TO: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division

FR: Richard M. Carpiano, Chair
Executive Committee, School of Public Policy

RE: Systemwide Senate Review of Proposed Regents Policy on Use of University Administrative Websites

Date: February 21, 2024

The Faculty Executive Committee of the School of Public Policy reviewed the document “Systemwide Senate Review of Proposed Regents Policy on Use of University Administrative Websites.”

We endorse most strongly the fundamental values and principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom that enable faculty and students/trainees to pursue scholarly inquiry and publicly express their viewpoints in a variety of forums, including the practice of academic units (e.g., departments, schools, colleges, programs) posting position statements that are authored by some or all of its faculty (and perhaps students/trainees). Likewise, we recognize that the desire for faculty to co-author and post unit statements expressing viewpoints or positions on matters of public concern can also present challenges related to stifling academic freedom and fostering hostile workplace situations for faculty (at any career stage) who do not wish to participate, regardless of their reason (whether expressly stated or not). Therefore, similar to the many other forums in which faculty, individually or collectively, may publish or express their viewpoints, we contend that it is fair, reasonable, and important for the UC system to establish some basic standards and guidelines regarding such statements. Such an effort is consistent with what other institutions (e.g., University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Illinois, Brown University) have already produced and the (University of) “Chicago Principles” or similar academic freedom documents regarding administrators, faculty, and students protecting and respecting campus freedom of expression, inquiry, and debate, which many prestigious U.S. public and private universities and colleges have adopted or endorsed.

Given these considerations, we support the proposed ideas that such unit statements should:

a. Not be posted on the landing page of the unit’s website. As a respectful compromise that respects academic freedom, a weblink to that statement can be provided on the landing page to enable access to the statement posted elsewhere.
b. List its authors/signatories and a disclaimer explicitly stating that the opinions expressed are only those of the authors, and do not represent the official views of the University or that unit (including other unit faculty not listed as signatories). The inclusion of this disclaimer is important to help (though not completely) address the fact that the process of producing of such statements present academic freedom and human resource-related (e.g., professional/workplace bullying) concerns when they do not represent the views of the entire faculty in the unit (e.g., one or more faculty declined to have their name associated with the statement authored by others in the unit but feel pressured to participate out of fear of negative repercussions). Including such a disclaimer also helps to address the high likelihood that outside readers will attribute the opinions expressed in the statement to all members of the unit—even those faculty who did not endorse it. Hence, not signing on to a document is insufficient to protective one from negative reactions and future consequences that such statements might generate.

Furthermore, we contend that it is reasonable for the UC system to adopt guidelines that advise faculty that such unit statements should:

c. be based on the professional and/or academic expertise—not personal opinions—of the faculty authors. This guideline is consistent with reasonable recommendations issued at the University of Colorado-Boulder regarding the posting of such statements: https://www.colorado.edu/academicaffairs/sites/default/files/attached-files/academic_unit_guidance_for_issuing_public_statements_using_university_websites.pdf

In closing, we wish to emphasize that reasonable guidelines for unit statements are consistent with and important for fostering academic freedom and a diversity of viewpoints that university campuses should strive to promote.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Carpiano, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Professor of Public Policy