

SACUA - Regents Meeting Public Comments - 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.

Approved by SACUA on 9/18/2024