the restoration and continuity of funding for Title VI and the dispersal of funds that have already been allocated. It is vitally important, at this time of great challenge, that our schools and universities would not retreat into narrow insularity. Michigan graduates must be proudly and emphatically multi-lingual, for it is by command over language that graduates will create the bonds of mutual respect and meaningful exchange that must uphold the international order.

Adopted by the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs, 9 February 2026

Adopted by the Senate Assembly, 26 February 2026

2. Academic Freedom

For some months faculty government has watched in trepidation as whole areas of research and learning have been summarily shuttered by governmental directive. Last month [we organized an informal survey of Michigan faculty](#), seeking to understand how our colleagues are responding to the political, financial, and moral pressures that we all face. The results are alarming. Among the over 700 respondents to the survey some thirty percent reported that they had censored what they say or teach in UM classrooms; and over forty percent had censored what they say in public life. The chief subjects that appear under threat include teaching around race and gender, teaching around climate science, and teaching around Palestine. Some faculty report that they have installed security cameras around their property out of fear that they will be targeted. Others have investigated wearing bulletproof vests.

These minatory results have led us to organize a series of events meant to help colleagues better deal with the threats of our time. On 25 February Michigan News [helped us organize a training session](#) to help faculty deal with hostile news reporting. In March there will be a further training session, this focused on doxxing and other forms of online harassment. There is a task force appointed by faculty government, called the Protections for Faculty Working Group, which is presently preparing a review of the resources offered by the Office of the Provost to faculty who are facing harassment. We will continue to work with the Provost on these matters.

3. Institute for Academic Freedom

In February the Faculty Senate Office prepared a \$500,000 application to the Strategic Innovation Fund to support the creation of an Institute for Academic Freedom. If funding is awarded, this new institute would:

- Create an academic freedom fellowship program to support U-M faculty research and public engagement;
- Provide summer support for graduate students performing research on academic freedom issues;

- Provide travel support for faculty fellow engagements, in support of academic freedom, with public officials;
- Provide funding support for volumes of original U-M scholarship;
- Organize two academic freedom lectures/panels each year;
- Develop a new national conference devoted to matters of civic discourse, open inquiry, and academic freedom.

SIF funding awards will be announced at the end of this month.

4. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: a need for renewal

In March last year the U-M administration bowed to legal and political pressure from federal authorities and [shuttered the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#). At the time U-M faculty recognized that President Ono's unseemly retreat from DEI was an act of cowardice. The closure of the ODEI deprived U-M of the services of a great many committed, insightful and smart staff who had been working to open our university's doors to communities that have been marginalized in institutions of higher learning. By a vote of 2,213 to 574 [the U-M faculty voted in April 2025](#) to "continue DEI initiatives that are in alignment with our university values, an extension of the mission of our schools, and legally compliant."

It now seems that the U-M faculty view on DEI is shared by the federal judiciary. In August last year federal judge [Stephanie Gallagher struck down the Department of Education's attempt to cancel DEI programs](#). In her ruling she determined that the Trump administration's campaign against DEI had "stifled teachers' free speech, causing millions of educators to reasonably fear that their lawful, and even beneficial, speech might cause them or their schools to be punished." On 21 January this year [the Trump administration dropped its appeal of Judge Gallagher's ruling](#). There remain other legal proceedings that are outstanding. What seems clear is that programs that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational institutions are legal.

These developments have caused Michigan State University trustee Rema Vassar to [argue, in a newly-published editorial letter](#), that MSU should reinstate the DEI programs and offices that had been hastily shuttered last year. "There is now zero legal justification—not even the pretense of pending litigation," she writes, for MSU to equivocate over this.

The University of Michigan is supposed to be America's leading university in the public interest. While we have made real advances in our efforts to broaden the student body to more fully represent the citizenry of our state, the demographic and historical reasoning that formerly made DEI necessary is no less pressing now. Around 15 percent of Michigan's people are Black Americans, and in Detroit, the city where our university was born, something over 75 percent of residents are Black. Neither our student body nor the composition of our faculty reflect this basic fact: [while the University's data around this is poorly presented](#), it shows that 2,030 current U-M undergrads identify as Black—about 5.7 percent of the total student body. Some 409 faculty identify as Black, about four percent of the faculty. [Generations of Black students and faculty have advocated for a wider, more diverse university](#), but their efforts have not as yet born fruit.

We here at U-M need to discuss the mandate of a revived Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. I opened these discussions in February, when I spoke with the Academic Program

Group about what the cancellation of DEI initiatives has meant for faculty, as teachers and researchers. We will continue to advocate around these matters, and I hope that our incoming president will feel able to restore some parts of what we lost when the ODEI was shuttered.

5. Outreach to Clinical Track faculty

Clinical faculty at the University of Michigan were brought fully into the structures of faculty government [by a vote of the Faculty Senate in 2023](#). The expansion of faculty government added nearly 2,000 new colleagues to our number. This is a welcome event: it has built solidarity among and between us, allowing us to confront today's challenges from a position of organizational strength.

But the expansion of faculty government does also cause faculty government perplexity. The work that clinical faculty do is oftentimes much different from the work that tenure-track faculty do. What do clinical faculty care about? What concerns animate clinical faculty in their work, and what anxieties do they harbor? In 2025-26, faculty government put together a series of events—called the “Clinical Faculty/Faculty Senate Dialogues”—to help us take the temperature of clinical faculty. These sessions have been convened at the University Hospital and at Mott Children's Hospital; in the coming months we will do an event for clinical faculty on Central Campus and another on Zoom.

Building on the series of dialogue meetings, SACUA is now constituting a Clinical Faculty Working Group. This is a limited-term group that will, over the remaining course of the semester (and possibly into the summer), condense what we've learned about the priorities of clinical track faculty. The goal is to create a white paper that can guide the advocacy of faculty government.

Respectfully submitted,

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5 March 2026