

STANFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS SERVICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STANFORD —

"Political expression by the University is improper and harmful as a matter of policy," according to a statement signed by more than 100 members of the Academic Council at Stanford in the past week.

Still being circulated informally to faculty members, the statement will be submitted to the Faculty Senate Thursday, March 4. The signers note that "every university has been the object of attempts, both internal and external, to impose orthodoxies in particular matters.

"These pressures have often been from the right. But orthodoxy is no less pernicious because its content is 'liberal.' For the particular position that a university takes is not nearly so self-destructive as the fact that it takes a position" at all.

In preparation for several months, the statement explains that "controversies over the formulation of institutional expressions, and the existence of the statements themselves, detract seriously from the University's core functions of disinterested scholarship and learning. . . .

"On many issues, only a small number of faculty will have expertise greater than that of ordinary citizens. The processes through which institutional statements on political matters are considered and enacted are usually incompatible with the University's commitment to rational inquiry and discourse. And the rhetoric of the resulting statement inevitably oversimplifies the issues involved—in precisely the manner that honest scholarship is committed not to oversimplify.

"More dangerously, the University's commitment to particular political positions tends to create an institutional orthodoxy which makes 'heretics' out of those who disagree, and which is inconsistent with the University's fundamental commitment to the continual critical search for truth in all areas.

"Politicization is a force not easily contained: what begins in the [faculty] Senate is bound ultimately to manifest itself in the classroom, and in appointments and promotions. . . .

"In the long run the University would cease to attract those who disagreed with its official politics, thus discouraging the open exchange of conflicting ideas that makes a university deserve its name.

"But even in the short run, politicization of the University through the institutional expression of views will adversely affect the quality of the institution's life. Honest and intense argument about political issues is essential to the intellectual vitality of the University. But when the prize for winning an argument is power—even the meager power of speaking 'for' the University—honesty tends to become compromised and argument becomes a divisive force."

Institutional positions should be taken "only in response to policies. . . .that have a significant and direct impact on the University's performance of its academic functions," it adds. The statement cites as examples legislation requiring students or teachers to attest to belief or requiring or prohibiting certain kinds of courses or research.

The statement as drafted expressed hope the questions it raised could be discussed and resolved in advance of any particular situation in which the expression of institutional views might be demanded. "Global crises present inauspicious occasions for the thoughtful consideration of matters of this sort," it concludes.

Initial signers included Profs. Paul Brest, Merrill Carlsmith, Robert Chase, William Clebsch, Gerald Lieberman, Robert Lind, John Linvill, Herbert Packer, Kenneth Scott, and Wallace Stegner.