



From the Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dear Faculty Senate Members,

Welcome to the Academic Year 2026-27! I hope your summers were productive and/or relaxing, as you intended them to be. This is the first Faculty Senate Chair newsletter of the Fall semester.

- **To new faculty: Welcome to the University of Michigan!** Welcome, also, to the ~7800-member Faculty Senate, of which you are automatically a member.
- **Inaugural “Open Questions” Panel on institutional neutrality, and other events:** The panel will be on Sept. 17 (Thu), 4-5:30pm – [register to attend!](#) Other events listed below.
- **Introducing SACUA member Kimberlee Kearfott:** Kim is a Professor in the Nuclear Engineering and Radiological Sciences department. This is her second time on SACUA.
- **Help SACUA prioritize the issues before us:** To help us prioritize among the issues we are working on, please [complete this survey](#).
- **Congratulations and welcome to President-Elect Cybele Raver!** We look forward to working with President Raver, who will officially start at Michigan on Dec. 1, 2026.

More details about all of the above are appended below. And, in case you'd like to catch up on Faculty Senate news from the summer, [previous newsletters are online](#).

Last but definitely not least, I was alarmed to hear that some faculty members' private homes were recently visited by anonymous groups seeking to intimidate them, reportedly because of their association with the [UM-LANL computing](#)

[center](#). Such conduct is exactly what [SACUA has already condemned as unacceptable](#). Our sympathies are with the affected families.

Thank you,
Kentaro

Kentaro Toyama
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To new faculty: Welcome to the University of Michigan! You are joining a hallowed institution with over three centuries of history. This year, [Time Magazine began its own ranking of the world's top universities](#), and correctly ranked us the #1 public university in the United States. (*Time*, in turn, instantly vaulted to the front of the pack in the large-grain-of-salt college-ranking business, at least in my reckoning.)

And, you have joined its [Faculty Senate](#). You are automatically one of the Faculty Senate's ~7800-members if you have an appointment of 50% or more as any of the following: Tenure-track faculty (~3600), Clinical-track faculty (~2300), Lecturer (~1150), Research-track faculty (~500), Librarian/Archivist/Curator (~250), or Executive Officer/Dean. The Faculty Senate elects the ~80-member Senate Assembly through all colleges/schools in Ann Arbor, the Dearborn and Flint campuses, and the Library system. The Senate Assembly elects the 9-member Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs, and SACUA elects the Faculty Senate Chair.

As Faculty Senate bodies, we engage with university leadership with an aspiration to [shared governance](#), whereby important university decisions are made collaboratively among leaders, faculty, and other stakeholders. A key concern for us is the robust protection of [academic freedom for faculty](#), which includes the four freedoms of scholarship, of teaching, of internal criticism (of the university), and of external speech. We also do our best to address workplace challenges that individual faculty occasionally face. If you experience or witness any problems that are not readily solved within departments and units, feel free to reach out to me (toyama@umich.edu) or the Faculty Senate Office (facultysenateoffice@umich.edu).

Inaugural “Open Questions” Panel on institutional neutrality, and other events: SACUA and the Faculty Senate Office run a range of events for faculty (see below), and here is a new panel series we are running this year...

Against a backdrop of polarized politics and social-media sensationalism, it has become harder to maintain space for real discussion, especially about controversial topics. Through the *Open Questions* series of panels, we hope to create space for meaningful dialogue about (for now, moderately) controversial topics. Our inaugural panel will be held on Sept. 17 (Thu) at 4-5:30pm in Forum Hall at [Palmer Commons](#) and feature discussion of *institutional neutrality*, which became a hot topic on campus when [the Regents adopted a neutrality policy](#). We are excited that UM faculty members Michelle Adams (Law) and Gary Harper (Public Health) will present different perspectives of institutional neutrality. We hope many of you are eager for a genuine exchange of ideas.

[Register to attend!](#)

[Fall events:](#)

- [Open Questions Panel](#) Sept. 17, 4-5:30pm, Forum Hall, Palmer Commons
- [Regent Candidate Forum](#) Sept. 24, 4-5:30pm, University Hall, Ruthven
- [Faculty Mixer](#) Oct. 9, 4:30-6pm, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology
- [Faculty On-Campus Work Retreats](#) various dates and locations
- [Political Speech and the Public Square](#) various dates, the Diag
- [Innovate Brew](#) Meet a new colleague! [\[sign up\]](#)
- [Davis, Markert and Nickerson Lecture on Academic Freedom](#) Nov. 5, 4pm-5:30pm, University Hall, Ruthven

Introducing SACUA member Kimberlee Kearfott: SACUA is a 9-member committee, with each member serving a 3-year term. Each newsletter will introduce one or more members. This month, Kim Kearfott says...

“I am honored to return to SACUA after serving as Faculty Senate Chair in AY2012–2013. My primary motivation is to support junior faculty, safeguard academic freedom, and foster the intellectual and disciplinary diversity essential to a great university.

“As a tenured full professor of engineering, I hold a Ph.D. in nuclear engineering from MIT with a minor in public health from Harvard. I spent my formative years across the United States, Germany, and Venezuela before attending university in Canada as an international student. Early in my career, I

served as a clinical research scientist in a medical setting, and maintained grant funding from a variety of sources afterward. My research—driven primarily by interdisciplinary teams of undergraduate students—focuses on applied radiation protection measurements. Many of these projects involve direct community engagement on issues such as radon gas, legacy radioactive waste, and nuclear power plants. Additionally, I dedicate significant time to STEM outreach at high schools and community colleges.

“On a personal level, I identify along three distinct spectra: LGBTQIA2S+, Asperger’s, and electromagnetic (I am sometimes more visible than others). Outside of work, I occasionally help on a small sheep farm and instruct humans on training their dogs for tracking—a search-and-rescue-related sport. My proudest achievement remains teaching a basset hound to fetch a tennis ball.

“Although personnel and institutional structures have evolved since my last term, the fundamental challenges remain—now amplified by leadership transitions and strong external pressures. The breadth of perspectives among this year’s SACUA members gives me great hope for a productive year. However, effective faculty governance relies on broad participation: please consider volunteering, and never hesitate to share your issues and ideas with us.”

Help SACUA prioritize the issues before us: Last year, [the Faculty Senate passed 16 resolutions during its Fall and Winter general meetings](#). We have made progress on some of the resolutions; others are ongoing concerns. There are also other issues from previous years that remain on our agenda. ([Here is a more detailed update](#). You’ll need to be signed with your umich.edu account.) SACUA, the Senate Assembly, and its committees plan to work on all of the issues to various extents, but time is limited. Help us prioritize issues by [completing this survey](#).

Congratulations and welcome to President-Elect Cybele Raver! This morning, [the Regents confirmed their selection of Dr. Cybele Raver](#) – a renowned psychology researcher and experienced administrator – as our new President; she will start December 1. [SACUA issued a formal statement](#) congratulating and welcoming her. I sent the statement to Dr. Raver, and she responded immediately, writing, “I am deeply honored to be joining the University of Michigan and excited to become part of such an extraordinary community. I look forward to listening, learning, and working together as we build on Michigan’s remarkable traditions while embracing the transformation

and possibilities ahead.” We look forward to working with her!
