
From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

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Dear colleagues:

This comes to you in the heat of the summer, a time that is supposed to be given over to rest, research and other pleasantly restorative things. Not so this year. Some of us have had important grants cancelled or delayed. Others of us have cancelled research trips and stayed at home, as we're unsure—if we leave—that the authorities will allow us back into the country. Some of us worry that our jobs will disappear as research funding dries up. All of us work with international students who are worried about their immigration status. All of us must deal with a presidential administration that seems determined to extract financial and political fealty from us. As I write, [Michigan and other institutions face pressure](#) to follow Columbia University's shameful capitulation and strike a deal with the Trump government.

I write to assure you that my colleagues and I in faculty government are doing all that we can to keep our University engaged in our historic mission: to educate the people of Michigan and the world in a broad and liberal manner; to cultivate in our students the disposition for reasoned, respectful, and principled argument; to uphold free speech and academic freedom, as they are foundational to the work of learning and teaching; to be “the leaders and the best” in matters of justice as much as in athletics.

I wish to call your attention to the following matters:

Student Activists Face Renewed Sanctions

Over the past 18 months student activists have been working to awaken our conscience to the unjustifiable horrors being perpetrated in Gaza by the government of Israel. Early this summer the Vice President for Student Life initiated a new round of disciplinary proceedings against eleven pro-Palestinian student protestors. The things of which these students are accused are—by any measure—small potatoes: they are said to have linked arms with other protestors, used a megaphone after being told not to, and prevented a police car from moving. All of these are normal activities in the loud and sometimes disruptive practice of the First Amendment.

A number of procedural problems are entailed in the University's prosecution of the case, as the students point out (see [Eleven Students and Alumni Facing Retaliatory Disciplinary Proceedings for Pro-Palestine Protest](#)). A key concern of faculty government is that these proceedings are being pursued under a version of the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SSRR) that was revised—without the involvement of faculty—in summer 2024. In November 2024 [the Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly to endorse a statement calling on the University to withdraw the revised SSRR](#), as it gives administrators far too much power over students' conduct. Our action notwithstanding, the edited SSRR is now being employed by the administration to adjudicate the behavior of the eleven students under scrutiny.

Last week I met with President Grasso and Martino Harmon, the Vice President for Student Life, to discuss these proceedings. I urged President Grasso to act with clemency toward the accused students. Withdrawing the charges against the student protestors would send a salutary signal to the University community: that this University values and defends free speech, even when it is disruptive.

I am happy to say that I have President Grasso's verbal assurance that the sanctions being pursued against our students are of a relatively unintrusive nature: for most of the students a letter of reprimand is to be the consequence of the proceedings.

We await the outcome of the disciplinary process. In the meantime, we urge those adjudicating the cases to recognize that these, our students, are acting in accordance with the great tradition of student activism here at the University of Michigan. Even when their activism is provocative or loud or transgressive, the protestors' rights must be respected.

Surveillance and Freedom

In June, reports [published in The Guardian revealed that the University had engaged a security firm called City Shield](#) to surveil students engaged in pro-Palestinian activism. With the buffoonish behavior of the City Shield agents laid before us, [SACUA issued a statement calling for an oversight committee](#) to ensure that the university's surveillance activities do not compromise the welfare and freedom of expression of the campus community. We called attention to the proliferation of high-powered surveillance cameras on campus, which offer agents of the University new powers to see what people are reading and hear what they are saying. We made particular reference to [SPG 606.01](#), which states that security cameras "must not impinge on or unduly constrain the academic freedom or civil liberties or community members."

I am happy to report that last week President Grasso instructed Rick Arnold, the interim head of the Division of Public Safety and Security, to work with SACUA in establishing a faculty advisory committee focused on the new security cameras. If you have expertise in this area and are interested in serving, please contact the [Faculty Senate Office](#) at facultySenateoffice@umich.edu

The New Travel Policy: Is it Worth It?

As of July 1st all of us travelling on University business are [required to make our bookings through Collegiate Travel Planners](#), a travel agency. This new requirement has been billed as a cost-saving measure, affording us better prices on flights, smoothing the booking process, and offering other benefits.

Almost as soon as the policy was announced we began to hear from colleagues with complaints about the platform. A number of colleagues reported that the prices they'd obtained through the CTP interface were considerably in excess of prices obtained through other platforms.

In June [SACUA wrote to Executive Vice President Geoff Chatas](#)—who oversees the University's financial operations—with a summary of the complaints we'd received. In response to our queries, colleagues in the Business and Finance Division have now offered to share the University's data about CTP with a working group of faculty government. SACUA member [Jesse Capecelatro](#) of the College of Engineering has agreed to act as convener of this working group. We anticipate that the group will meet with colleagues in

Business and Finance to review the data in three-month intervals, allowing us insights into whether and how the CTP platform is actually providing us as individuals with the promised savings in our travel.

If you are interested in serving on this limited-time task force, please contact the [Faculty Senate Office](#).

OVPR Bridge Funding for Federal Research Grants

As many of you will know, the Office of the Vice President for Research has established a funding line to support those of us whose research grants have been cancelled or abridged by the federal government. Funding lasting up to six months is available to all UM faculty—including colleagues in Dearborn and Flint—whose work has been adversely impacted by funding stoppages. Central administration will cover up to 50 percent of eligible research costs, with units covering the remaining expenses. [Further information from OVPR about the bridge funding can be found here.](#)

We have heard from a few colleagues with suggestions about how this important program might be extended to address other exigencies arising out of the changes in federal funding. If you have views, do please reach out to the [Faculty Senate Office](#).

Coming Soon...

In the coming weeks you will hear from faculty government with news about the coming academic year. Thanks to the generosity of the Provost (who has kindly provided the necessary funding) we will be able to carry forward many of the exciting programs that my predecessor Rebekah Modrak conceived. Among other things:

- In early September we'll be working with the [Ann Arbor AAUP chapter](#) to convene a 90 minute all-campus discussion on "What do We Want in a New UM President?". Specific details about this will come soon.
- In the Fall semester we'll be re-launching '[Political Speech and the Public Square](#)', a series of hour-long free speech events on the Diag, giving faculty, students and staff an opportunity to air their views about the most pressing, most controversial matters in public life. Further details and a schedule will come to you soon.
- The popular [Faculty On-Campus Work Retreats](#) will return next semester. We will write to you shortly with an invitation to sign up for a two-hour

work session, followed by lunch with colleagues. It's an opportunity to get through a piece of writing or research, meet colleagues, and discuss your work in a friendly and engaging atmosphere.

- The [2025 Faculty Mixer](#) will occur October 8th, 4:30-6:00pm at the Detroit Observatory. Tours of the museum + telescope room will be given. [Register to attend the Faculty Mixer here.](#)
- The [25th annual Davis, Markert and Nickerson Lecture on Academic and Intellectual Freedom](#) will be given by the distinguished scholar of Italian fascism Ruth Ben Ghat. The lecture will be given on November 6th, 2025. More information will be circulated soon.

In solidarity,

Derek R. Peterson

Chair of the Faculty Senate

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