



# FACULTY SENATE

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

### **From the Chair of the Faculty Senate**

Dear colleagues:

In the weeks following the murder of the activist Charlie Kirk several members of the Michigan faculty who expressed critical views of the late Kirk's politics were subject to unwelcome and aggressive attacks. In some cases the home addresses of Kirk's critics were published on social media, and one of our colleagues has been obliged to move out of state, as they feel that their family is not safe in Ann Arbor. Another member of the faculty has had police visiting their house to ensure their welfare. I was myself subjected to misleading and derogatory reports in conservative media.

We are aware that the University was under intense pressure to chastise and discipline members of the faculty in connection with their comments. We are glad that President Grasso and members of the Board of Regents held fast against these concerted efforts to limit what faculty can say in public life. The viciousness of these attacks is a premonition of the pressures that lie ahead, and for that reason, faculty government has recently formed a Protections for Faculty working group to offer support and advice to faculty members facing harassment and doxing. This group is presently preparing a plan of activity for the coming months. In the interim, I suggest that members of the faculty consider obtaining legal insurance. For most of us [the legal services plan is available for a low cost as a benefit of our employment](#). The period of open enrollment for this and other benefits ends on Friday, 24 October.

### **Introducing the New University Faculty Ombuds**

Over the summertime members of SACUA worked with the Office of the Provost to identify and recruit a new university faculty ombuds. I am happy now to be able to

hymn the praises of [Dr. Mary O’Riordan, who joins Dr. Stephanie Preston in the ombuds office](#). Dr. O’Riordan is Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the Medical School and an accomplished administrator. As the faculty ombuds, she and Dr. Preston provide impartial and confidential advice to any of us facing vexing difficulties in connection with our work at the University. The ombuds office serves dozens of colleagues every year; their aim is to resolve conflict and, where necessary, inform upper administrators of the need for institutional change. I am confident that Dr. O’Riordan will be excellent in the role, for by disposition and by hard experience she knows what faculty need to thrive at this place. [You can learn more about the Faculty Ombuds office here.](#)

### **University Senate meeting**

The whole of the Faculty Senate—all 7,800 of us—will meet for the first time this academic year on Monday, 3 November from 3:15 up to 5:00 pm in University Hall, the central space in the Ruthven Building. The meeting will also be convened on Zoom. I urge you to attend in person if possible, for it is by meeting together that we can forge a common purpose in these troubling times. And as an incentive to in-person attendance, allow me to highlight the luxurious array of eatables that will be on offer. Whether you are coming in person or in digital form, [please register for the University Senate Meeting here in advance.](#)

We have already received a few resolutions that will be discussed at this meeting. If you would like to put forward a resolution, please do so soon, as the deadline for submitting resolutions is 20 October. Resolutions may be submitted by emailing the resolution to the Faculty Senate Secretary: FacultySenateSecretary@umich.edu. Resolutions should be moved by a member of the Senate and must bear the signatures of the movant and at least two supporting members. [For more information about the University Senate meeting, have a look at this webpage.](#)

### **Presidential Search Committee resolution**

At its meeting on 22 September the Faculty Senate Assembly—a representative body of 77 members—[adopted a Statement Concerning the Presidential Search Committee](#). The statement highlights the exclusion of members of elected faculty

government from the Presidential Search Committee, laments the fact that the search process has been detached from a broader discussion around the concerns of faculty government, and calls on the institution's leaders to ensure that, as a matter of principle, all search committees for executive officers of the University should have representatives of faculty government among their members. The resolution will now be put before the whole of the Faculty Senate for a vote on 3 November.

It is worth remembering that, as recently as 1987, the Presidential Search Committee was selected entirely by SACUA. It worked with the Regents to identify and screen suitable candidates, collect the insights of students, faculty and staff, and define the vision that the new president would pursue. This is the search that eventually netted President James Duderstadt, one of the most consequential and forward-looking UM presidents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I commend to your attention a newly-published open letter in the University Record, authored by the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs. The letter laments that in recent months decisions of considerable importance to our common life have been taken with little or no engagement with representative faculty institutions. It calls on the University's leadership to commit, once again, to shared governance. [The open letter regarding consultative decision-making can be found here.](#)

### **H-1B visa resolution**

At its meeting on 22 September [the Senate Assembly adopted a resolution concerning the federal government's new rules concerning H-1B visas](#). The resolution highlights the critically important role that H-1B visa-holders play in Michigan Medicine, the College of Engineering, and in the teaching of foreign languages. It articulates the faculty's disapproval of the new rules guiding the H-1B visa process, asks our legislators to work to reverse these iniquitous new policies, and calls on the University to offer all possible support for international faculty, students and staff who are dealing with this policy. This resolution will likewise come before the Faculty Senate at its meeting on 3 November.

### **Course materials transfer stirs anxiety**

As the University announced (with little fanfare) earlier this year, [UM faculty have until 24 April 2026 to render our course materials accessible in conformity with the Americans with Disabilities Act](#). We in faculty government look with trepidation upon the impending deadline. The goal is of course laudable. But the standards are obscure, and—based on early reports—the work of remediation is exceptionally time-consuming. There are a number of challenging questions that have not to our knowledge been addressed: how to render scientific equations into plain language; how to describe art or music; how to make hand-written archival materials readable.

SACUA will in the coming weeks be discussing the matter with Ravi Pendse, the Vice President for Information. We will urge VP Pendse and others charged with implementing this new policy to provide faculty with the resources we need to make our teaching materials accessible. Course materials should not be left to us individually to ameliorate.

### **Work Retreats**

In the past few weeks faculty government has convened several events that are designed to foster collaboration and promote reasonable and vigorous debate across campus. On 24 and 25 September we held the first of several faculty work retreats in the Hatcher Library. Some 50 faculty spent the morning working on research and writing alongside each other, then convened for conversation and fellowship over lunch. We thank the Library's Dean, Lisa Carter, for opening the library to us for these occasions; we thank also the Hatcher Gallery staff and librarian Mary Lawrence. On 8 October faculty government came to North Campus, where we hosted several dozen faculty at a work retreat in the beautiful Lurie Engineering Center. There are more work retreats coming on 22 and 23 October. [Do join us for the faculty work retreats! The signup form can be found here.](#)

### **Political Speech in the Public Square**

On 23 September we convened the [first of four scheduled events titled 'Political Speech and the Public Square'](#). This first event brought together a number of students, faculty and staff to discuss the question 'What Do We Want in a New UM

President?’ [A report on the September 23rd event was published here](#). The next of these exercises in public speech will be held on 21 October at noon on the Diag. We will be discussing the question ‘Artificial Intelligence: Is It a Good Thing?’ If you would like to say your piece, [do please request to speak in advance using this form](#). We want to hear your view.

### **Coming soon: The Davis, Markert, Nickerson Lecture in Academic Freedom**

I am happy to say that the distinguished historian Dr. Ruth Ben-Ghiat will deliver the Faculty Senate’s annual Davis, Markert, Nickerson Lecture in Academic Freedom. Dr. Ben-Ghiat is the author—most recently—of the [book \*Strongman: Mussolini to the Present\*](#), a New York Times bestseller. Here in Michigan her title will be ‘Intellectual Freedom in an Authoritarian Age’.



For reasons that she will discuss, Dr. Ben-Ghiat feels that she must deliver her lecture on Zoom. We have therefore constituted a panel of three distinguished faculty colleagues to comment—in person—on her lecture and offer reflections based on their own work. These three discussants will be [Ron Suny](#), a historian of authoritarianism in Europe; [Karima Bennoune](#), a professor of law who writes about academic freedom in times of controversy; and [Ji Yeon Hong](#), a political scientist studying the political economy of authoritarianism.

The DMN lecture will be given at 4:00 on Thursday, 6 November in the Maize and Blue Auditorium in the Student Activities Building. [More information about the DMN Lecture can be found here](#). A separate email inviting you to register to attend will be sent in the coming weeks.

In solidarity,

Derek R. Peterson  
Chair of the Faculty Senate  
Ali Mazrui Professor of History and African Studies