



To: SACUA

From: Cliff Lampe, Chair, Communications Advisory Committee

Subject: Report on Activities of the Communications Advisory Committee for 2023-2024

Members:

Ellen Bauerle
Laura Beny
William A. Calvo-Quirós
Jim Cranford
Stefanie Galban
Pat Herbst
Cliff Lampe (Chair)
Sarah Murray
Maheema Kohli
Malinda Brunk

SACUA Liaison:

Alex Yasha Yi

Meeting Dates:

Thur. 11/16 from 9-10am
Thur. 12/14 from 9-10am
Fri. 3/8 from 1-2pm
Tues. 4/30 from 4-5pm

Committee Charge

1. Develop some best practices for streamlining communication on campus and reducing email clutter.
2. Explore and offer recommendations, if needed, regarding how the University considers storytelling with the public in order to promote faculty research and greater community engagement.
3. Consider whether to have an event to provide information and advice about how faculty can effectively communicate with the media about their research—with the logistical assistance of the Faculty Senate Office.



4. Consider emergent issues or topics brought forward by CAC members or the Vice President for Communications for discussion over the course of the year. While coordinating with the Faculty Senate Office to help avoid duplicating work that SACUA has now referred to itself or to another committee, the committee may also continue discussing any issues or topics raised in the committee's most recent annual committee report.

Committee Actions

The CAC committee met three times in the 23-24 AY. We had more meetings scheduled, but had to cancel two due to sickness and emergency situations.

Information Obtained

The committee covered the four major charge items it was given this year. Information obtained here is included below.

1. Develop some best practices for streamlining communication on campus and reducing email clutter.

This topic was discussed in our March meeting. It was recognized as an issue felt by many people across the organization. The subcommittee recommends a separate task force to determine best practices around simplifying communication. This task force should include a broad range of faculty, including those with expertise in this area. The distributed nature of the university makes a central solution unlikely. Ideally, a task force that combines faculty, students and staff might be ideal. It's unclear if this should be run through the VP Communications office, or some other group.

2. Explore and offer recommendations, if needed, regarding how the University considers storytelling with the public to promote faculty research and greater community engagement.

This topic was addressed in our December meeting. No resolution was reached though it was recognized that because of the decentralized nature of the university, this was difficult to handle centrally, and that negative news from the university is clearly swamping our ability to highlight our scholarship.

3. Consider whether to have an event to provide information and advice about how faculty can effectively communicate with the media about their research—with the logistical assistance of the Faculty Senate Office.

This item was on the agenda for our April meeting, but that meeting had to be canceled due to a university meeting.



4. Consider emergent issues or topics brought forward by CAC members or the Vice President for Communications for discussion over the course of the year. While coordinating with the Faculty Senate Office to help avoid duplicating work that SACUA has now referred to itself or to another committee, the committee may also continue discussing any issues or topics raised in the committee's most recent annual committee report.

CAC meetings this semester were primarily taken up by issues of emergent crisis. From the GEO strike in the fall, to the campus action around the conflict in the Middle East, to LEO, to the football sign-stealing scandal; there were many opportunities to deal with crisis over this year. Given the current nature of higher education, and likely challenges in the future, this situation is unlikely to change in the future. Recommendations for managing the balance between crisis response and strategic communications is provided below.

During the meetings, VP Hunter spoke clearly about the role of the university as a neutral platform – which is different than the ability of students and faculty to express their opinions. Even though the public can't often differentiate what is an official university position vs. that of an individual member, the university has re-stated its values as a neutral platform for free speech. "The institution is not a moral agent."

Recommendations

This year, the committee was not effective in communicating feedback to the administrators. Some of this results from the situational context of our limited engagement, but there are broader structural changes that need to be considered to make this committee effective in its mission.

- This year, faculty engagement seemed limited. The committee chair recommends a stronger charge to committee members to frame their participation. This should include an expectation to attend at least two in-person meetings per year, to respond to requests for feedback asynchronously within 48 hours, and to participate in agenda setting.
- SACUA should adopt a process for on-boarding new administrators. This should include a description of best practices for interacting with the committee, for how to determine expected outcomes of interaction, and information on how committees are constructed. Ideally, this information should be captured in a guidebook resource and living archive that includes minutes, agendas, and charges from past committees.
- Administrators should be encouraged to work with the committee asynchronously between meetings for urgent issues. Communications in particular is sensitive to the context of campus emergencies, and often scheduled meetings are inflexible moments to receive feedback on those emergent issues. The chair recommends a tool like Slack or Chat to give the VP more access to the committee between meetings.
- Given the likelihood that emergencies are going to continue to be drive the agenda of this committee in the future, it is important to find a way to balance urgent feedback with more strategic discussions. The asynchronous communication described above is



one mechanism for managing that tension. Another would be to consider subcommittees of this committee to differentially address emergent vs. strategic agenda items. Another would be to over-schedule meetings so that losing meetings to emergencies is not as consequential.