

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION
Items for Information**

SUBJECT: October 2024 Faculty Governance Update

1. Updates on SACUA and FSO activities

SACUA and the Faculty Senate Office held the first two "On-Campus Faculty Work Retreats" events. The events were an opportunity for faculty to preserve two hours of research/creative work time in their schedules, and then to have that quiet work time in the Hatcher Library Gallery, followed by lunch with colleagues. Faculty time is pulled in many directions, with endless requests from students, and our own research/creative work is often what gets cut. The retreats, organized by the FSO and funded by the Provost's Office, are meant to create an environment that prioritizes faculty research. Our next retreats are October 23 and 24. Information is

The Faculty Senate Office, supported by Year of Democracy, Civic Empowerment, and Global Engagement, the Michigan in Washington (MIW) program, and the Ginsberg Center, launched the series – Political Speech and the Public Square – to provide a forum for members of the U-M community to listen to and learn from each other. The series is intended to ensure continued political speech on the Diag and to develop a campus climate comfortable with hearing different well-informed points of view, even those counter to one's own views.

Our focus for Fall 2024 is on "What's at Stake for Me in the November Elections." The first event, on September 10, focused on Climate Change Policy and featured student and faculty speakers from the Ford School of Public Policy, Ross School of Business, SEAS, PitE, and our new Associate VP for Campus Sustainability. The second event, on October 8, focused on Reproductive Health Policy, with faculty and students from Michigan Medicine, LS&A, and UHS. Our final event, On October 22, will focus on the Current Crisis in the Middle East.

Information about the Campus Faculty Work Retreats and Political Speech in the Public Square is at the FSO website: <https://facultysenate.umich.edu/>

2. "Institutional Neutrality" without Faculty Governance

When the General Counsel was tasked with creating a draft policy for "institutional neutrality," the SACUA Chair requested that President Ono "appreciate that the adoption of an 'institutional neutrality' policy would significantly impact our educational and research missions." We asked that "*elected members of faculty governance* have the opportunity to review and comment on policy drafts" and that the Senate Assembly be allowed time to schedule a discussion about the draft policy for our November 18 meeting because "the adoption of significant policy requires

lengthier, more robust processes of consideration, inclusive of representational faculty governance.”

President Ono supported these principles of shared governance, relaying our communication to the Regents with his support: “I do believe that the faculty voice is very important (I am a member of the faculty) and we would likely benefit from the views and feedback from the representative bodies.... SACUA has asked that they have an opportunity to review this in November. Unless there is some urgent reason to rush this, I am supportive of their request.”

The response from the Regents, via Vice President Kinsey, was that they would only release the draft for “public comments” and not provide time or extend the timeline through November to allow for discussion by elected faculty representatives.

At this point, the Regents have undergone a process that does not reflect the input of faculty governance. This includes the creation of a report by faculty who, save for 1 of 41, were not elected to faculty governance. While they are valued colleagues and their service on the report committee is appreciated, their involvement is not a substitute for obtaining subsequent input from the Senate Assembly, which is comprised of broad faculty representation from across the University system as provided through the Senate Assembly’s elected members. In comparison to the Senate Assembly’s open discussions held during public meetings, the distribution of the draft through the University Record for the collection of “public comments” is a process without transparency or public access to these discussions.

3. SACUA Statement to the Regents

The following statement was approved by SACUA and then delivered by the SACUA Chair during the public comment period for the meeting of the Board of Regents on September 19, 2024.

Good afternoon. I’m the chair of SACUA.

I’ve signed up to speak to you on behalf of SACUA about why faculty governance and oversight matters. What I am going to say today requires more unpacking than this format permits, so if anything raises questions or concerns, I welcome a continued conversation.

Our world-class faculty at the University of Michigan have the responsibility for curriculum, instruction, research, and student life as related to education. We are the University members who have the most contact with students, who most deeply engage with questions of education and scholarship. It is through the faculty that the mission of the University is advanced: through our teaching, through our research, and through our service to the public and the U-M community. It is therefore concerning when faculty voices are being ignored.

On SACUA, for example, we hear from many of these University professors, from across the three campuses, who have identified and reported violations of guidelines and process to protect our institution and our ethics, only to be sanctioned by administrators who retaliate against them.

Studies show that people who are willing to step forward and point out violations are “good employees, extremely devoted to the organization’s purpose, and concerned that the misconduct they observe would undermine the organization.” But we have learned that the University’s legal team, even when presented with evidence of misconduct, chooses to use our institution’s resources to silence the star employees who have stepped forward.

The power imbalance, with faculty having very little protections, agency, and input into governance, and administrators having very little accountability or checks and balances is causing harm to our institution and to our world-class faculty.

SACUA is hearing from faculty that the Regents are either naively unaware, badly uninformed, or ethically compromised.

As another example of faculty voice being ignored, during the summer, the Regents (1) ignored faculty governance in amending policies and (2) overturned guidelines set by the University itself.

SACUA is hearing from faculty that the Regents do not understand the nature of the institution you oversee, have no interest in learning firsthand from faculty, and are currently trampling over the deepest traditions of academic freedom and free speech you are supposed to protect.

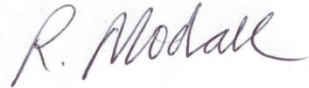
SACUA is hearing from faculty that the Regents are listening to donors and politicians who try to compromise the educational mission of our institution. SACUA is hearing that the Regents do not respect the faculty as meaningful stakeholders in shared governance. SACUA is hearing that the Regents may have the legal power to act as they please, but do not have the ethical authority or institutional knowledge to manage from the top. A commitment to shared governance assures a robust “participatory democracy” based on faculty expertise and a diversity of opinion.

The University’s world-class faculty is critical to our institution’s prestige. Students come to the university to work with us. They do not come to Michigan to work with you.

Regents, faculty confidence in your leadership of this institution is low. This is the right moment to listen to faculty and their representatives. Faculty and administrative officers tend to view

situations differently and an effective University has processes that recognize and welcome this difference, not as conflict, but as opportunity for complex resolution.

Submitted: October 8, 2024



Rebekah Modrak
SACUA Chair