



From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dear colleagues:

This comes with my best wishes for a happy and productive new year.

I'll begin this newsletter by conveying the following resolution.

Resolution Welcoming Kent Syverud as President of the University of Michigan

At its meeting on Monday, 12 January, the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs unanimously approved [a resolution to welcome our new president](#):

The Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs welcomes Kent Syverud as the 16th president of the University of Michigan. Mr. Syverud is no stranger to Ann Arbor. His record as a teacher and an administrator is impressive. At Michigan Law and at Vanderbilt Law he played a leading role in keeping the doors open to previously under-represented groups. As Chancellor and President of Syracuse University Mr. Syverud invested in the research enterprise, worked with students to address racism, built new dormitories, and created new support structures promoting mental health. He earned a reputation as a willing listener and engaging interlocutor. At Syracuse Mr. Syverud served *ex officio* on virtually every committee of faculty government, and we are told that he was an active participant in faculty-led administrative work. These are all qualities of leadership we need here at U-M, and we trust that he will bring this disposition toward consultative administration to Michigan.

We are heartened by these and other aspects of Mr. Syverud's record, and we look forward to working with him to advance this university's public mission in the months and years ahead.

Early Soundings of President-Elect Syverud

I had the pleasure of attending the ceremony wherein the Board of Regents elected Kent Syverud as President of the University of Michigan. It was a congenial occasion, and as chair of the faculty I ought to be in a position to explain to the University why our newly-named president is the right person for the job. But [faculty government was given no role to play in choosing the next UM president](#), and I met Mr. Syverud for the first time on the day he was voted into office. The search process deprived Mr. Syverud of the opportunity to make his case to students, staff and faculty.

So I—like many of you—have been sifting through old newspaper reports, trying to get a sense of the character of our new president. What I have learned is encouraging. Mr. Syverud was born outside Rochester, NY, to a father who worked at Kodak and a mother who was a hospital administrator. He taught at Michigan between 1987 and 1997. I have not made a systematic search through [the SACUA archives](#), but a quick review shows that Professor Syverud was an active participant in the work of faculty government. In 1991 he was made a member of the Legal Services Task Force, which helped establish legal protections for faculty who were caught up in controversy; and in 1994 he led a faculty committee developing a definition of tenure. As associate dean he was actively engaged with Black students, listening to their concerns and advocating for their interests. He played a key role in [Grutter v. Bollinger](#), the case by which the U-M Law School defended its use of race as a criteria for admission. In an April 2001 editorial published in the *Detroit News* he described how he had "watched with wonder as future lawyers come to appreciate classmates of all races as individuals." In this and in other aspects of his work as associate dean he showed courage and moral fortitude, qualities that we need at Michigan.

At Syracuse Mr. Syverud's record as a champion of liberal education is not above criticism. In July last year [Syracuse shuttered its office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#), retitling it the "People and Culture" unit. To his credit, Mr. Syverud did keep the office open for several months after Donald Trump came to power; and when it was closed, the staff who had formerly worked in the DEI office were re-employed in the new unit. Students seeking to raise awareness of the human costs involved in Israel's war in Gaza found it hard to get traction under his presidency. Protestors camped at the SU campus for 16 days in the middle of 2024. In an interview last year [Mr. Syverud speculated \(without evidence\) that the protestors were "encouraged from Iran."](#) Seven students

involved in the encampment were subject to disciplinary proceedings. Syracuse [faculty have argued that SU's actions undermined students' freedom to protest and chilled free speech.](#)

The Trump government is placing extraordinary pressures on all American universities, and at Syracuse Mr. Syverud has been obliged to trim his sails to the prevailing winds. That is why it falls to us—students, staff, and faculty—to shape his presidency here at Michigan into what we want it to be. It is in our interest that President Syverud would succeed. As we are assured that he will be an attentive and engaged listener, it is us who must now hold him to account, challenge him where necessary, support him where possible, and encourage him to defend the vitally important work of liberal education.

Please Complete the Survey on Censorship and Self-Censorship

A February 2025 Faculty Senate survey revealed that at least half of the faculty who responded are "self-censoring" their instruction, that is, choosing not to teach particular topics or to have certain conversations with students. Moreover many faculty are facing harassment and doxxing due to their research specialties and extra-mural speech.

In light of what we learned and the political challenges that have arisen in the past few months, SACUA and a Faculty Protections Working Group are gathering additional information from faculty about your experiences involving censorship of instruction, research, and extra-mural speech. The survey is intended to inform faculty governance: how can we advocate for faculty, what types of events can we offer. Your participation will ensure that faculty governance and administrators are informed about the realities of scholarship and instruction on campus.

The survey is being conducted through an anonymous Google Form, so your submission is anonymous and your answers are not connected with your email address or name. Our report of findings from this survey will be shared with the Faculty Senate and key administrators. Your participation will help ensure that a wide range of faculty experiences are understood so that we can better advocate for you.

We anticipate that this will take ten minutes to complete. **The deadline for participation is the end of the day on Friday, January 30.**

[The censorship survey can be found at this link.](#)

Working Group on GenAI Formed

By an overwhelming majority U-M faculty voted in November 2025 to support Motion 4, a "[Resolution Demanding a Comprehensive Policy Addressing the Role of Generative Artificial Intelligence at the University of Michigan.](#)" The Provost and the Vice-President for Information Technology have now constituted a working group to take up the matters raised in the motion. The working group is led by [Dr. Mika LaVaque-Manty](#), a political theorist and former Director of the LSA Honors Program. Dr. LaVaque-Manty was nominated for this role by SACUA. The working group will be taking the temperature in teaching units across campus, gathering evidence about the challenges that GenAI poses and learning what faculty are doing to ameliorate its degenerative effects on the academic enterprise. I look forward to working with the group, for GenAI is perhaps the most pressing existential challenge that we, as teachers and learners, must now confront.

SACUA passes "Statement Against Doxing and Other Forms of Intimidation"

In response to recent developments, SACUA unanimously adopted [a statement regarding doxxing and other forms of intimidation](#) at its meeting on Monday, 12 January:

In recent years, members of the University community have increasingly faced threats related to their work, research, teaching, or extra-mural speech. These have included threats of violence, the publicizing of home addresses, and, more recently, appearing at individuals' homes in attempts to intimidate. Targeting individuals with threats or intimidation is unacceptable and undermines academic freedom.

SACUA urges all members of the University community to commit to civil dialogue for meaningful exchange and understanding. Academia should be a place for open debate, inquiry, and the resolution of differences through discussion rather than intimidation.

Sign up for Work Retreats!

Faculty On-Campus Work Retreats offer a quiet space to work with other scholars and artists, and an opportunity for you to prioritize your research and creative work before teaching, service, and email take over the semester. Lunch, after the work session, is a chance to share interests and work with other colleagues, to learn about each others' research, to grow professional and social networks, and to experience the University as a collective.



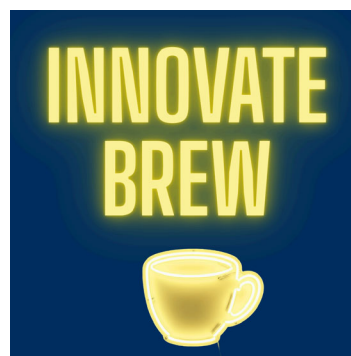
The Work Retreats are open to all ~7,600 members of the Faculty Senate, including tenure-track professors, lecturers, research faculty, clinical faculty, librarians, archivists, and curators. The series was developed by the Faculty Senate Office, is supported by the Office of the Provost.

The next of our Work Retreats will happen next week, on 21 and 22 January, from 9 am to 1 pm in Space 2435 in the North Quad. It's a lovely, light-filled room, and a good place to work.

Do sign up in advance. [More information and the sign-up form for the work retreats can be found here.](#)

And Sign Up for Innovate Brew!

Do you have 30 minutes to talk, one-on-one, with a U-M colleague? Sign up 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.



Innovate Brew, originally created by Ross Professor Bill Lovejoy, is based on studies showing that innovation happens when people at a distance get together. The premise is that, when people are relaxed and in uncompetitive environments, they tend to have conversations that stimulate new ideas. The tricky part is: even at U-M, we tend to stay in familiar networks and are less likely to run into people from different walks of life, practices, and lenses on the world.

The Faculty Senate Office and the Office of the Provost are delighted to announce the revival of the Innovate Brew program. This simple 30-minute coffee might lead to new collaboration. At the least, you'll meet passionate people, sharing what they care about, and will discover the breadth and diversity of the university.

[For more information about Innovate Brew, and to sign up, please visit this page.](#)

A luta continua,

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

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