

Statement of the Academic Freedom Committee

June 30, 2020

In response to a recent controversy surrounding an e-mail reply to a student by Gordon Klein (a Lecturer in Accounting at the Anderson School), the UCLA Senate Committee on Academic Freedom underlines all instructors' freedom (protected by [APM-010](#)) to express their views on grading policy as they determine to be appropriate.

Some people may well disagree with Prof. Klein's views, and think that he should have responded differently to a student's request that the grading structure be changed to "exercise compassion and leniency with Black students in our major." But instructors are entitled and empowered to say "no" to such requests;[\[1\]](#) and, just as students have every right to express their views on such matters to faculty and to others, instructors are entitled to explain their views in turn to students. When any of us ask people to do things, especially based on a moral or political argument about current events, those people are entitled to respond with their own moral or political views.

The process of evaluating the situation is proceeding at the Anderson School, and our committee has no direct role in that process. Our concern instead is that any public announcement that an instructor is being placed on administrative leave for what appears to be a particular statement—whether the statement happened in class, in an e-mail responding to a student, on social media, or wherever else—creates a chilling effect for other instructors, especially untenured ones. It is the committee's role to try to prevent such chilling effects.

An academic institution like UCLA must remain a place for the expression of a wide diversity of views and interpretations. It should also be a site of vigorous debate—including by students, by faculty, and by others—so that those exposed to or participating in these discussions have the opportunity to hear a range of opinions as they formulate their own views.

[\[1\]](#) See, e.g., [Academic Senate Memo on Spring 2020 Final Exams](#), which reaffirms that instructors have "the flexibility to change their method of final assessments" so long as the final grade "reflect[s] the student's achievement in the course" and is "based upon adequate evaluation of the achievement," but does not require instructors to make any particular changes.