

Report on Activities of Government Relations Advisory Committee for 2025-2026

Overview

From: Kevin Cokley, Chair, Government Relations Advisory Committee

Subject: Activities of Government Relations Advisory Committee for 2025-2026

Committee Members: Kevin Cokley (Chair), Jowei Chen, Shevon Desai, Lisa Fein, Anouck Girard, Scott Greer, Nakhiah Goulbourne, Karyn Lacy, John Mansfield, Shahzad Mian, Rima Mohammad, Sara Samuel, Beth Wilensky, Jeffrey Yackley

SACUA Liaison: Rogério Meireles Pinto

Advisory to: Chris Kolb, Vice President for Government Relations

Meeting Dates: September 11 (planning meeting), October 9, December 11, January 22, February 26, April 23

2025-2026 Committee Charge

1. Support Government Relations' efforts to strengthen communication about the necessity of U-M research to legislators and the public, such as through the following:
 - Translating the importance of research funding, including indirect costs, into language that resonates with the public;
 - Considering if there are opportunities for GRAC members and/or other identified faculty, with Government Relations' guidance and support, to more directly engage with legislators and/or assist with legislator engagement;
 - Collaborating with OVPR and U-M Communications regarding messaging and overlapping goals regarding legislative actions and higher education policy;
 - Exploring means to educate the general public about what a PhD is, how they drive research, and a PhD's relevance in fields beyond medicine. It is critical to the mission of the university to communicate the value of a PhD to audiences such as government and business.
2. Discuss with VP Kolb the evolving challenges presented by federal and state governmental pressures on individual faculty member efforts to pursue research and education, including faculty perspectives on funding cuts and self-censorship.
3. Examine the impacts of changes being made by Federal Departments—such as the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services—that challenge the University's ability to pursue its pedagogical and research mission.
4. Consider emergent issues or topics brought forward by GRAC committee members or the Vice President for Government Relations for discussion over the course of the year. The committee may also continue discussing any issues or topics raised in the



committee's most recent annual committee report.

Committee Actions

While GRAC members asked what specific actions they could engage in to provide support for Government Relations, there were no specific actions recommended. GRAC members did engage the VP of Government Relations after each update.

Government Relations Updates & Topics Discussed at GRAC meetings

- VP Kolb provided Government Relations updates at GRAC meetings followed by time for GRAC discussion. These updates and discussion covered the following topics:
- **Federal Updates:**
 - Potential impacts of a lengthy federal government shutdown on U-M research grants were discussed.
 - Indirect cost funding was discussed, including the [FAIR](#) model.
 - The [annual U-M Congressional breakfast](#) in D.C. raised \$147,000, with U.S. Rep Lisa McClain as the keynote. The party of the keynote speaker alternates each year.
- **State of Michigan Budget:** Regular updates on the status of the MI budget with regards to higher education were provided.
 - At the end of 2025, MI house took steps to cut \$600 million in state appropriates, which had the potential to impact state funds designated to MM survival flight.
 - The [Michigan Association of State Universities \(MASU\) published a report on the economic impact of state universities](#) in Michigan. As a research university, U-M's economic impact is proportionately larger than other universities in the state. It was suggested that anecdotes may be more impactful than such reports in conveying U-M's importance. Students can be effective ambassadors. [RU4M reports](#) demonstrate the federal funding impact of R&D at universities.
 - The MI Governor released the annual state budget recommendations, with the higher education budget flat from the prior year and with some funds again designated as one-time money. There was discussion about how the budget for higher ed is determined and if there are any opportunities for added state funds for education, including potential roles for U-M faculty.

Issues Raised by GRAC Members & Discussion

- **Academic freedom:** GRAC members discussed the Texas A & M faculty member fired over course content and raised concerns that academic freedom might be similarly impacted at U-M. The state of Michigan provides [constitutional protections](#), with university boards elected by the general voting population and not determined by the governor. There was discussion about the threats received by a U-M faculty member because of comments made in the aftermath of the killing of Charlie Kirk. Both President Ono and President Grasso have spoken publicly about the importance of academic freedom.



- **U-M Los Alamos Supercomputing Research Center:** GRAC members raised questions about the U-M LANL supercomputing site proposed for Textile road and there was discussion about related concerns raised by Ypsilanti area elected officials.
- **Preparation for a new U-M president:** There was discussion about the Faculty Senate reception held for Kent Syverud and about Government Relations' role in supporting an incoming president.
- **Institutional Neutrality:** There was discussion about whether it would be meaningful to have an institutional response to the murder of Renee Good. The administrative rationale for institutional neutrality was discussed and faculty raised questions about the long-term implications of institutional neutrality.
- **DEI:** There was discussion about the status of DEI in higher ed given that recent court decisions have upheld DEI in higher ed.
- **ICE:** ICE operations have occurred in the county and there was discussion and questions were raised about whether ICE might visit campus.

Recommendations

- GRAC recommends that committee members be involved in determining the content of the committee charges for the next year
 - While the 2025-2026 GRAC charges addressed noteworthy issues, committee members felt that there were bigger governmental affairs problems facing UM than issues that were essentially about the marketing of the Ph.D. degree, which seems better suited for development or market research
 - GRAC members should be able to vote on the charges, and formally amend them as needed
- GRAC recommends maximizing the expertise of committee members to better support Government Relations' efforts by facilitating engagement with policymakers and key decision makers. This is an important issue to address as it was also presented as a recommendation by last year's GRAC committee without knowledge by the current GRAC membership
 - GRAC members understand they are not lobbyists and do not desire to engage in lobbying efforts; however, they do desire to communicate directly with policymakers to engage in educational advocacy where they provide general information and/or speak on issues without urging a specific vote on legislation
 - GRAC members understand that to engage in such advocacy activities requires them to act in their capacity as private citizens, not as university representatives
 - GRAC members understand that no university resources, such as university email, staff, or materials may be used when engaging in advocacy activities on personal time
 - GRAC members understand that such advocacy activities must occur without official guidance or sanction from the VP for Government Relations
- GRAC recommends identifying a specific issue for the committee to work on that will result in a tangible product that can benefit the VP for Government Relations

Overall Summary of Committee Work

- GRAC listened to the VP for Government Relations updates and engaged in discussion after each update. GRAC also raised issues of concern which the VP of Government Relations responded to.