April 15, 2024

TO: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division of the Academic Senate

FROM: Wesley Leonard, Chair
CHASS Executive Committee

RE: Systemwide Senate Review of Proposed Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units

The CHASS Faculty Executive Committee (EC) at the University of California at Riverside has reviewed the revised Proposed Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units. We appreciate the increased clarity of definitions and guidance in this revised version. However, we continue to have a number of concerns.

First, this policy has lacked faculty consultation from the beginning, which is contra to UC’s commitment to shared governance. As such, we recommend that this policy be abandoned. Any policy that takes into consideration similar issues must include faculty in all stages of drafting and consultation.

Second, the prohibition of political statements on the main page of official UCR department and program websites put forth by academic units will curtail academic freedom. Many units, including those in interdisciplinary units such as Ethnic Studies, Gender & Sexuality Studies, and similar units and disciplinary units such as Art, Dance, Theatre, Sociology, Psychology, and Anthropology, among others that teach critical approaches to systems of power and oppression, understand intellectual production and exchange as inherently political. That is, scholars throughout CHASS units document how the very basis of university life and faculty work is political - from the types of research that is conducted and taught and considered important to the publication process. Restrictions on political statements that directly relate to a unit’s mission go against faculty expertise and the history and founding of many disciplines and fields of study.

Third, what counts as a political statement continues to be unclear. For example, do land acknowledgements count as political statements? How do political and discretionary statements differ? And who gets to decide which statements are political?
Fourth, we are concerned that labels such as “anti-harassment”, “anti-violence”, and “anti-discrimination” can - and have been used - to silence scholarly critique of structural inequities, which infringes upon academic freedom.