

October 22nd, 2018

Further statement on the rights and responsibilities of faculty as they relate to writing letters of reference:

In light of recent events on the Ann Arbor campus, the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) strongly reaffirms its commitment to the defense of academic freedom and the rights and responsibilities of academic tenure.

SACUA reasserts its commitment to the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) Statement of Professional Ethics, which stresses that a faculty member's evaluation of a student's merit should be the primary concern in providing letters of recommendation and to the Association's assertion that faculty members "have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom."

In its previous [Statement on Letters of Reference](#), SACUA affirmed a community standard. Clear understanding of that standard should protect students and faculty alike. SACUA therefore objects to any suggestion that its [Statement on Letters of Reference](#) can be used as an endorsement of sanctions against a member of the faculty.

SACUA is concerned that the widely circulated disciplinary letter recently issued by the Dean of LSA may have a chilling effect on members of the academic community who may, for legitimate and deeply held personal reasons, feel uncomfortable about providing letters to certain organizations or individuals. Such discomfort is fully in accord with the principle of intellectual integrity that is the core of academic freedom and does not represent "exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students," which is deprecated by the AAUP.

SACUA asserts that recommendation letters represent the *personal* endorsement of the writer and, as such, the decision to write any letter *must* remain the prerogative of the author; faculty members should not have to fear reprisal for declining to write a letter. To the extent that any member of our academic community feels coerced into providing a recommendation letter, or stating opinions that he or she does not believe, the integrity of the recommendation is tarnished and the academic freedom that is central to our University is impugned.