



## University of Houston Chapter

November 24, 2025

Dr. Renu Khator, Chancellor University of Houston System, President University of Houston  
Dr. Diane Z. Chase, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost  
Dr. James Briggs, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Faculty Affairs  
Dona Cornell, General Counsel  
CC: UH Deans, Members of the Faculty Council

### **Re: Dean and Chair Review of Faculty Course Syllabi and Content**

Dear Chancellor Khator, Provost Chase, Associate Provost Biggs, and General Counsel Cornell,

The hundred fifty member UH Chapter of the AAUP write in response to Chancellor Khator's email on November 21, 2025, directing faculty to review their course titles, syllabi, and content, and asking department chairs and deans to "help" faculty align their courses with the University's commitment to exposing students to "different perspectives" and avoiding "indoctrination." The values articulated in your message—academic rigor, respect for students' intellectual development, and a commitment to free inquiry—are ones we all share. Precisely because we share these commitments, we are deeply concerned that the directives outlined in Chancellor Khator's email present significant risks to academic freedom, to the integrity of our teaching mission, and to the University's legal obligations. We respectfully request clarification about the principles and procedures that will govern this process before implementation proceeds any further.

We also wish to note that claims of widespread indoctrination in university classrooms are not supported by credible evidence. Nothing in the University's own experience suggests a systemic problem of this kind; indeed, national research shows such instances to be exceedingly rare. A policy change of this magnitude should not be built on assumptions that lack factual support, particularly when they risk undermining core academic-freedom principles, as discussed below.

#### **I. UH's Existing Commitments to Academic Freedom**

The University of Houston System has already adopted clear standards in this area. Board of Regents Policy 21.03.2 affirms that "The faculty member is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing the subject matter, but the faculty member should be careful not to introduce into the teaching controversial matter which has no close relation to the subject." This provision mirrors the AAUP's Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, to which UH has expressly committed. These principles recognize that faculty have the best understanding of what is essential in a field and how it is evolving. AAUP principles therefore state that the



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freedom to teach includes “the right of faculty members to select the materials, determine the approach to the subject, make the assignments, and assess student academic performance in teaching activities for which they are individually responsible, without having their decisions subject to the veto of a department chair, dean, or other administrative officer.”

The AAUP’s Policy Documents and Reports further explain that “indoctrination” occurs only when an instructor *dogmatically insists* that students accept propositions that are in fact professionally contestable, and not when faculty teach settled questions, take positions grounded in scholarship, or structure courses around particular intellectual frameworks.

Any process that empowers administrators to review or alter course content must be consistent with these binding institutional commitments.

### II. Risks Posed by the Current Directive

Because the email requires review of all courses—with no articulated standards, definitions, or due-process protections—significant risks arise.

#### 1. Risk of Censorship and Viewpoint-Based Interference

Requiring chairs and deans to “align” courses with unspecified expectations about “different perspectives” invites subjective and viewpoint-based judgments. Without clear limits, the process could effectively police or prohibit legitimate scholarly approaches, including courses designed around particular intellectual frameworks such as the immigrant experience, African American history, LGBTQ+ studies, Crip studies, health disparities, or feminist legal theory. Requiring every individual course to include different sides of every issue could undermine academic integrity and distort whole fields of study.

#### 2. Risk of Compelling “False Balance”

AAUP has cautioned that requiring instructors to incorporate all potentially relevant perspectives is incoherent because there are often numerous perspectives that might be asserted as relevant. For example, must (or may) a dean “help” faculty align their courses such that a constitutional law professor offers white supremacy as one “view” of ideal race relations in the United States? Must a biologist present creationism as an “alternative” to Darwinism? While these examples may sound extreme, they illustrate the point that all courses require judgment calls regarding which perspectives are, in fact, relevant. As principles of academic freedom have recognized for over 100 years, taking those judgment calls away from faculty would substitute administrative judgment for disciplinary expertise.

Moreover, universities have an obligation to avoid teaching discredited claims and theories in the name of balance. No respectable university would demand that climate scientists teach discredited studies sponsored by climate change deniers or that public health faculty teach debunked medical misinformation. Faculty are not neutral curators of every viewpoint ever

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expressed, but experts trained in analyzing and assessing the rigor and quality of relevant evidence and arguments. A strong education involves both imparting established knowledge and engaging students in debates; the former should not be sacrificed at the altar of the latter.

### 3. First Amendment Exposure

In its landmark 1967 decision in *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, the Supreme Court recognized academic freedom in higher education as a “special concern of the First Amendment” and necessary to protect against “a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom.” When the government—whether the state or the university acting under state authority—directs or alters classroom content because of the perceived political valence of course materials, the risk of unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination is substantial.

A system in which administrators instruct faculty to revise syllabi or content based on judgments about “indoctrination” or “balance,” without clear standards, would place UH in a legally precarious position.

### 4. Chilling Effects on Teaching and Learning

Even well-intentioned review processes can chill legitimate academic discourse. Faculty may avoid teaching controversial but essential topics not because they lack relevance, but because they fear administrative reprisal. The AAUP has repeatedly warned that the greater danger in higher education today is *self-censorship*, not indoctrination.

Students, and our democracy, ultimately pay the price when faculty avoid essential but controversial topics that are central to civic, scientific, and professional education.

### 5. Lack of Process, Standards, and Faculty Governance

The absence of articulated standards and procedural safeguards is especially concerning. The directive provides no explanation of:

- what criteria chairs and deans will use
- who defines those criteria
- what constitutes “indoctrination”
- what counts as a legitimate “perspective”
- how disagreements between faculty and administrators will be resolved
- what procedural safeguards will prevent arbitrary, inconsistent, or discriminatory decisions

This is particularly concerning because of the absence of any commitment in Chancellor Khator’s email to allowing faculty participation in defining the standards to be used in the review process. Rather, it appears that the Faculty Council, department-level faculty governance bodies,



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and disciplinary experts will be excluded from helping to define such standards as well as the process for this review.

### III. Questions Requiring Clarification Before Implementation

Because this initiative touches the core of the University's academic mission, we ask for clarification on the following questions before any review proceeds:

1. How will UH define "indoctrination," and will that definition align with AAUP's distinction between indoctrination and standard scholarly teaching practices?
2. How will UH determine which perspectives are "legitimate" and which are academically discredited?
3. What specific standards will guide chairs and deans in judging course titles, content, and syllabi, and will faculty be afforded the opportunity to comment on these standards before their implementation?
4. Will there be restrictions on faculty's ability to alter course syllabi or course content following approval of their initial syllabus to address developments in their field or society writ large, student requests for additional materials or coverage of additional issues, or as otherwise deemed necessary by the faculty member?
5. Will these standards be publicly available and applied consistently across colleges, departments, and programs?
5. Does UH intend to require that *every* course individually expose students to "different perspectives," even when the course's pedagogical purpose is to explore a specific tradition, community, or analytical framework?
6. Does UH intend to require courses which teach well-established scientific principles to offer "different perspectives?" For example, will an astronomy class be required to offer flat earth theory?
6. How will UH ensure that this process does not infringe on faculty rights under Regent Rule 21.03.2 and AAUP's protections for the freedom to select materials, determine pedagogical methods, and engage students in contested issues?
7. What recourse will faculty have if they disagree with a chair or dean's requested changes to their course content?
8. What steps will UH take to ensure that the process does not create First Amendment risks by enabling viewpoint-based decisions about academic content?
9. How will UH ensure that its review process complies with accreditation requirements regarding faculty control over curriculum and academic content?



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### IV. Conclusion

We share the University's commitment to rigorous education, to helping students form their own informed opinions, and to preventing dogmatic instruction. But UH's ability to achieve these goals depends on adhering to the academic freedom principles that the University has long embraced. Without clear standards, transparency, safeguards for faculty rights, and alignment with AAUP and First Amendment principles, the current directive risks censoring legitimate academic content, chilling vital classroom discussions, compromising UH's commitment to intellectual rigor, and exposing the University to significant constitutional and accreditation concerns.

We ask the University to pause implementation until these questions can be addressed openly and in genuine consultation with faculty governance bodies.

Sincerely,  
The UH AAUP Chapter