



May 29th, 2025

### **University Senate President's Statement before the Board of Trustees**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Board.

I am confident you are fully aware and informed, we are facing a wave of Federal actions that threaten the autonomy, integrity, and long-term viability of institutions vital to our society and economy, not least including colleges and universities. Whether through restrictions of Federal research funding, or denying access to our international students, proposing ideological interference in academic programs, or legislative overreach into university governance, the message is clear: some forces would prefer higher education to conform, rather than to be open to multiple and diverse viewpoints, broadly accessible and inclusive, and independent in the pursuit of knowledge and creative work.

As leaders of this institution, we must recognize these actions for what they are—not isolated policy disputes, but rather parts of a strategic effort to not only weaken, but also erode trust in higher education, including public-sector institutions like our own. These efforts seek to cast universities as out-of-touch institutions, rather than what we truly are: catalysts of innovation, creativity, democracy, and civic responsibility with a lived commitment to serving the public good.

In the face of ongoing challenges, our greatest strengths lies in collaboration and communication—across our University, with other institutions, and with the State government. Recently, the University Senate passed a recommendation recognizing President Koppell's efforts to engage with national organizations such as the AAC&U, APLU, and the President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration.

The Recommendation provided a useful opportunity to restate and reinforce our shared commitment to maintaining the core values of the academic enterprise appropriate to our free and democratic society, and specifically to Montclair State University as a Public Research University and access institution. This includes freedom of inquiry and expression in research, scholarship, creative work, and instruction; integrity in intellectual work and in the supporting administration of our institution; support for the well-being and basic rights of students as well as their freedom of expression; broad inclusion and access, with a cultivated sense of belonging, to the many aspects of the University; and collaborative civic engagement in service of the public good.

The Senate recommended continued outreach and partnership with other higher education institutions in New Jersey and beyond, both directly and through the previously mentioned

organizations as well as with the American Federation of Teachers and its local affiliates, in service of both our institution's mission and the broader goals of higher education in the state and the nation.

I want to take this moment to encourage stronger communication and collaboration within our University Community including through our shared-governance bodies. In my time on the University Senate, I've come to understand and value the many opportunities the University Senate provides for building consensus and charting thoughtful paths forward in the face of adversity. The current challenges provide an impetus and an opportunity to strengthen our Institution through further development, thoughtful improvement, and fortification of our shared-governance practices.

Let us be clear—to those who seek to undermine us, and to those who look to us for leadership: working together, our University will not yield in pursuit of our mission. We will continue to teach, to question, to explore, to serve, and to lead.

Thank you.