



From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dear Faculty Senate Members,

I hope your summer days are unfolding as planned! Here is a slightly late June newsletter:

- **OMB Rule on Federal Grants:** A [proposed rule would make federal grants contingent on political approval](#), not only scholarly merit. [VP of Research, Skip Lupia, and others are coordinating a university response](#). You can also [respond individually](#), as indicated below.
- **Introducing Vice Chair Kirsten Herold:** Kirsten, from the School of Public Health, is the first Lecturer to serve on SACUA, and this year's Faculty Senate Vice Chair.
- **New AI Committee:** The potential impacts of AI are varied, and opinions about it are diverse. To consider issues most relevant to the university, SACUA is forming an AI committee. Help determine its charge by [answering just one multiple-response question in this survey](#).
- **Results from Last Month's Survey:** Respondents expressed broad satisfaction with their colleagues, students, and university resources. Other responses pointed to eroding shared governance at the university and ideological tensions among the faculty.
- **Statement regarding Regent Acker:** [An investigation confirmed](#) previous [allegations of vulgar comments by Regent Acker](#). [SACUA is calling on him to resign](#).

More details below.

Thank you!

Kentaro

Kentaro Toyama
Faculty Senate Chair
W. K. Kellogg Professor of Community Information

OMB Rule on Federal Grants: In late May, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposed a [new rule that affects a huge range of federal spending](#), including all federal grants. The rule would make grant decisions subject to political approval and enable sudden termination of grants for arbitrary reasons; more detailed summaries of concerns with the rule are available from [Stand Up for Science](#) and [a former NIH program officer](#).

The [UM leadership is working on a response](#) on behalf of the university, with the Offices of Research and Innovation, Government Relations, and the General Counsel, leading.

Your voice could matter. A good summary of possible individual actions is indicated on this [Stand Up for Science webpage](#). One easy action is to submit a comment by July 13, either directly on the [government's website](#) (but, do not attach files with UM letterhead), through [the University of Michigan web form](#) (earlier deadline of July 3; also informs university leadership), or through [the Stand Up For Science website](#) (includes good instructions).

Introducing Vice Chair Kirsten Herold (in her own words): "I am excited and honored to serve as your SACUA vice chair in the coming academic year.

"For those of you who don't know me, I am a Lecturer IV in the School of Public Health, where I staff a small (very small!) writing lab, serving SPH students, faculty, and staff. I love this job, working on everything from class papers, Master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations, to high stakes grants, AMCAS and fellowship applications, and basically any other professional writing task you can imagine. I have been at SPH since 2011. Before that, I worked in the Career Center for a short stint and before that in the English Department, teaching writing classes, starting in 1992. My Ph.D. is from the UM English Department, under the direction of Profs. Martha Vicinus and Enoch Brater.

"Moving further back into the mists of time, I grew up in Denmark. After high school, I came to the U.S., initially to "see the world." After some extensive goofing around, among other things living in West Berlin, two doors from the

Wall, I ended up getting my B.A. at Colby College in Maine, where I was able to indulge my interests in all kinds of subjects -- English literature, German, Art History, Ancient History, Greek and Latin -- really a terrific experience -- before coming to Ann Arbor for graduate school.

“But the thing I am most proud of in my career of is my role in starting and building LEO, the Lecturers Employee Organization, into the strong campus union it is today. When we started organizing back in 2002, lecturers, or nontenure-track instructional faculty, were viewed as a dirty little secret in many departments: no mailboxes, no names on bulletin boards or offices, etc. In fact, the then Dean of LSA called us “the C students of the University” (to our faces!) as if there is something disgraceful in focusing your career on teaching UM students. While that mindset may still exist in a few dark corners of the campus, at least now, seven contracts later, we have a rational appointment system, standardized raises, health insurance year round, and faculty governance rights.

“In conclusion, I think we have a great group on SACUA this year. I look forward to working with Kentaro and our terrific staff in the year ahead and seeing many of you at our various events around campus. The more people participate, the stronger we are.”

New AI Committee: This past year, Provost McCauley and VP of IT Pendse charged an AI in Education Working Group to understand faculty views of AI in our teaching, and a report by them (based partly on a survey sent to all faculty on March 17) is due to be released soon.

Given AI’s multifaceted impact on the university, however, SACUA voted unanimously in May to form its own AI Committee, to complement and build on the Working Group’s work. The committee’s charge is still being determined, but we believe that it should address a handful of focused topics, while also seeking to be relevant across the very diverse range of UM faculty views about AI. At a university like ours, a broad range of AI use and non-use can be enabled: Individual faculty should be able to pick and choose among options so that they can, e.g., have students do assignments in “[AI-free zones](#)”; better manage AI-based cheating; prepare students for jobs expecting AI facility; use AI to assist in research; evaluate existing AI models; develop advanced AI models; use AI to support routine work tasks; create collaborative art with AI; and so on. Part of the committee’s goal will be to identify areas where faculty demand is not being met.

[Help us understand what faculty most want with respect to AI by completing this survey.](#) It contains just one multiple-choice question (and a couple of optional questions). If you have specific ideas for what a volunteer AI committee could meaningfully focus on within an academic year, please feel free to indicate in the optional open-comment question.

Results from Last Month's Survey: Speaking of AI, I personally have deep concerns about its potential impact on our world, but to better understand its evolving capabilities, I have been trying it out. I asked Claude Cowork to synthesize responses to last month's newsletter survey about what faculty are satisfied and dissatisfied with. It processed 173 responses in about a minute, and its output was frighteningly good. I read every submitted comment myself and spot-checked Claude's analysis for major errors (which are not otherwise infrequent); in this instance, there were none that I caught. Below are the top three classes of responses for each of the two questions, excerpted from [Claude's full analysis](#).

Q1: What is one aspect of your experience at the University of Michigan that you are especially satisfied with?

1. COLLEAGUES, COLLEGIAL CULTURE, AND INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY (n=60)

The single most common source of satisfaction. Respondents describe the quality, brilliance, kindness, and collaborative spirit of their faculty peers, as well as a broader sense of intellectual community among faculty, staff, and students. [...]

2. STUDENTS — QUALITY OF AND SATISFACTION WORKING WITH OR TEACHING THEM (n=34)

Many faculty cite their students as a primary source of satisfaction — the quality, motivation, curiosity, and diversity of both undergraduate and graduate students. [...]

3. RESEARCH SUPPORT, FUNDING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE (n=29)

Faculty express satisfaction with the resources, funding opportunities, and institutional infrastructure available to support their research. [...]

Q2: What aspect of your experience at the University of Michigan is most in need of improvement?

1. EROSION OF SHARED GOVERNANCE AND FACULTY VOICE IN INSTITUTIONAL DECISIONS (n=36)

The single most common complaint, and the most broadly felt across faculty. Respondents across the political spectrum describe a structural deterioration in the role of faculty in university decision-making. [...]

2. QUALITY, EFFECTIVENESS, AND POLITICAL BIAS OF FACULTY SENATE / SACUA (n=22)

A large number of respondents – predominantly though not exclusively moderate or conservative – are critical of how the Faculty Senate and SACUA have operated in recent years. Complaints fall into two related categories: (a) the Senate has become ideologically captured and no longer represents the breadth of faculty opinion; and (b) the Senate is strategically ineffective, spending time on symbolic resolutions and rhetorical posturing rather than consequential governance. [...]

3. POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CLIMATE – POLARIZED VIEWS (n≈31 total)

This is a deeply divided topic with significant respondents on both sides. It is presented here as a single topic because the underlying concern – that the university's ideological environment is not inclusive of all voices – is shared, even if the identified problem and proposed solution differ sharply. [...]

At least among those who responded, there is broad satisfaction with our colleagues, students, and resources to pursue scholarship. As for challenges – improving shared governance was the top issue, and it remains firmly on

SACUA's agenda. The comments about SACUA's ineffectiveness were difficult to hear, but remind us to prioritize concrete, broadly sought action. A perennial challenge for SACUA is identifying the best way to encourage meaningful change, given that [our formal power is largely advisory](#). Our voice, in private meetings and in public venues, is one of the few levers we have. When and how best to exercise that voice is rarely clear, however, and often the topic of heated debate, not made easier against a backdrop of severe political polarization, itself a challenge highlighted in the survey responses. There was also a long list of issues each raised by small numbers of participants, but which deserve consideration. SACUA will review these more carefully for potential follow-up.

Statement regarding Regent Acker: In April, 2026, [The Guardian reported on obscene comments Regent Jordan Acker made](#) about a UM student and others. [SACUA issued a resolution asking Mr. Acker to resign](#) if the allegations were true. At the time, Mr. Acker denied the allegations. The [Regents commissioned an investigation at significant cost to UM](#), which has since [confirmed the allegations](#). At the June Board meeting last week, [Mr. Acker issued an abstract apology](#) and said he would demonstrate "accountability" by staying on for the remainder of his term, which ends January 1, 2027. Now that the facts are confirmed, [SACUA is again calling on him to resign](#).

Purely for information: No internal UM process exists to dismiss a UM regent. [A regent may be dismissed by Michigan's governor, or impeached by the state legislature. A recall vote is also possible during the middle years of a regental term, but not in the first or last year.](#)

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