

## **SACUA Statement in Support of Tenure at UM-Flint**

The members of SACUA have learned that the administration of UM-Flint is considering laying off tenured faculty members as part of UM-Flint's Strategic Transformation Initiative. We call on the leadership of UM-Flint to avoid such a violation of UM core principles and to address UM-Flint's budget shortfalls through other means.

Specifically, on October 9, 2023, in a meeting with three University of Michigan-Flint faculty members, two tenured and one tenure-track, Interim Chancellor Fry stated that tenure-track faculty layoffs were on the table. When this group asked for direct confirmation that tenure-track faculty might be laid off, the Interim Chancellor replied, "Yes. We'd do everything we can to repurpose people, but yes." Later, by email, a group of faculty asked if the Interim Chancellor might reconsider this position, given its possible negative effects to the UM-Flint campus and academic freedom, and she reaffirmed her position that tenure-track faculty might lose their jobs.

These statements raise the potential for serious threats to tenure and academic freedom, a dangerous precedent inconsistent with the values stated by the University of Michigan, whose handbook states that "The University of Michigan believes that tenure is an essential part of the guarantee of academic freedom that is necessary for University-based intellectual life to flourish."

The UM Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) stands in unwavering support of all University Senate members at UM-Flint. We emphasize that removal of tenured faculty due to program discontinuation is the jurisdiction of Regent's Bylaw 5.09. Furthermore, UM Standard Practice Guide (SPG) 601.02, Section III, subsection A.2 states "[t]he University has never released tenured faculty members because of program closure. The maintenance of tenured faculty and of essential instructional and supporting services remains the highest priority of the University."

While SPG 601.02 allows for financial exigency, this is defined as imminent financial crisis that threatens the survival of the institution as a whole. In his 1983 article for the AAUP, former president of Miami University, Ohio, James C. Garland cautioned that financial exigency should not be confused with "fiscal crisis," which can be alleviated by less drastic means than to terminate appointments of tenured faculty. "If this boundary is allowed to become indistinct or blurred, then the credibility of an institution's support of the principles of tenure becomes suspect."<sup>1</sup>

The University's commitment to the ideals expressed in SPG 601.02 must hold fast continuing forward. Any threats to tenure on one UM campus represent threats to tenure on all three UM campuses, and ultimately compromises UM's ability to fulfill its mission and obligations to its

students, staff, and faculty, and to the wider society it serves. The purpose of tenure has been, from its inception, to guarantee academic freedom. Any threat to tenure effectively undermines faculty's capacity to speak on matters of public concern and discourages teaching and scholarship on important issues that are potentially contentious.

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<sup>1</sup> Garland, James C. "What Financial Exigency Means." *Academe*, vol. 69, no. 1, 1983, pp. 24–26. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40248995>.