



FACULTY SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dear colleagues:

This letter comes to you a few days following the death of the activist Charlie Kirk, who was murdered while addressing a crowd of students at a university in Utah. In life, Kirk was no friend of academic freedom. Twenty members of the Michigan faculty are included on his “Professor Watchlist,” which targets faculty who (in his partisan definition) “promote anti-American values.” His demagoguery has endangered a great many people. Even so, his death must cause all of us sorrow. Kirk’s murderer has threatened the fragile consensus that underlies all academic work: that universities are spaces of free exchange, where people holding contending views can offer ideas, test out positions, and work together toward truth. The fear that this and other instances of political violence generates will stifle freedom and inhibit our ability to learn from each other. That is why violence has no place on a university campus: it is the mortal enemy of civil discourse.

I write for two purposes: first, to let you know of the work that we in faculty government are doing to advance our collective interests, and second, to alert you about several matters that presently weigh upon us.

Townhall on the UM Presidential Search Inspires Vigorous Discussion

On 3 September, faculty government convened a town-hall meeting titled “The Next U-M President” to discuss the presidential search process and to zero in on qualities that faculty would like to see reflected in the next Michigan president. The meeting was attended by 80 people in person and over 200 online. The leading presenter—Judith Wilde, of George Mason University—presented research suggesting that presidents chosen in secret are less attached to their institutions, because they lack the support of faculty, staff and students. The other presenters—Derek Peterson, chair of SACUA; Nathan Sadowsky, treasurer of University Staff United; and Eric Veal Jr., president of Central Student Government—were unanimous in their hope for a president who was principled and unafraid in their defense of our institution’s core values.

The general discussion that followed was wide-ranging. Perhaps the most interesting suggestion was that the University should conduct a ‘post-mortem’ of the last two presidencies, in order to determine where and why both ended in acrimony.

Reports on the town hall have been published in the University Record and in the Michigan Daily.

- [Town hall report published by the University Record](#)
- [Town hall report published by the Michigan Daily](#)

The Faculty Senate Office kept notes, and we have relayed them to the Regents and the search committee. [The notes of the town hall can be found here.](#) [The town hall was also recorded to YouTube and is available here.](#)

Relatedly: I call your attention to [the series of short editorial letters recently published in the Michigan Daily](#). In them two dozen colleagues articulate—with considerable power and insight—what it is that we need in the next Michigan president. I hope that these editorials will be required reading for the Search Committee as it begins its work.

Faculty Government and the Presidential Search Process

At its meeting on 6 September, [the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs adopted a statement concerning the presidential search process](#). In it we register our disapproval of the composition of the search committee, which excludes representatives of faculty government. The statement concludes by arguing that all executive search committees ought, as a matter of course, to have among their members representatives of faculty government, as it is we—scholars, clinicians, teachers and researchers—who actually do the work that make this institution what it is. The statement will now go to the Senate Assembly for discussion and a vote, and will then be considered at a meeting of the full Faculty Senate in November.

New Reporting Obligations Cause Concerns over Academic Freedom

At the start of this new semester the University adopted—with very little fanfare—a revised SPG, 17 pages in length, that augurs badly for the freedoms that underpin our academic work. [Under this new version of SPG 201.89-1 all University employees, including student employees, are mandatorily obliged to report to the Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX Office](#) any conduct that might “adversely affect” an individual’s “participation in a University activity.” We are likewise required to report conduct that might constitute a “Hostile Environment”

for anyone based on their “national origin (including shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics),” among other considerations. Those of us who supervise student employees have long been mandatory reporters. This revised SPG requires all of us to report conduct of this kind. It was adopted in response to [a complaint from the Office of Civil Rights, which in June 2024 addressed the University](#) about allegations that U-M had “discriminated against students on the basis of their national origin (shared Jewish ancestry/Israeli).”

I regard discrimination of any kind as an affront to the basic mission of a public university: to lift up our students without regard to who they are or what they look like. At the same time, I look upon this new policy with alarm. It comes on the heels of the University’s year-long efforts to suppress pro-Palestinian protests on the Ann Arbor campus. For us as faculty, this new policy holds out the prospect that federal investigators will be able to zero in on specific members of the faculty, staff, or student body and target those of us who articulate positions that run counter to the political logics now dominating Washington. It creates even more disincentives for principled speech around controversial matters, making it more challenging for us to do the educational work we ought to do. It makes it hard for us to mentor our students, turning every private conversation (potentially) into a public event. And, perhaps most perniciously, it appears to force all of us to be tattletales, creating a culture of self-censorship that is injurious to free expression.

I have met several times with Tami Stickman, Director of the ECRT office, and our dialogue is ongoing. I have likewise relayed these points personally to President Grasso, who has expressed his strong support for academic freedom. Faculty government will continue to pursue this matter, and we would be glad to hear from you about your own concerns around the revised version of SPG 201.89-1. I can be reached at facultySenatechair@umich.edu.

Revisions of the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities

At the start of this semester, the University [published a revised version of the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), which establishes the disciplinary procedure that governs the conduct of students at U-M. Faculty government has been closely engaged with the SSRR over the past year. In July 2024 it was revised by the Board of Regents without input from faculty or students. The revisions are injurious to students’ freedoms. They make it possible for “The University”—separate from anyone among the faculty, staff, or students—to prosecute and punish students for their conduct. They also eliminate the faculty’s role in assessing penalties that administrators impose. In

November 2024 [the Faculty Senate overwhelmingly supported a resolution calling on U-M to pause the implementation of the revised SSRR](#); and during Winter 2025, the Student Relations Advisory Committee—an advisory committee of faculty government—was meeting weekly to develop [a set of 19 revisions to the SSRR policy](#). These reasonable revisions would have restored the faculty’s role in assessing student conduct, and would have protected students from hasty or ill-founded prosecution.

Earlier this semester we heard that most of the suggested amendments had been rejected by the administration. Even the amendments that were accepted were significantly modified: where SRAC called for a process that is “designed to be fair and efficient,” [the published policy is “designed to move swiftly and as efficiently as possible.”](#) President Grasso has assured us that Proposal 18—which would re-establish a faculty appeals board—remains under consideration. I earnestly hope that the Board of Regents will agree to restore this vital part of our shared academic culture.

In the coming week SRAC will be meeting to discuss the revised Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities. I look forward to working with the committee to develop a forward path.

Federal Funding Cuts: A Request

Last semester, faculty government conducted a survey among faculty, asking for information about the impact that federal funding cuts have had on UM researchers, scientists and teachers. [The survey results can be found here](#). In concert with the administration, we are now planning for a public facing event (or events) that will call attention to the important work that is *not* being done in Ann Arbor because federal funding has been cut or eliminated. Our aim is to dramatize the importance of scientific research—including basic science—and to argue the case for federal agencies that cannot, by statute, advocate for themselves.

If your own work has been adversely affected by federal funding cuts, if you are willing to talk about the matter in public, and if your research has important public-facing dimensions, would you please contact me at facultySenateChair@umich.edu? We are looking for stories that can make the stakes clear.

Surveillance on Campus: Update

On 18 June [SACUA adopted a resolution expressing disquiet at the proliferation of high-powered security cameras on the Ann Arbor campus](#). We noted that the Faculty Senate has articulated, in an overwhelming vote, a conviction that the University should not share information that would allow immigration authorities to identify, locate, or harass University of Michigan students, faculty or staff; and we called for the creation of an oversight committee to regulate the use of these new cameras ([Resolution Urging the University of Michigan to Protect International Students, Faculty, and Staff from Unwarranted Detention](#)). Our views are shared by the ACLU, whose members published [an open letter regarding campus surveillance](#).

I am happy to say that, two weeks ago, [the DPSS published a new website, which includes information about the use of security cameras](#); and the Office of the President is presently constituting a new ad-hoc committee that will look over the University's use of cameras and other security approaches across campus. SACUA has nominated six faculty members to serve on this committee; we are told that it will include three members of the faculty, two deans, two students, and two staff. We look forward to working with this committee to ensure that security measures do not intrude upon the space for free expression.

Protests on Campus: Further Developments

In late August a group of faculty and students invited Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) to visit the U-M campus and speak about [the University's ongoing prosecution of pro-Palestinian student protestors, a matter about which I have written in earlier newsletters](#). About a hundred students, staff and faculty attended her press conference, which convened outside the Ruthven building. There were no barricades outside the doors of Ruthven; when Rep. Tlaib sought an audience with President Grasso, the doors were opened to her, and she received a hearing from his chief of staff. In turn, the student activists were respectful of public access to the building. Not every protest will be free of disruption, for disruption is a necessary means of calling attention to gross injustice. Nonetheless: I have conveyed to President Grasso and interim DPSS chief Rick Arnold my hope that the University's approach to this recent protest will foretell a more open and less confrontational policy in the year to come.

Protections for Faculty Working Group

In recent months a number of members of the faculty have been subject to unwanted attention from aggressive and angry outsiders, many of them fueled by an Internet-born sense of grievance. While [the Office of the Provost](#)

[maintains a website with resources supporting faculty](#) who face doxing and other forms of harassment, many colleagues find these resources to be limited. Faculty government has therefore formed a Protections for Faculty Working Group, convened under the chairmanship of Dr. Jonathon Kuuskowski of the School of Music, Theater and Dance. The working group will prepare a report identifying further remedies and supports that the Provost might offer to endangered members of our community. It will also work with faculty government to develop public events that call attention to the problem and open up discussions about how to manage it. Our aim is to impart a sense of security to faculty working on controversial subjects, the foundation for academic creativity.

New Travel Policy

On 1 July the administration adopted a [new rule obliging UM employees travelling on University business to use Collegiate Travel Planners to book flights](#). On 24 June, SACUA [adopted a statement calling on the University to slow the implementation of the new policy](#), in order to allow time for faculty feedback and proper evaluation. In the weeks since this policy's implementation faculty government has heard from a large number of colleagues with complaints. Faculty government has therefore formed a CTP Task Force under the chairmanship of Dr. Jesse Capecelatro of the College of Engineering. The new task force is presently eliciting information about their experiences with CTP from members of the faculty. If you would like to offer comments on your own experience, [please use this Google survey form to inform us about your experience with CTP](#). The task force will use the material they collect to inform their work.

We are pleased that the Vice President for Finance has agreed to meet with the Task Force on a once-every-three-months basis to share data about CTP usage and to discuss, in general, the nature of the complaints we've received.

Upcoming Events

The Faculty Senate Office has organized a range of public events for the coming semester. Our aim is to foster a sense of community and common purpose, so better to build consensus and defend our institution.

Political Speech and the Public Square

We have put together four free speech events under the title 'Political Speech and the Public Square', wherein faculty, students and staff will offer reasoned opinions about controversial subjects over the lunch hour. The first of these events, which will be about "What do I Want in a New U-M President?", will take place at noon on Tuesday, 23 September. **Please note that due to construction, the September 23rd event will take place at [Ingalls Mall](#).** It will be chaired by Neeraja Aravamudan, the Director of the Ginsberg Center. Do please come! [Further information about Political Speech and the Public Square can be found here](#). We still have a few speaking spots left. [If you would like to request to speak, please do so using this form](#).



Faculty On-Campus Work Retreats

We're organizing eight faculty work retreats, which will bring faculty together for a morning of writing and research, followed by a collegial lunch. The first of these work retreats will take place on 24 and 25 September in the gallery of the Hatcher Library. Please sign up! Several seats remain available. It's a good opportunity to get to know colleagues and share ideas, while also advancing our own work. [More information about the Faculty Work Retreats and the registration page can be found here](#).



Faculty Mixer

The annual faculty mixer will happen on Wednesday, 8 October at 4:30 pm at the Detroit Observatory here in Ann Arbor. Do join us for cocktails, snacks, and a look through the famous telescope. [More information about the Faculty Mixer can be found here](#).



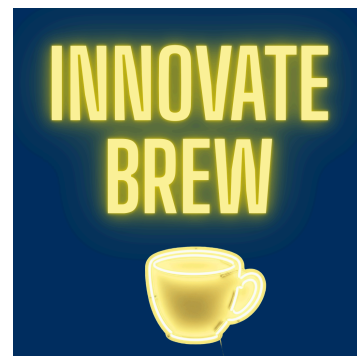
DMN Lecture

The [35th annual Davis, Markert and Nickerson Lecture on Academic and Intellectual Freedom](#) will be given by the distinguished scholar of Italian fascism Ruth Ben Ghiat. The lecture will be given on November 6th, 2025 at 4pm. CART Services and ASL interpreters will be present at the event. [Register here to receive event updates about the DMN Lecture and be informed of when registration opens.](#)



Innovation Brew

Do you have 30 minutes to talk and have coffee, one-on-one, with a random U-M colleague? Sign up for [Innovate Brew](#) and the Faculty Senate Office will pair you with a different research-active colleague from outside of your field, once a month for six months. [Register here to sign up for Innovate Brew, and you will receive a match near the end of September!](#)



In solidarity,

Derek R. Peterson

Chair of the Faculty Senate

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