

COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND RIGHTS ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR) serves as guardian of academic freedom and rights for all members of this academic community. The committee met formally on numerous occasions during the academic year as well as summer 2017. Because all of these meetings focused on sensitive complaints particular to faculty and faculty petitioners, participation was limited to the four members of the committee that are faculty at the College and did not include the student representatives provided by SGA.

Informal Cases: The faculty members of CAFR met with two petitioners (both faculty) to discuss possible violations of academic freedom and rights. These were independent, unrelated complaints, and both involved multiple meetings. Neither concern was ultimately adopted by CAFR as a formal case. In the first instance, attempts were made by CAFR to informally mediate and resolve the concern. In the second instance, CAFR concluded that the concern was not consistent with a violation of academic freedom or rights. That is, a more formal complaint to CAFR or investigation by CAFR was not warranted.

Formal Cases: After informal inquiries and discussion with CAFR, the committee received and adopted two formal complaints and pursued formal investigations. The committee conducted an investigation into the alleged violations, and presented its findings and recommendations to the President in the form of written letters as well as a pair of meetings between the President and the chair of CAFR. In both cases, the President communicated his decision in writing in response to CAFR's recommendations, and CAFR communicated those decisions to the petitioner.

Other Communications:

The chair of CAFR participated in the Committee of Committees meetings hosted by the FEC during both semesters. The chair also attended a chairs' gathering with President Glotzbach wherein shared governance and initiatives expected by attending committees / groups were introduced by the chairs and discussed.

The chair of CAFR met with the Board of Trustees during the fall and spring semester at Trustees meetings to offer a brief report on the activities of CAFR. Both meetings occurred in person, rather than by phone. At the May Trustees meeting, the chair of CAFR expressed a concern that the integrity of communications between CAFR and the Board had become less robust over recent years. In particular, the practice of members of CAFR (chair or chair with others) meeting with the Board without the President, Deans or Vice Presidents present has lapsed since 2012. In the intervening period (2013 to present), the meetings between CAFR and the Trustees have often occurred over telephone and, to the best of our knowledge, always occurred with the aforementioned administrators present. CAFR asked the Board to consider whether and how private conversations might be different. In a subsequent letter (June), the Chair of the Board of Trustees communicated to the chair of CAFR that the Board discussed the issue during their executive session and ultimately concluded that current practice – where CAFR meets with Board in executive session of the Academic Affairs committee, including the President and DOF/VPAA – should be continued. The Board also expressed an appreciation for why CAFR

might want to change that practice as well as an appreciation for a number of factors that would such an arrangement (restoration of previous practice) less than ideal.

Looking forward, CAFR is aware that the best efforts of the committee often fail to meet the perceived needs of the petitioners. The receipt of a letter that included *Kindness*, a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye, forcefully made this point even as it also communicated an appreciation for the effort in the past. A majority of the Committee's recent recommendations for the protection of academic rights and freedoms have not been adopted. In fact, the only recommendations from the 2016-2017 incarnation of the Committee that have been adopted are that CAFR's letters of findings and recommendations be preserved in other more permanent (and confidential) files. Ideally, CAFR makes few recommendations and delivers those recommendations in a substantive fashion such that the audience finds the arguments therein compelling.

Respectfully Submitted,

Josh Ness
Chair of CAFR, 2016-2017

AY 2016-17 CAFR Membership

Josh Ness (Biology)
Nurcan Atalan Helicke (Environmental Studies and Sciences)
Kyle Nichols (Geoscience; as 1 year replacement)
Feryaz Ocakli (Political Science)

AY 2017-18 CAFR Membership

Josh Ness (Biology), Chair
Nurcan Atalan-Helicke (Environmental Studies and Sciences)
Benjamin Bogin (Asian Studies)
Masako Inamoto (World Languages and Literatures)
*Student Reps to be determined