

UCLA STATEMENT ON STATEMENTS

September 2024

UCLA exists to create and share knowledge for the public good. The university's leaders are stewards of this mission and have a responsibility to create an environment in which freedom of expression is protected, celebrated and cherished. To accomplish that goal, UCLA's practices, rules and policies must encourage the widest diversity of views, allowing all of its community members a broad latitude to speak, write, listen, inquire, challenge and learn. Our [mission and values](#) compel this:

UCLA's primary purpose as a public research university is the creation, dissemination, preservation and application of knowledge for the betterment of our global society.

To fulfill this mission, UCLA is committed to academic freedom in its fullest terms: We value open access to information, free and lively debate conducted with mutual respect for individuals, and freedom from intolerance. In all of our pursuits, we strive for excellence and diversity, recognizing that openness and inclusion produce true quality. These values underlie our three institutional responsibilities: education, research and public service.

Given the increasing pressure on university leaders to make official statements about societal, political and public matters, the [UCLA Statement on Statements Working Group](#) was convened in the summer of 2024 to determine whether issuing such statements was in alignment with UCLA's mission and values. The working group was charged with recommending guidelines for when the institutional voice of UCLA should and should not be utilized to address societal, political and public matters.

We recommend that, moving forward, university leaders should not make statements on societal, political and public matters unless those matters directly affect the university's ability to support a research and educational environment where free expression thrives.

Below we offer several key reasons for this recommended shift:

Foremost, limiting the use of the university's institutional voice is intended to enhance freedom of speech, inquiry and expression across the UCLA community.

Members of the UCLA campus possess a great variety of thoughts and beliefs, reflecting the diverse backgrounds, identities and perspectives of our students, faculty and staff. But statements from university leaders on societal, political and public matters can stifle a free exchange of ideas and risk making some parts of our diverse community feel silenced or unheard. When university leaders issue such statements, they risk being seen as attempting to represent the entire community on societal, political and public matters, and our commitment to inclusive excellence may be undermined. By refraining from expressing an institutional perspective, we better protect the open exchange of ideas among those on our campus — something that is foundational to our identity as an academic institution — and we avoid the potential to make parts of our diverse community feel unheard or disrespected.

UCLA's purpose as a public university is to create spaces for conversations that are meaningful, thoughtful and engaging — not to preempt those conversations with official statements.

We also believe this recommendation to restrict the use of institutional voice aligns with the skills and responsibilities of university leaders. These leaders are expected to be adept at leading an institution: their job is to ensure academic excellence; to stimulate effective and meaningful research; to advance new ideas; to protect the university's mission; to set the ground rules and to create an environment that promotes academic freedom. To best serve the university, campus leaders' focus, activities, resources and communications should connect to these core academic and institutional objectives.

Issuing statements on matters that do not directly affect the university's ability to support a research and educational environment where free expression thrives can distract from the pursuit of core university priorities. But there are other considerations at play as well: University leaders may not — indeed likely will not — have enough expertise in a relevant subject to weigh in on societal, political and public matters. Furthermore, putting out statements on certain issues creates greater and greater pressure to put out statements on other issues, requiring an ever-increasing amount of time and resources.

We recommend above that university leaders should refrain from making statements on societal, public and political matters, unless those matters directly affect the university's ability to support a research and educational environment where free expression thrives. Whether — and if so, how — a contentious issue relates to this essential mission of the university will itself be disputed at times; as with any general rule, this one would require university officials to exercise judgment in good faith, subject to critique by community members. In borderline cases, the presumption should be for not issuing a statement. We note that even when events happen that meet the threshold for comment by university administrators, stakeholders should realize that statements and judgments will come at a slower pace than some might desire because we are committed to accuracy and due process, and it takes time to get both facts and context.

Our recommendation applies to the chancellor, executive vice chancellor and provost, vice chancellors, vice provosts and deans. When these individuals speak or share written messages, members of our community may understand them to be doing so on behalf of the university (or their academic school or college).

By intention, our recommendation does not extend to department chairs and heads of academic programs, centers and institutes. There are often similar reasons for these leaders to be reluctant to issue statements so as not to exert pressure, however inadvertent, on how the discussion of important issues unfolds in their units, and so as not to risk any misimpression that they speak for others.

At the same time, we are also aware that the roles of chairs and programmatic heads differ from those of other university leaders in ways that are defined by their academic expertise on external matters and that, therefore, touch more closely on academic freedom. If these individuals do make statements, drawn from expertise and relevant to their work or role, they

should make clear that they do not speak on behalf of the university. Additionally, all statements should adhere to the [UC Regents Policy on Public and Discretionary Statements by Academic Units](#).

We make this recommendation realizing it may be in some tension with our other values. Drawing a boundary around what university leaders use institutional voice to speak about (and not speak about) could be perceived or felt as regressive in terms of inclusivity, and evince an unwillingness to speak out on behalf of historically marginalized groups or on important geopolitical crises. Nevertheless, we believe this is the proper course, precisely because we wish to protect free speech for *all* community members, including marginalized and minoritized groups, and to ensure that they have the opportunity to articulate their positions unfettered by the imperatives that govern the institutional voice.

Ultimately, we seek to build a culture of trust, and commitment to our mission, which involves practicing and teaching real dialogue. We believe, in the end, that what we do is more important than what we say. We should strive, in our daily practice, to model dialogue and work through differences.

UCLA Statement on Statements Working Group

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