FACULTY WELFARE

February 20, 2024

To: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division

From: Abhijit Ghosh, Chair
Committee on Faculty Welfare


At our meeting on February 13, 2024, the Committee on Faculty Welfare (CFW) reviewed the Proposed Regents Policy on Use of University Administrative Websites. CFW members had the following mixed reactions/comments/questions with respect to the proposed policy.

- Some members agree with part of the proposed policy indicating that the main landing page of universities and departments should not be used to express personal and political views. These members assert that there are many other channels to communicate personal and political views outside of official university landing pages. Personal and political views do not belong on the main page. Perhaps departments could include blogs, or other additional pages to their website, where individuals can express their personal and political views. If faculty, however, have access to these blogs to express their views on politics, etc.: graduate and undergraduate students should also be allowed to access these pages and contribute. Students rarely ever have a chance to post any kinds of views on University websites anywhere, even though they also have freedom of speech and are also an essential part of the University community.

- Other members oppose the proposed policy. There is a great deal of subtext here that is largely up for debate and potentially censoring. It seems like this is perhaps laying the groundwork for departments to not make statements on their webpages. It is agreed that faculty members don’t speak for the institution, but there are a number of examples of all kinds of language that do not fit the protocol for “official business” that many organizations at the university currently employ (e.g., land acknowledgements). Who is the arbiter of what constitutes “official business” and what constitutes “political opinion”?

Would the proposed policy prevent departments from posting a “Calendar of Events” or “Schedule of Speakers,” lest the titles/names of these events be construed as “political”?

This is the University’s own claim about valuing diversity:
https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html.
The proposed policy seemingly runs counter to some of the language from the University’s statement; and this can be a slippery slope towards suppression of speech.

At UCR and in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS) in general, the proposed policy oversteps various departments’ missions and pedagogy, while misunderstanding a number of disciplines within CHASS and beyond. The existence and research of Gender Studies, Black Study, SEHE (Society, Environment, and Health Equity), Middle East and Islamic Studies, Creative Writing, and any number of departments does not exist in a political vacuum.

How does this policy make any sense for departments whose mission statements engage with the complexity of the political and humanistic experience? A "business only"/"just the facts" approach grossly misunderstands the existence of entire disciplines. Under this new proposed policy, what does the Administration envision the mission statement for some of these department webpages to look like?

From a managing optics perspective, this policy seems like a shortsighted attempt from Administration to avoid scrutiny; but implementing it is also going to raise a ton of scrutiny. Furthermore, the Administrators proposing this policy need to understand that what they are doing will create a Streisand effect.

The proposed policy should focus on safeguarding against abuse of speech, rather than safeguarding against the expression of it.

- Was there an “event” that prompted this issue? Would it perhaps be better to address that “event” in isolation, versus create a systemwide policy that impacts all University administrative websites; and which could potentially lead to subjective judgments/regulation and a flood of contentious debate regarding whether a view, statement, or sentence is indeed personal and/or political?