



FACULTY SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dear colleagues:

I write for two purposes: to bring you news of the recent vote of the Faculty Senate, and to update you on several matters of importance in our common life.

Faculty Senate Vote Breaks Records

On Monday, 3 November the Faculty Senate convened for the first time this year. Under consideration were nine motions, all of which were put forward by members of the faculty. In the ensuing election 3,638 colleagues cast ballots, or 46.6 percent of the total Faculty Senate. It is by far the biggest number of voters in the history of the University of Michigan.

All the nine resolutions passed with over 80 percent of the total vote, and a few resolutions passed with well over 90 percent of the vote. The [tabulated results of the election can be found here](#); here is [a Daily report on the election](#) on the vote; and here is [a Record report](#). Based on this resounding vote, it is clear that the faculty of the University of Michigan feel as follows:

- Faculty really do want UM Medicine to provide gender-affirming care to trans youth. The vote for [Motion 2](#) comes in at over 80 percent.
- Faculty regard President Donald Trump's 'Compact for Excellence in Higher Education' as a very bad deal for American academia and as a threat to the work we do. Fully 93 percent of the faculty voted for [Motion 3](#).

- Faculty think that the University’s new travel policy ought to be pulled back and reworked. A remarkable 96 percent of faculty voted for [Motion 1](#).
- We need to figure out what AI is doing to our students’ ability to think and learn for themselves. 86 percent of faculty [would like there to be a comprehensive policy that addresses the pedagogical and environmental dangers that AI](#) poses to our enterprise.
- 88 percent of faculty voted for [Motion 7](#), which calls on upper administration and the Regents to respect the recommendations of faculty government and re-commit itself to an equitable, transparent and democratic process for student discipline.
- 88 percent of faculty voted for [Motion 9](#), which asks that—going forward—faculty government have a representative on executive-level searches. Faculty are not happy about the manner in which the presidential search committee was constituted.
- Over 92 percent of faculty would like the University to invest the necessary resources to help make our teaching materials accessible to students with disabilities. As [Motion 6](#) points out, at present faculty are being left to figure out the mechanics of ameliorating course materials individually, at considerable cost of time and energy.
- A great many colleagues would like the Office of the Vice President for Research to restore Consulting for Statistics, Computing, and Analytics Research, a valuable service that was terminated over the summer. Over 90 percent of faculty voted for [Motion 5](#).

It is sometimes said that faculty government at Michigan represents the view of an aggravated and opinionated cabal. That argument can no longer be sustained. To an extent greater than at any point in our institution’s history faculty have turned out to vote on these important motions. We have done so because, at a time when our civic institutions are under threat, we know that we must invest our energies in

the institutions that uphold democracy. I am very much encouraged by this election.

In the days that come, I will meet with the vice presidents who are charged with administering the various areas of work discussed in these motions. I will report back to the Senate with the results of this advocacy.

SACUA Visit to U-M Flint

On 24 October several members of SACUA made a formal visit to UM Flint. We had occasion to meet with Flint faculty chair Gabriela Hristova and other members of faculty government; we spent a pleasant hour with the leadership of the American Federation of Teachers chapter in Flint; and we enjoyed the gracious hospitality of Chancellor Laurence Alexander. The tenure-track faculty at Flint have recently been unionized, and we were particularly impressed with the AFT-AAUP Agreement with the UM Regents. It gives Flint faculty notable advantages in compensation, in benefits, and in security of employment, and it obliges the University to respect standards of shared governance. The [Flint contract can be found here](#). It is a testament to what an organized, unionized faculty can do to advance its collective interests.

Cuts in Funding for the Arts Cause Concern

For the past several years the Office of the Vice President for Research has provisioned artists, musicians, designers and performers with 'block grant' funding to support their creative practice. In fields where grant money is otherwise scarce, this vitally important funding has [enabled our colleagues to pursue the important work they do](#). This semester the [OVPR eliminated block grant funding for the arts and music](#). All of us are aware that the University is in the edge of a period of fiscal stringency, and we know that cuts must be made. These block grants are however a pittance, seen in relation to the University's budget: in all, the units received \$500,000 last year. Last week colleagues from the Stamps School of Art and Design, the School of Music, Theater and Dance, and the Taubman College of Architecture delivered letters of concern to the Provost, calling upon her to reinstate funds for the affected schools.

It is not my part to adjudicate funding decisions at the University. But my opinion is this. At a time when our national culture is being pruned by demagogues who wish to promote a simplified definition of ‘home’, it is of great importance that we retain and foster a vision of a big, expansive, cosmopolitan public culture. We need poets to hymn the tragedies of our times; we need musicians to keep our minds fixed on solidarities of tone and movement; we need artists to help us see a better world. This is not the right time to cut funding for the arts.

DMN Lecture Centers on Authoritarianism

On 6 November faculty government convened the 35th annual [Davis, Markert and Nickerson Lecture on Academic and Intellectual Freedom](#). An audience of around 500 heard the historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat speak about ‘Intellectual Freedom in an Authoritarian Age’. The lecture honors Professors Davis, Markert and Nickerson, who were drummed out of University service in the 1950s, when the McCarthy-era Congress was investigating the threat of Communism on U.S. college campuses. In her lecture Dr. Ben-Ghiat argued that today—as in the 1950s—an authoritarian state is taking shape in the United States. She called universities ‘frontline targets in the struggle over democracy’ and urged faculty and students to resist the placid temptations of quiescence in the face of repression. A [full report on the lecture can be found in the University.Record](#).

Coming Soon: ‘Surveillance: Does it Make us Safer?’

This semester faculty government has convened several events under the heading [‘Political Speech and the Public Square’](#). These events are meant to stretch our first amendment muscles, push back against the enclosures that increasingly enfold us, and give us all the opportunity to practice vigorous, principled debate. [Here is a report on the most recent Political Speech and the Public Square events](#), which concerned Artificial Intelligence.

The next installment in this series will happen on Tuesday, 18 November, when we will gather at noon on the Diag to debate ‘Surveillance: Does it Make us Safer?’ The subject could hardly be more timely. The University has in the past year been avidly installing new and more powerful cameras in public spaces like the Diag. Over the summer months [faculty government adopted a resolution calling on the](#)

[University to put in place rules to delimit and contain the rapidly-growing technologies of surveillance.](#) Last month the University responded [by adopting a new SPG, numbered 510.02](#), which strips away many of the protections that had earlier guided the use of surveillance cameras on campus. This new policy is cause for great concern, and I am presently in discussions with the interim director of public safety about it.

So this is a good time for us to assemble and talk about surveillance technologies, what they protect, and what they endanger. Do join us on the Diag on Tuesday next week at noon.

A luta continua,

Derek R. Peterson
Chair of the Faculty Senate
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