COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

April 15, 2024

To: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division Academic Senate

From: Matt King, Chair
Committee on Academic Freedom

Re: Proposed UC Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units

The Committee on Academic Freedom reviewed the proposed UC Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units.

Compared to the proposed Regents Policy on the Use of University Administrative Websites reviewed in February 2024, this revised proposal is less problematic, but the fundamental issues our committee flagged for academic freedom remain.

The distinctions between Public and Discretionary Statements are unclear: for example, the course offerings, curricular models, and research produced in departmental units very often directly deal with and "comment on institutional, local, regional, global or national events, activities or issues" and these are, often, considered "controversial" by certain members of the university or the public. This applies to the bulk of the humanities and social sciences, but also of the arts. As our committee pointed out previously, statements about evolution etc. from departments in the hard sciences also, according to this proposal, fall into the realm of the discretionary (since they are rejected as merely opinion by conservative Christians, for example, as well as many in public office in the US today who are deeply challenging academic freedom in other states).

It is unclear who exactly will make the call between public and discretionary statements and who will evaluate the disclaimers. Will it be field experts? Administrators? Regents? Won't entire subfields in the humanities and social sciences be immediately out of compliance?

The new proposal still profoundly challenges the UC's fundamental requirement to safeguard (and promote) academic freedom.