



Committee on Academic Freedom

Annual Report 2000-2001

Lisa A. Bero, PhD
Chair

During the 2000-2001 academic year the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) met three times, with a quorum present at each meeting. Some particularly complex issues were presented to the Committee late in the academic year and will continue as active issues for 2001-2002.

Committee activities and accomplishments included:

- Revision of Committee Bylaws submitted to Committee on Rules & Jurisdiction
- Reviewed draft UC Electronic Communications Policy
- Commented on report of Task Force on the Future of Clinician Scientists
- Reviewed departmental promotion policies
- Reviewed grant submission policies of departments
- Drafted a comment to Burrill/UCSF Venture Capital Fund proposal
- Advised - on a confidential basis - two faculty members who sought help of Committee

Systemwide Issues

Student Evaluations of Faculty

Dr. Wallhagen, the University Committee on Academic Freedom (UCAF) liaison, informed the Committee that the main topic of discussion at the statewide meeting of the UCAF was that of student evaluations of faculty. The statewide Committee expressed concern that students used inappropriate language and references in many evaluations. Students seem to be unaware of the fact that evaluations are used for faculty promotions and can greatly affect the consideration of promotions and merit increases for faculty members. The statewide Committee members felt that this problem was less of an issue at the graduate level but supported further review of current policies and mechanisms for deterrence.

Academic Freedom's Visibility at Statewide Academic Council

Dr. Wallhagen emphasized to the Committee the importance of increasing the visibility of academic freedom issues on a systemwide basis. Academic Freedom committees currently have no representation on the statewide Academic Council therefore increased communication is needed to compensate for the lack of representation. Dr. Wallhagen suggested that a symposium could be organized to provide a forum for



discussion for members of Academic Freedom committees across the University. The Committee supported this idea and suggested that such a symposium might be used to share information and to set standards in areas such as research publication authorship responsibility. The Committee noted that pressure to publish often compromises such responsibility.

University Issues

Revision of Committee Bylaws Proposed for Consideration

The Committee submitted to the Committee on Rules & Jurisdiction a proposal for changing CAF bylaws. The proposed changes were intended to codify the informal rules which had previously governed Committee membership, meeting times and terms of office.

Review of Draft UC Electronic Mail Policy

Reacting to a request from Academic Senate Chair Larry Pitts, the Committee reviewed the draft UC Electronic Mail Policy and its impact on academic freedom. The Committee agreed to draft a letter to the UC Office of the President requesting regular revisions of this Policy and the need to address data collection issues.

This review was prompted by faculty who expressed concerns to Dr. Pitts and Chair Bero regarding the policy. These concerns included feelings that previous comments from faculty were not considered or incorporated into the draft, that “emergency” was not well defined, and that system administrators may not be able to access electronic communications in order to investigate “hacking.” Dr. Munoz raised two issues which were ambiguous in the Policy: what constitutes an “emergency” that would allow administrators to read a computer user’s email and who retains ownership of human subjects information obtained through the Internet.

Task Force on the Future of Clinician Scientists

The Committee reviewed the findings of the Task Force on the Future of Clinician Scientists and sent comments back to the Chair of the Academic Senate. Two issues discussed in the Task Force Report were particularly relevant to Academic Freedom.

1. The requirement, or perception of a requirement, that being a principal investigator on a NIH RO1 (or equivalent) grant is essential for promotion.

This requirement had previously been brought to the attention of the Committee because some investigators view this requirement as a threat to academic freedom since it can restrict the type of research that an investigator pursues. CAF feels strongly that the amount and source of funding for research should not be considered as a criterion for promotion. Academic productivity should be assessed using other criteria, such as publications and recognition of research accomplishments. If



federal funding is viewed as important by the department chair for financial reasons, this should be explained to individuals when they join the faculty.

2. Discouraging faculty from participating in collaborative research.

This issue is seen as a threat to academic freedom since it could restrict the type of research that an investigator pursues. The Committee felt that faculty should be rewarded for collaborative research, rather than discouraged from pursuing it.

Based on discussions of the above two issues, the Committee strongly endorsed the recommendations of the Task Force related to promotion of collaborative research and the improvement of communication regarding expectations and promotion criteria. CAF recommended that these objectives be expanded to all faculties, not just clinician scientists. For example, department chairs should be evaluated on the basis of how all their faculty progress, not just clinician scientists.

Departmental Promotion Policies

The Committee reviewed departmental promotion policies and will continue to do this in future. CAF takes the position that academic freedom must be preserved as independent from the agendas of pharmaceutical companies and external economic pressures. CAF is particularly concerned with monitoring how the funding sources for research are used as criteria for promotion in some departments. CAF feels that promotion criteria should reflect the policy that academic research should relate to the mission of the University rather than be determined by the amount of funding potentially available to a researcher following a specified path of investigation. In all cases, funding should not determine the direction of research.

CAF will continue to work closely with the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) in order to capitalize on the information collected by CAP from all UCSF departments regarding their criteria for promotion. CAP uses this information to assist in their evaluation of Academic Personnel files and to address their on-going concerns about the extent to which significant disparities for promotion criteria exist between departments. CAF will continue to work with the Senate Office and CAP to analyze this information in the context of faculty issues of academic freedom.

Grant Submission Policies Of Departments

The Committee considered the School of Medicine's (SOM) grant submission policy which, over time, has been reviewed by several Academic Senate committees. Current SOM policy stipulates that all grant submissions must be processed through the primary department of the principal investigator. Committee members expressed concern that this policy may inhibit collaboration between investigators in different departments and may therefore compromise an individual investigator's academic freedom. The Committee on Research (COR) originally took up this issue under Chair Linda Noble, but never officially commented. In 2001-2002, the CAF may consider preparing a letter directed to Dean Debas and the Senate Chair, expressing concern regarding current policy and calling for suspension and review of the existing policy.



Burrill/UCSF Venture Capital Fund proposal

The Burrill/UCSF Seed Venture fund is a proposed \$10 million project funded by CalPERS and managed by a commercial venture fund, Burrill and Company. This venture fund will work with UCSF researchers to support the early development work necessary to build intellectual property value and provide proof-of-principle, leading to the formation of new companies. In exchange for its participation, UCSF will take an equity stake in all companies launched through this fund mechanism. The Committee began work on drafting a response to the proposal that will be completed during the 2001-2002 term.

Updating Visibility of Committee

In order to raise its visibility, the Committee updated its website and received coverage in UCSF's "Newsbreak" on the CAF's role in the Academic Senate.

Issues for the 2001-2002 Academic Year

Suggested new topics for next year include:

- Follow up on review of grant submission policies of the School of Medicine
- Complete review of Burrill/UCSF Venture Capital Fund proposal

Respectfully submitted,

Committee on Academic Freedom

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