



Photo by Lauren Gutterman

Crackdowns on Campus Protests

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An Introduction to the Series

In spring 2024, the half-century tradition of college administrations letting peaceful protest flourish unobstructed on campuses across the United States came to a sudden and violent end as one college president after another called in armed riot police to physically subdue and arrest student protesters calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. By June, more than 3,200 students, faculty, and community members had been arrested—many injured, some shot with rubber bullets. Many still face charges. Administrators justified this use of force by arguing that these campus protests were antisemitic and made Jewish students, faculty, and staff feel uncomfortable and unsafe. This collection documents a weaponization of antisemitism that some have called a “new McCarthyism.”

—Annelise Orleck

Modeling the World We Seek

By Annelise Orleck*

As an aging college professor, I found myself in a surprising position on the evening of May 1, 2024: face down in the grass of the Dartmouth College Green, with a heavily armored riot policeman kneeling on my lower back and three others holding me immobile. Police wrenched my arms painfully behind me as they roughly tightened plastic zip ties on my wrist that cut sharply into my skin. “You’re hurting me,” I cried. “Please stop.”

Though they did not kill me, as they had so many Black women and men in the years before and after 2020, and though I only briefly thought that I might die that night, I found myself croaking the words that I have heard so many victims of police brutality say before me: “I can’t breathe.” Because my face was pressed down into the grass, and I actually couldn’t breathe. One of the officers growled at me the words that I had also heard too many times from police: “You can talk. You can breathe.” As I thrashed and gasped for air, they threatened to charge me with resisting arrest, which at the moment did not matter much to me, since breathing came first. After a while, they pulled me up hard to my feet and pushed me toward one of the college vans that the administration had commandeered from the student outdoor club and given to the police to facilitate the only mass arrests I have seen in my thirty-four years of teaching at Dartmouth.

Like many colleges and universities, Dartmouth had banned tents on the Green after student encampments spread across the country calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and for divestment from companies that profit from Israel’s war. College policy violations don’t usually result in arrests, but Dartmouth chose to report the protesters to local and state police for “criminal trespass.” As a recent court order made clear, “the State arrested each named defendant at Dartmouth College’s behest.” When New Hampshire riot police arrived, there were ten students sitting quietly in five tents, surrounded by roughly 150 supporters, who had linked arms around them. It was a notably diverse protest, with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist faith communities represented.

Over the years, students have led myriad peaceful protests on the Dartmouth Green: to support campus unions, to denounce sexual violence, and to call for divestment from fossil fuels and, before that, from companies that profited from South African apartheid. There have been rallies decrying racist statements in the famously conservative *Dartmouth Review*, calling for protection of undocumented students, and opposing the incarceration of migrant children. Not since the late 1960s has Dartmouth called in riot police to assault protesters. Across the country, student protest has flourished largely unrestrained on college campuses since the disastrous 1970 crackdowns at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson State in Mississippi cost six students their lives. Why are we seeing beatings and arrests of thousands now? What moved college administrators this spring to make such a sharp change in how they handle peaceful student protest?

* First published for the [winter 2025 issue](#) of *Academe* magazine.

Understanding the Crackdowns

That night at Dartmouth eighty-nine people, including me, were brutally arrested by phalanxes of heavily armed men in full body armor with helmets, truncheons, police dogs, and an armored vehicle. They descended alongside several local police forces, apparently called in by the college president and the Republican governor of New Hampshire, Chris Sununu, who, hours earlier, had condemned campus protests calling for peace in Gaza as “100 percent antisemitic.”

A disproportionate number of those arrested that night were students of color. Their own experiences of state violence and discrimination have sensitized them to the suffering of Palestinians. Some of the arrested were, as I am, Jewish. This fact reflects the broader movement for a ceasefire in Gaza, which contains a disproportionate number of Jews who are moved by our religion’s call for *tikkun olam*—the holy work of repairing the world—to denounce the genocide being committed in our names. The narrative promoted by politicians like New Hampshire’s then governor, many media pundits, and supporters of Israel that these protests are “100 percent antisemitic” is, on my campus and others, 100 percent untrue.

These violent crackdowns on campuses have been executed in the name of fighting antisemitism, defending free speech, and keeping campuses “safe.” Dartmouth’s president and other college administrators have argued that calling riot police and arresting protesters are not an infringement of their rights to free expression. Rather, they insist, there are proper and improper ways to protest. “Occupations”—the word administrators use to describe the tent encampments student protesters have set up to evoke the situation in which more than a million displaced Gazans are now living—infringe on the freedom of those who disagree with the protesters, making them uncomfortable and perhaps physically impeding them as they walk to or from classes or dorms. Some Jewish students who have experienced such discomfort have filed class-action lawsuits against their universities for not protecting them.

Regardless of where you stand on whether campus officials should arrest peaceful protesters whose speech is making some other students feel uncomfortable, it is crucial to recognize that this new campaign against alleged antisemitism on campuses is not instigated by Jewish undergraduates who feel unsafe. It is coordinated by powerful organizations with international reach—some of them funded to the tune of tens of millions of dollars by wealthy conservative US donors and the Israeli state. The Institute for the Study of Global Anti-Semitism and Policy (ISGAP), closely tied to Israel’s ruling Likud party, has provided research and data to members of Congress and state governments seeking to pass laws opposing the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement. ISGAP research was also cited in Republican-led congressional hearings investigating the so-called rise of antisemitism on college campuses.

While ISGAP has concentrated on government agencies, many suits against colleges and universities have been litigated by the Louis D. Brandeis Center, founded in 2011 to combat civil rights violations against Jewish or Israeli students. The Brandeis Center usually sues for violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids discrimination against or exclusion of anyone on the grounds of race, color, or national origin in any program receiving federal funds. It has launched suits and legal complaints against Columbia University, Harvard University, the University of Vermont, American University,

Brooklyn College, Tufts University, the University of Southern California, and many other institutions. The center has also promised to clean up “the morass of Middle Eastern studies,” mounting complaints against 129 Middle Eastern studies programs and centers on campuses. “When universities fail to comply with their legal obligations,” the [Brandeis Center website](#) declares, “the center holds them accountable by taking legal action.”

If the language and arguments made by campus administrators to justify crackdowns on encampments sound eerily similar, that is because they are. Much of that language can be found in a handbook published by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), *An Equal Space for All: A Trustee Guide to Preventing Encampments and Occupations on Campus*. ACTA grew out of the National Alumni Forum, which was founded in 1995 by former National Endowment for the Humanities chair and culture warrior Lynne Cheney, and it is now on the advisory board for Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation’s blueprint for the first six months of the Trump administration. ACTA brings together alumni, donors, trustees, and university presidents to help them “fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities,” which might be read as doing the bidding of donors. Calling “Spring Semester 2024 a national and international disgrace,” the handbook argues that “time, manner, and place” restrictions on the right to protest are crucial to furthering the academic mission and protecting freedom of speech. It states that the encampments were “designed to disrupt” and insists that college presidents, as part of their responsibility to trustees and donors, institute “pro-active” regulations to prevent such protests.

Does all of this make politicians and college administrations tread carefully when students protest Israeli policy? You bet. The massive PR campaign to delegitimize criticism of Israel has also powerfully influenced mainstream media coverage of the protests. It has not only been relentlessly negative but also wildly alarmist: One CNN anchor compared the campus protesters with Hitler youth on campuses in the 1930s; another insisted that they were in the pay of Iran, while an MSNBC host compared the protesters to the armed Donald Trump supporters who violently stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, arguing that campus protests are motivated only by hate.

It seems clear to me, as a historian of US politics and social protest movements, that we are in the grip of a national mass hysteria not unlike the Red and Lavender Scares of the post–World War II years, when Hollywood actors, writers, New York schoolteachers, postal-service workers, and federal employees in Washington, DC, were called in front of congressional investigating committees and interrogated about Communist Party sympathies or hidden gay lives. In that era, Communists and gay people were painted as threatening to US national security for two reasons. Communists were thought to want to reveal secrets to our enemies, and closeted gay people were seen as vulnerable to blackmail by foreign spies because of shame about their identities. Now it is critics of Israel’s war in Gaza who are seen as threats to US national security, because they question long-standing agreements to supply billions in weapons annually to our primary ally in the Middle East. The US-Israel relationship makes a few people (some of whom are on the boards of trustees of colleges and universities) a lot of money. This country’s major producers and suppliers of weapons are well represented among boards of trustees of elite institutions. In 2022, more than two-thirds of foreign investments in Israel came from the United States. And Israel’s investments in the tech-heavy NASDAQ stock exchange are fourth in the world—smaller than only those of the United States, Canada, and China. Seen in that light, we can understand why trustees and politicians alike view student protesters’ calls for colleges and universities to divest from companies tied

to Israel as an existential threat. Dartmouth's president is a [director](#) of Bridgewater, the largest hedge fund in the world, which is headed by an Israeli tech guru and invests heavily in Israeli technology.

Money is certainly part of what is fueling the bipartisan response of politicians to this year's wave of student protests. Politicians heavily funded by Israel's premier lobbying firm in the United States, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), are more than happy to conflate criticism of Israeli policy with antisemitism. Just as members of both parties in Congress—from the 1940s through the early 1960s—feared being called soft on Communism, now politicians are weaponizing fears of a “new antisemitism” to further their own political agendas and line their pockets, bolstering military and technology contractors in Israel and the United States as they rile up voters. Fear sells. It generates both profits and votes.

That's where the campaign of shock and awe came in during the spring of 2024. It all happened so quickly it was head-spinning. On April 27, a pro-Palestinian student protest at Washington University in St. Louis resulted in one hundred arrests. Steve Tamari, a Palestinian history professor from nearby Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, was thrown to the ground by police with such force that he suffered multiple broken ribs and a broken hand. His crime: filming the police action. That same week, state police broke up a small encampment at Emory University in Atlanta, injuring one professor so seriously that months later she could not fully turn her head.

On April 30, the New York City Police Department made nearly three hundred arrests at Columbia University and City College of New York, barricading students into their dorm rooms, jailing protesters without water for sixteen hours, and holding two in solitary confinement. On May 2, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) broke up an encampment of student protesters at the University of California, Los Angeles. For hours before that they watched as a mob of self-proclaimed Zionists, some of whom were armed thugs with ties to actual neo-Nazi and anti-LGBTQ groups, beat them, shot fireworks at them, and sprayed them with chemical irritants. When the LAPD did step in, according to witnesses, officers shot unarmed, peaceful protesters and faculty in the chest, face, arms, and legs with “less-than-lethal” munitions. According to one volunteer medic, injured protesters were prevented from seeking hospital care until police had zip-tied and arrested them.

The violence continued at the University of Virginia, where—seven years earlier—actual neo-Nazis had marched with torches chanting “Jews will not replace us.” No police moved in to stop them. But, on May 4, 2024, Virginia riot police called in by the university president pepper-sprayed and violently arrested peaceful protesters, destroying both tents and students' belongings. Two and a half weeks later, on May 21, riot police used tear gas and chemical irritants to break up an encampment at the University of Michigan, on a part of the campus that, like Dartmouth's Green, has hosted peaceful protests for decades without incident.

More than 3,100 were arrested at Gaza protests on college campuses from April to June 2024. The independent Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project found that 97.4 percent of these protests were completely peaceful. Most of those arrested, including me, were charged with criminal trespass: for standing on the property of the institutions where they study and work. Interestingly, prosecutors from Manhattan to Austin have dropped charges against hundreds of protesters for lack of evidence and,

as one Indiana prosecutor put it, because the charges are “constitutionally dubious.” So far, New Hampshire authorities have offered deals but refused to drop charges outright because, in the words of one prosecutor, a statement must be made to “entitled students who think they run the world.”

This theater of repression did what it was supposed to: Bringing in riot police makes it seem that peaceful protest is actually threatening, which is why many student protesters chanted at edgy troopers: “There’s no riot here. Why are you in riot gear?” But those who cracked down on the threat were lauded by Republican politicians. In late June, Dartmouth was cited in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as the only Ivy League campus not investigated by Congress for antisemitism. Our president continued to insist that she was acting in defense of free speech when she called armed police to arrest peaceful protesters. Her rhetoric mirrored exactly the arguments made in the ACTA handbook.

Republican congressional interrogators gloated over the resignations of the presidents of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania late last year. In mid-May, as riot police were flooding campuses to “clear” encampments, US Representatives Elise Stefanik and Virginia Foxx called to Capitol Hill the presidents of Northwestern University and Rutgers University, where administrators chose to negotiate rather than call police on their own students. The irony of a Jewish, pro-Israel university president, Northwestern’s Michael Schill, being dressed down by Republican House members with ties to actual white supremacist, homophobic, antisemitic, and Islamophobic organizations, should not have been lost on anyone. But, alas, it was. Because that is how mass hysterias work.

Some of the loudest self-appointed congressional defenders of American Jewry are non-Jewish conservatives who supported the January 6, 2021, assaults on Capitol Hill, where some protesters wore Camp Auschwitz shirts and others wore clothing with the logo 6MWE, which stands for “six million wasn’t enough”—a clear and chilling reference to the Nazi murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust. Those same members of Congress are now convening hearings to “investigate” how antisemitism is allegedly running rampant on college campuses and in K–12 education.

War on “Campus Radicals”

With the election of Donald Trump to a second term and the ascension of the GOP House leaders to positions of greater power, it is crucial that we understand this latest campus crackdown in historical context. Calling in armed state police to beat and jail teenage protesters may be seen as an alarming new stage in a seventy-year war by conservative politicians and intellectuals to “retake” higher education from “tenured radicals” who allegedly poison students’ minds by radicalizing them. Israel and its supporters have their agenda right now regarding campuses, but so too do conservative educators and politicians.

The war on campus radicals can be traced at least as far back as William Buckley’s 1951 polemic *God and Man at Yale*. It heated up with Roger Kimball’s 1990 screed, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. In 1994, Lynne Cheney rejected the American history standards she had commissioned (and which actual scholars of US history developed) as paying too much attention to “obscure” figures like Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman and embarrassing topics like Red Scares and the Ku Klux Klan—and not enough to Confederate generals like Robert E. Lee or inventors like Orville and Wilbur Wright, the so-called fathers of aviation.

Those first battle cries were alarming at the time. They seem almost quaint now. The assault on education has intensified mightily since 2010 with the passage of book bans, bans on trans children competing in team sports, and the enactment in more than twenty states of “divisive concepts” laws that forbid teachers to discuss anything that makes students or, more likely, parents uncomfortable. In some districts this has meant a ban on teaching the history of slavery, systemic racism, the Holocaust, and anything positive about LGBTQ people. Along with riot police on campus have come new policies ending or drastically limiting diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and calls for an end to Middle Eastern studies programs, women’s, gender, and sexuality programs, and more. Campus crackdowns have been accompanied in some public universities, such as the University of Texas, by the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and the firing of their staff.

The bans in Florida, Texas, and other states on teaching the history of US minority communities go hand in hand with a spate of laws introduced since the racial justice protests of 2020 to criminalize protest in general. Teaching “divisive concepts,” conservative education officials assert, fuels protests. Post–September 11 antiterrorism legislation is now being adapted so that all kinds of acts of civil disobedience—blocking pipelines, roads, and bridges, for example—can be prosecuted as terrorism and protesters can be harshly punished. Again, with a second Trump administration, we can only assume that all of this activity will intensify and that it will become more dangerous than ever to protest on campuses.

Legislation now being considered in Washington, DC, and in state capitals may quickly take us down that slippery slope. House Resolution 6408, a piece of legislation that has already passed the US House and is awaiting consideration in the Senate, would give the secretary of the treasury unilateral power to terminate the tax-exempt status of any organization that provides “material support”—and that includes speech acts—to any supposed terrorist organization. It has so far been blocked by a Democratic Senate but is likely to be adopted and signed into law by the new Trump administration.

What some have called “anticipatory obedience” helps to explain why Columbia University suspended its campus chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace. There is zero evidence of any links between those groups and Hamas, which attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 civilians and taking more than 230 civilian hostages. Nevertheless, Israeli government–funded campus surveillance agencies such as Canary Mission, along with the Anti-Defamation League and AIPAC, have repeatedly charged campus activists with providing aid and comfort to Hamas. That charge has been echoed ad infinitum by some vehemently pro-Israel faculty, students, and administrators but even more vociferously by members of Congress (mostly Republicans but also strong Israel supporters in the Democratic Party). If H.R. 6408 becomes law, we will undoubtedly see numerous colleges and universities suspending or banning student groups engaged in protest—not just of Israeli policy but also of US policies. Student protesters talk of a “Palestine exception” to free-speech protections. But if these bills become law, protest for any reason could be subject to harsh punishment. This is already happening as more recent arrests at campus protests at Stanford University, the University of Rochester, and elsewhere in summer and fall 2024 have resulted in multiple felony charges, meaning that peaceful protesters are now facing real jail time. Such punishment is intended to have a chilling effect on student protesters, and a sharp decline in campus protests suggests that it is doing just that.

As part of the crackdown on recent calls for a ceasefire in Gaza, Congress reauthorized an expanded version of Section 702, a post–September 11 program of warrantless mass surveillance (including private communications). This tactic has already been used against Black Lives Matter activists and journalists. The intent now is to enhance surveillance of campus protests. A proposal to reform Section 702 to require warrants for surveillance of US citizens was defeated, with the Anti-Defamation League and other pro-Israel groups arguing that it would hamstring surveillance of “pro-Palestinian” movements.

There has been, without doubt, a rise in antisemitism in this country and around the world. But the most worrisome antisemitism is not coming from student protesters calling for an end to the horrific war in Gaza. Since 2015, when Donald Trump launched his successful campaign for the US presidency, we have seen the rise of a vast network of violent white supremacist, antisemitic, Islamophobic, and homophobic groups. Frighteningly, most of them are armed to the teeth with actual weapons of war. Continued erosion of any kind of gun control makes them more dangerous than ever.

But I want to go one step further and say that, like the Red Scare of the 1950s, the violent crackdown on student and faculty protests over the past year is itself antisemitic. It has targeted Jews disproportionately; it seeks to enforce, through state violence, surveillance, and legislation, a particular political stance to which all Jews must adhere; and it insists that if Jewish students and faculty ally with Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists to oppose Israeli policy, we can all be charged with supporting terrorism. It seeks to eviscerate the rich array of Jewish identities, which has always included people critical of Zionism. There is no room in this view for Jews whose identity is rooted in the long tradition of Jewish support for minority and worker rights, democratic pluralism, and social justice.

It is ironic, even tragic, that campus protesters have been so demonized. Because, in some very real ways, the student encampments have modeled the new world that we must bring into existence if there is to be peace, in Israel/Palestine and beyond. At encampments across the country, Jewish and Muslim students have broken bread together, prayed together, and shared insights and rituals from their respective religious traditions. These students—the very same ones who have been targeted for arrest, beatings, suspensions, and expulsions—may just be leading us toward new visions of what is possible. And, in these dark times, we need that if we are to move forward.

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A Toolkit for Spotting the Authoritarian University

By Noëlle McAfee*

There's nothing like a rumble of dissent to bring authoritarianism into relief. In placid times, there can easily be a semblance of liberal ease, tolerance, and openness to ideas; but when the status quo is threatened, this façade easily crumbles, triggering authoritarian reactions. Classic ones include demonizing enemies, clamping down on free expression, banning public associations, and insisting that an emergency warrants the suspension of normal procedures and democratic norms. I've been studying this curious phenomenon for many years now, including its psychic origins and the kinds of practices that authoritarian leaders regularly invoke. Even authoritarian leaders who are not very smart instinctively know what to do to garner public support and quell dissent. From Hungary's Viktor Orbán to America's Donald Trump to Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, they all seem to follow the same playbook for manipulating public opinion and reinforcing their own rule.

Until recently, I thought authoritarianism happened only to countries. That changed on April 25 when I stepped out onto the quad of my university to observe a peaceful protest and watched in horror as the Georgia State Patrol marched on to campus, joining Atlanta's and Emory's own police departments. In a flash they descended on students and colleagues, brutally attacking them with tasers and rubber bullets. And then, because I would not step away from witnessing this horror, I was [handcuffed and dragged off](#) to a police wagon. Twenty-eight were arrested that day, including students and faculty. When economics professor [Caroline Fohlin](#) tapped on the shoulder of a police officer and screamed at officers to "get away" after she saw them smashing a student's head, police tackled her and slammed her head against the concrete. Incredibly, she was then charged with battery against a police officer. We continue to face charges of disorderly conduct and criminal trespass.

At that moment, the signs of encroaching authoritarianism that I had been witnessing on my campus for over a year suddenly clicked into place. There were locked doors to the president's office building. All means of communication between faculty and student leaders and their constituents were shut down. Certain words and phrases were vilified. Police presence was normalized.

Weeks later, when I met on Zoom with other AAUP members who had likewise witnessed police brutality on their own campuses, I realized that the very same things were happening everywhere. Virtually every university that overreacted to peaceful protests seemed to be following the same playbook. And it was uncannily similar to the one followed by the likes of Orbán, Trump, and Bolsonaro. I here offer anyone experiencing a crackdown at their own university a toolkit for making sense of the new authoritarian university. Below are the six key elements of its playbook.

1. Foment Fear

Authoritarianism operates by ginning up fear of some potential enemy that might destroy the community. This often involves distorting facts, such as claiming that protesters were violent when they were in fact peaceful. Alternative facts are floated as if they were truth. The most widespread rationale

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [September 25, 2024](#).

for crackdown has been that there is a rising scourge of antisemitism on campuses. This is a kind of gaslighting: everyone talks about the rise of antisemitism on campuses even though the facts hardly bear this out. In reality, protesters have been calling for an end to Israel's invasion of Gaza. The charge of antisemitism is fear-mongering: the product of political and legal pressure on campus leaders by elected officials and conservative donors who insist on conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

This has been happening despite the presence of a disproportionate number of Jews in these largely peaceful campus protests. Even if it bizarrely means calling many Jews antisemites, this tactic paints campus communities as split between good and peaceful people, on the one side, and a dangerous enemy on the other. This consolidates support for leaders who promise to ward off all dangers. Depicting benign adversaries as fearsome threats heightens anxiety that benefits authoritarian leaders.

2. Scapegoating Vulnerable Populations

Frantz Fanon called such moves phobogenic. The person or group deemed dangerous, becomes the target and reservoir for the group's fears and anxieties. Manufactured phobic objects serve as scapegoats for authoritarian crackdowns on peaceful protests. Depending on the context, different groups can be posited as phobic objects. During the protests of spring 2024, the arrested have disproportionately been from groups who are already marginalized and ostracized: immigrants; trans and queer people; racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. All have served as scapegoats though they were in fact the victims of authoritarian politics and police brutality.

Then, weirdly, the victims have been blamed for failing to forgive and move on, for being disloyal and recalcitrant. At New York University, as *The New York Times* [reported](#), arrested students had to apologize and confess: "In order to return to the university, some students would be required to complete a 49-page set of readings and tasks—"modules"—known as the Ethos Integrity Series, geared at helping participants 'make gains' in 'moral reasoning' and 'ethical decision making.'" Even though the students were within their rights to protest, this requirement effectively reinforced the view that protesting made them criminals.

This need to demonize protesters may be why my university administration has yet to call for charges to be dropped against the twenty-eight of us arrested on April 25: Leadership needs to maintain the illusion that those arrested pose a mortal threat to the community. It is also likely the reason that they have not expressed concern for or issued any condemnation of the right-wing group Campus Reform, which arrived on [campus on September 9, 2024](#), and began distributing defamatory posters with names and photographs of those of us who were arrested on April 25.

I wrote to the university's general counsel to make clear that this group was violating Emory's own recently reinforced signage policies and putting students and faculty at risk. I asked him to call on the organization to stop. He replied, "It's not clear that the flyer actually came from Campus Reform, even though someone put their logo on it." How does one explain this unwillingness to acknowledge an actual wrong done, that those of us arrested and still facing charges are now also being doxed and depicted as security threats? The authoritarian playbook tells me why: To acknowledge that any protesters are vulnerable and now themselves in danger would effectively humanize them, undermining the authoritarian's aim to demonize them.

Riven with anxiety, the public tends to fall for these phobogenic moves, believing that it is the students and not the police who are violent or hateful and need to be contained. Fear-mongering fuels authoritarianism by making people consent to a brute power that promises to control these supposed dangers.

3. Consolidate Executive Power

Shortly after they take power, authoritarian leaders claim that exceptional circumstances warrant the suspension of normal procedures. This “state of exception” has been enacted on campuses across the country in spring 2024 and since then, allowing campus leaders to whittle away student and faculty governance and effectively ban peaceful protest. Once campus and wider communities descended into a state of anxiety and panic about imminent threats posed by Gaza peace protesters, many were willing to go along with these crackdowns, even taking pleasure at the punishments police were meting out to the newly imagined enemies. As Theodor Adorno noted in his 1951 essay, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” authoritarian leaders manipulate regressed parts of the human psyche to get people to voluntarily submit to nondemocratic rule and hence their own domination.

When leading a country, an authoritarian might suspend parliament; when leading a university, an authoritarian might, as at the University of Kentucky, suspend the university senate. At Emory, the administration ignored its own open-expression policy, violently terminating protests and unilaterally enacting new rules, all despite the university senate’s protestations and standing policies that call for faculty oversight and input.

Since the 1980s, the neoliberal university has prepared for possible coming states of exception by denigrating and undermining norms of shared governance to the point that faculty councils and university senates now have merely ceremonial roles and no actual power to do anything. All we are left with is the power of public opinion, which requires skills of community organizing and courting the press. Instead of being able to sit down with leaders of governing boards to work together, faculty are left having to protest publicly the university administration’s refusal to honor faculty oversight of the educational mission. In the face of the brute vertical power of today’s university administrations, faculty’s most available path to restoring shared governance is to cultivate democratic, horizontal power, to become skilled in the democratic arts of collective action and speech, hoping that pressure against authoritarian measures might bear fruit.

4. Curtail People’s Democratic Power

Ah, but authoritarians have an answer for that. They instinctively understand the power that can emerge from public assembly and speech, so one of the first things they do is close spaces for assembly and communication among the people, just as the British did with the 1774 Intolerable Acts banning New England town meetings. Today’s authoritarians claim there are imminent dangers that warrant suspending normal democratic practices.

A subtle but telling sign of this is limiting ways in which people can communicate with each other. At Emory, a year before the protests, the university disabled the ability of student and faculty government leaders to communicate directly with their constituents. They were told that since everyone’s email

inboxes were overburdened, announcements should be funneled through the *Emory Report*, the email newsletter released by the administration, an official publication that most people don't read.

In addition to curtailing communication, authoritarians limit opportunities for people to physically gather, not just by violently terminating peaceful protests but also by locking doors. At Emory, for weeks before the police crackdown, the doors of the main building for the university president and provost were locked. Over the summer, academic buildings and libraries were either locked or closed to the public. At Columbia University, people had to [use their campus IDs](#) to get on campus or into the dining halls. At Dartmouth, students, faculty and staff who were arrested at a May 1 protest were banned from the campus green and administration buildings.

In addition to these brute forms of curtailing speech, there is also the more subtle but insidious tactic of increased surveillance. CCTV cameras appeared on Emory campus buildings surrounding the quadrangle where students pass time between classes, where some professors hold class on a nice day, where people gather to protest. A place that was once free, at least on good days without police presence, has become a space of round-the-clock surveillance.

5. Normalize Use of Force and Militarized Police

The most visible sign of the new authoritarian playbook is the deployment of heavily militarized police forces on peaceful campuses. This past spring, all over the country armed police descended on campuses wielding flash grenades, Tasers, pepper spray, long guns, rubber bullets, and drones. At Emory University and the University of Texas they violently terminated student demonstrations shortly after they began. When professors protested, they were smashed to the ground: at Emory and Dartmouth and at Washington University, where they broke nine ribs and the hand of SIU–Edwardsville Professor Steve Tamari.

American colleges and universities are now complicit with a metastasizing police state. The very same police who attacked students and faculty at Emory [are creating new training facilities](#) to ramp up their use of force against the populations they are supposed to be protecting. On my campus, the same students protesting against genocide in Gaza are also protesting the development of "[Cop City](#)," where a Georgia international police exchange proposed using Israeli Defense Forces to train Atlanta police in tactics that might then be used to take down students deemed "threatening." Before the spring 2024 crackdowns, Atlanta [police shot](#) a twenty-six-year-old Cop City protester dead.

6. The Final Authoritarian Play: Truncate Thinking

Colleges and universities have long and often been caught in the crosshairs of political battles, but this past season things seem to be even worse. When otherwise independent organizations become politicized by agents for a more authoritarian politics, they can become adjuncts for authoritarian aims. Agents for this can be governing boards populated by political appointees at public universities and big corporate players at private universities. They choose administrators who will follow through.

Through all these tactics the authoritarian mindset hinders the ability to think, or to tolerate any range of possibilities. Authoritarians trade in fear and dichotomies. They vilify words and thoughts that might call into question how things are. They cling to absolutes and either-or thinking, to the point that hearing

a chant about freedom for one group feels like it must mean death for another. The issue is not an inability to think rationally but an inability to sit with any thought that is indeterminate or engages contingency or ranges of possibility.

Authoritarianism feeds on this. When people are consumed by fear and anxiety, they will turn rule over to authoritarian leaders. The authoritarian needs an enemy in which people can deposit anxieties and focus rage. It's the only way to justify calling in heavily armed police on students sitting peacefully on the grass.

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On the New Guidance and Expectations of Student Conduct at New York University

By Rebecca E. Karl*

The NYU administration dissimulates and even prevaricates. Our provost, our deans, and our spokesman have each proclaimed, publicly and behind closed doors, that the newly issued guidance on student speech, sprung upon the university on August 22, “changes nothing.” (Our president has gone AWOL, apparently remaining only in her own echo chamber.) Despite the protestations, all signs are that things have changed fundamentally. In addition to the walling off of swathes of what used to be public gathering spaces on and near our campus, as well as the newly severe proscriptions on permitted assembly in or around university buildings, this new [guidance](#) doubles down on specific connotations. It broadly equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism and specifically names Zionism a “[code word](#)” for probable racist intent.

The guidance thus legitimizes the newly built environment (assembled in the aftermath of the spring 2024 student encampments for Gaza) that features any number of checkpoints, cameras, and areas that render our “university without walls” into walled zones of exception and surveillance. It also turns into potentially criminalized behavior all speech acts, inside and outside the classroom, that critically examine Zionism as a twentieth-century European political ideology, as the founding theory of the Israeli state, as a form of colonial-settler apartheid practice, and as the ideological and historical basis for the expulsion of Palestinians from their own land. Specific language in the guidance that equates “Zionism” with “Jewish identity” is particularly pernicious and implicates all, including myself, who do identify as Jews but certainly not as Zionists.

The lawyers who wrote the guidance (as confirmed in a meeting the NYU-AAUP Executive Committee had with them and the provost on September 11) repeatedly said that it was not “their intention” to chill speech on campus. As they and we all know, however, legal standards do not consider “intention” as a defense against criminal findings. In our case at the university, they assured us, if a complaint is filed with the hugely empowered Title VI Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO)—its new director yet to be hired—intent will be subject to a rigorous investigation. For those of us who witnessed last year how OEO was immediately weaponized—predominantly against students of color and precarious faculty who had participated in protests against Israeli aggression in Gaza—through bias hotlines and doxing apparatuses working in high gear to shut down pro-Palestinian activism, the prospect of depending on the OEO for any form of fair hearing is a threat, not a reassurance. Already, at the end of spring term, students who found themselves on the wrong side of a complaint were forced to write self-incriminating apologies and “essays” reflecting on their own failings. Some were then further disciplined, declared *persona non grata*, while others were barred from graduation ceremonies or, at the Abu Dhabi campus, were summarily disappeared from view and deported. Indeed, as one of our NYU-AAUP colleagues instructed the clueless lawyers and our seemingly mute provost—our absent president is beyond reach—the tragic irony is that OEO was originally federally mandated to *protect* students and faculty of color who have historically been subjected to racism and bias, while now it is being used as a primary form of hunting

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [September 26, 2024](#).

down and disciplining students of color for their activism in support of the Palestinian people's humanity, their right to resist colonization and genocide, and their very existence.

The new "guidance" is a disaster for academic freedom and the academic community at large. It has promoted, already in the first weeks of the semester at NYU, antagonisms between and among classmates, students and professors, and colleagues, many of whom now side-eye each other with suspicion, perhaps ready to click on that OEO complaint link. Graduate student instructors and other precarious faculty are in the crosshairs of this new guidance, with few protections other than those from their union, which is being called upon to contest the new labor environment. The academic and social atmosphere on campus is chilling and repressive. Walls and swipe-surveilled security corridors prevent "outsiders"—whether scholars, classmates from other universities, or anyone who even lives in the neighborhood—from accessing the university's imagined perimeters, just as rent-a-cops are on every corner and at every doorway, ready to follow activists intrepid enough to engage in protest, taking pictures and recording their chanted slogans. Alleged anti-Palestinian or Islamophobic or anti-Arab bias reported to the hotlines is usually rerouted to the Department of Campus Safety and dropped without further action, whereas alleged antisemitic speech is routed directly to OEO or the Office of Student Conduct to be investigated with alacrity and pursued with purpose.

So, beyond the boondoggle of semantics and imputed intentions, what this new guidance does is take focus off the disingenuous practices and deeds of our university leadership last spring, when the historically racist NYPD was called onto campus two times, to arrest peacefully protesting students and faculty and then to destroy the communities of learning and living these protesters had painstakingly constructed and theorized. What it does is inaugurate and enable a snitch-culture on campus and beyond. The new guidance reflects neither on what rules our leadership might follow to ensure academic freedom and labor rights on our campus nor on how the securitization of the university goes against every intellectual and social rubric of openness that might characterize a private institution of higher learning in service of the public (as NYU's empty slogan goes). The intent to shut things down and shut activists up, to shut the public out rather than let it in, to wall off rather than to open up is clear.

This is, of course, not the first attempt at muzzling pro-Palestinian speech at NYU or anywhere in the United States, for that matter. The "Palestine exception" to speech has been operative for quite some time. It is openly enforced by shadowy organizations such as Canary Mission that threaten with violence, and long implicitly and explicitly sustained by universities like mine, which have singled out Palestinian advocacy for unique forms of censure. (For those who may not be aware, Canary Mission assembles and promotes lists of professors and students, many of whom are Jewish, labeling them as antisemitic for their pro-Palestinian activism. Often occupying a relatively sleepy corner of right-wing agitation funded and maintained by the Israeli state, the makers of this list have been newly empowered in recent months.)

NYU has dense entanglements with Tel Aviv University—including its study abroad site in Tel Aviv; it maintains huge investments in weapons manufacturers who profit massively off the death and destruction of Palestine; and the university has a large number of trustees with political, economic, and cultural interests in the Israeli state propaganda machine. One prominent trustee is Birthright founder Michael Steinhardt, who has been indicted repeatedly for trading in stolen antiquities and whose name

sullies several NYU schools and buildings. These entanglements, along with NYU's partnership with such entities as the Academic Engagement Network (another Israeli state front), have constrained and structured how Palestine can and cannot be addressed as a political or educational principle on campus and beyond.

Despite the longevity of the "Palestine exception," things have changed and intensified this semester. We are operating now under an overt and publicized speech regime with rules crafted by and through a legal team enabled by our university leaders and dictated by external forces we do not know and cannot name. This configuration seems to care for little other than constraining the study of peoples, politics, cultures, and economies whose histories discomfit a powerful few. In protecting the dominance of these few through force, repression, and threat, NYU has capitulated to a dangerous principle while sacrificing the academic mission it proclaims to be upholding.

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Updates on Columbia and the Columbia Antisemitism Task Force

By Robert Newton *

Across the country last fall, students took to public spaces on their campuses to protest the violence unfolding in Gaza. There were meetings, teach-ins, rallies, marches, picketing, and eventually encampments. Columbia University, where I teach sustainability science, was an epicenter of media attention but was by no means alone in the vibrance and stridency of its protests. The response was swift and severe from ultraconservative Republicans in Congress who called Columbia's president, Minouche Shafik, and leaders from Harvard, Penn, Northwestern, Rutgers and other universities before hearings—grilling them aggressively, subpoenaing institutional and individual communications, and establishing a narrative of antisemitism in the nation's leading universities. That narrative quickly took on a life of its own.

At Columbia, as at many (but far from all) campuses, there followed crackdowns on student activism. Anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian organizations were restricted in their freedoms and then suspended. When students escalated their actions, they faced disciplinary processes. When they escalated again, this time to a peaceful encampment in the small lawn that passes for a commons here, they were charged with trespassing. They escalated again, occupying a building full of classrooms. The NYPD was called onto campus for a second time, and students were arrested—this time in a physically aggressive manner—and disciplined again. At Columbia and across the city, more than five hundred students were arrested, some held in New York prison cells without food or water for many hours. There were numerous injuries, including to a graduate student whose eye socket was broken by a police boot while he lay restrained on the ground.

The aftermath of these disciplinary moves, including the criminalization of students, continues to ripple through the campus and our students' lives. In much of the media, and in many parts of academe as well, the focus of activists and media alike has shifted to the behavior of students and the disciplinary process. To an extent, this is needed. Lawyers and supportive faculty must be organized for hearings. Students banned from dorms must be housed. Ad hoc disciplinary regulations must be dismantled; fair and legitimate norms of discipline must be reestablished. The rights of students and faculty need to be protected. But in this shift toward the immediate issues of campus behavior and academic rights, the overall context of the events of the past year has been dimmed. In evaluating our students' actions and our institutions' reactions to them, we should never lose sight of the fact that they were protesting an ongoing attack on a civilian population that has experienced levels of destruction, dislocation, and death not seen since the carpet bombing of northern Korea in the 1950s and north Vietnam in the 1960s. This context is absolutely critical to any understanding of the events of the past year.

At Columbia, the lack of context is nowhere more evident than in the activities of the President's Task Force on Antisemitism, established in response to pressure from House Republican leaders, wealthy donors, and student lawsuits. On the Friday before Labor Day weekend, the task force dropped its

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [October 2, 2024](#).

second [report](#). The ninety-page document is based on listening sessions conducted by task force members with about five hundred Columbia students and faculty, the very large majority of them Jewish. The task force, per its stated methodology, did not question or vet the claims of respondents. Rather, it sought to understand the perceptions, feelings, and responses of some of Columbia's Jewish subcultures to the events of the last year.

After reporting on what they heard, task force members framed the results, settled on its own definition of antisemitism, and addressed the connection between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Through a controversial logic, consistent with the focus on Jewish feelings as determinative, the task force's definition of antisemitism equates anti-Zionism with animosity to both the State of Israel per se and Jewish people. Thus, they found most anti-Zionist speech to be a violation of the US federal Title VI protections against discrimination based on both national origin and ethnicity. The interim president of Columbia praised the work of the task force and posted its report on the university website. As with the first report, the task force released its second one immediately to a wide array of media. There was no internal dialogue or vetting within the faculty, most of whom found out about it from reading the news. Not everyone was thrilled. A group of twenty-four Jewish faculty members (including me) wrote a detailed and scathing [critique](#) of the methods, controversial framing, and erroneous details of the report.

The task force report refers to the violence of October 7 more than twenty times. The word *Gaza* is mentioned only once as a "humanitarian catastrophe." The dislocation of virtually all Gazans, the destruction of Gaza's schools and universities, the reduction to rubble of housing and infrastructure, the deaths of over forty thousand people, and the rising levels of childhood disease and malnutrition are nowhere to be found. Thus, the anti-Zionist animus that the report's authors document in such detail seems to have sprung spontaneously from an antisemitic culture. Even worse, phrases like, "After October 7, many Jewish and Israeli students began to report multiple instances of harassment, verbal abuse and ostracism" imply that antisemitism was sparked by the violence against Jews in southern Israel. This framing is simply inaccurate. In the wake of the October 7 attacks, there was nearly universal empathy for Israelis and other victims, including the hostages. The surge in membership in pro-Palestinian organizations; the demonstrations, rallies, and speeches of anti-Zionist activists on campus; the Columbia University Apartheid Divest coalition; and the strident voices calling for a ceasefire were a response to the massive destruction wrought by the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza.

By writing this critical context out of their report, the authors make it impossible to understand the events of the past year at Columbia. Hundreds of student activists (a sizable number of them Jewish) who bear their Jewish peers no ill have been horrified by the actions of Israel's government between October 8 and today. To accuse these students (and faculty) of antisemitism is wrong—and because it is inaccurate it is counterproductive. The recommendations of the task force, which flow from its one-sided framing of last year's events, will not calm the tensions and conflict on campus. They are more likely to inflame divisions because the targets of their criticism will correctly feel that they have been wrongly accused of a bias they do not harbor.

The task force's reportage of the perceptions and sentiments of Jewish students at Columbia is useful and important. But it is one-sided. And these feelings and narratives have not been validated—appropriate perhaps for "listening sessions" but not for formulating policy recommendations. Student

narratives have been shaped into a framework and used as the basis for policy recommendations by a task force that equates opposition to Zionism with opposition to the State of Israel per se and with antisemitism. Such an equation is both false and dismissive of the thousands of students and faculty who feel an urgent need to stop the killing in Gaza, who support equality for all people living in Israel/Palestine, who also feel love for their Jewish friends and colleagues.

At the end of its second report, the task force signals its intention to produce a third report, attending to “inclusion” in classrooms and content in curriculum. Ponder that. Professors on our campus are already being called before Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action inquiries to answer to students who feel that their discomfort at classroom speech is sufficient evidence of bias.

Columbia needs to do better. We owe it to our students to set the recent report aside until a more appropriate, well-rounded process can be constituted. And we must not permit a politically and culturally narrow group—none of whose expertise is in educational norms, academic freedom, or curriculum development—to join the cacophony of interest groups already trying to tell faculty how and what to teach in their own fields.

Robert Newton is a member of the Columbia University AAUP Executive Committee. He retired in 2022 as a senior research scientist at Columbia University’s Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory. Now he teaches in Columbia’s Sustainability Science program.

Institutional Neutrality, Expressive Activities Policies, and Administrative Shamelessness

By Benjamin Robinson*

At the end of July of this year, the Indiana University Board of Trustees approved a new [Expressive Activity Policy](#), which took effect on August 1, banning all legally protected expression on IU campuses—whether a protest or just a peep—from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Since then, hundreds have joined weekly [candlelight vigils](#) on the Bloomington campus at 11 p.m. every Sunday in defiance of the ban. I and twenty others have been [cited for violation of this absurd policy](#) and sanctioned with reprimands in our personnel files. For staff, the reprimands spell out that further violation means termination; for faculty that has been softened with a warning that it “may result in . . . termination of appointment.” While surely many more than nineteen people at IU have expressed themselves after 11 p.m., IU police and administrators are targeting only the expression the courts hold to be at the core of the First Amendment: namely, public political speech.

What’s more shocking even than such blanket crackdowns on expression since students first began establishing encampments in support of peace in Gaza in April and May of this year is the shamelessness with which university leaders across the country are now claiming to be acting in the interest of “institutional neutrality” and securing “expressive activity” for all. The duplicity reminds me of developers who tear down a stand of oaks only to name their tidy development “Oak Grove.”

Seeing the fury with which my administration—once it had torn down the Gaza encampment in IU Bloomington’s historic assembly ground this August 1—proceeded to ring the Dunn Meadow protest site with hurricane fencing, dig it up with bulldozers, and post notification that the chain-link fence was protecting expressive activity, a student I know commented bitterly, “It’s like they’re saying, ‘This chair is for everyone, so no one can sit in it.’”

It’s urgent that we ask ourselves honestly and exactly what is going on at our campuses, with the extraordinary police violence last spring (resulting in [over 3,100 arrests](#)), followed this fall by nationwide [policies](#) intended to stifle any new protest. The basic answer seems to be this: In order to avoid any acknowledgment of the moral courage of students whose protests have succeeded in rupturing the country’s most charged political taboo—against criticizing Israel’s ethnonationalist siege of the Palestinian people—top administrators, with a single voice, have dubbed the protests “[a national and international disgrace](#)” and invented the story that an outbreak of disruptive expression this past spring had disfigured our campuses, undermined our educational missions, and deprived bystanders of their own expressive rights. This administrative lie has become so pervasive that it is hard to see how thoroughly it’s chilling and corrupting every aspect of campus life across the country.

In Bloomington, those of us who joined with students last April didn’t see *protesters* failing to understand civil discourse—a supposed failure that many [a pious campus committee](#) has now been [convened to address](#). What we saw were students, faculty, and staff gathering to fulfill their most

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [October 7, 2024](#).

profound civil obligation to bear witness against injustice: in this case, Israeli crimes of apartheid and genocide tolerated by our national leaders. What we saw, too, was a university administration willing to [call out snipers and riot police](#), camouflaged troopers, armed with assault rifles and tear gas, helicopters, BearCat armored vehicles, and drones, to arrest fifty-seven protesters (including me)—and to do so mere hours after it had [clandestinely changed a policy](#) in place for fifty-five years protecting the right to protest. This short-lived [new policy](#), in effect just long enough for the April arrests, sought a pretext for police action by removing existing language abjuring force (“[the University should not use physical force to enforce these rules](#)”) and adding a requirement for advanced approval for the tents and signage that students on the verge of assembling in the meadow had no time to seek.

Any reasonable person not caught up in our leaders’ fictions would place the failure of civil discourse elsewhere rather than among the protesters on Dunn Meadow. Might not the four administrators who met at 11:49 p.m. to change the historic free expression policy be the ones who need a lesson in civil discourse? What about the Indiana State Police superintendent, whose comments on the spring arrests [need to be read to be believed](#)?

Haven’t our top administrators failed to grasp something important about civil discourse? After all, the crackdown on expressive activity this August provides solid evidence that they haven’t learned the most basic lessons about democracy since their midnight policy change in April. Indeed they are defendants in two lawsuits we have brought with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): [one](#) for banning us from campus in April and [one](#) for banning overnight free expression as of August.

It is quite clearly administrators, not protesters, who disrupted and disfigured our campuses this past spring. But a lie needs no evidence, and none has been offered to show that there has been any substantial increase in the number of disruptive incidents by students this past year. Nor is there any evidence showing that students are responsible for an impeded campus learning environment. While danger and safety are omnipresent concerns for administrators, available data, such as those collected by the Crowd Counting Consortium at Harvard and University of Connecticut, [show](#) no such rise of dangerous incivility.

Rather than evidence for a crisis of expression among the rank-and-file—one so urgent that new time, manner, and place restrictions and pervasive surveillance must be imposed without faculty involvement—we have seen overwhelming evidence for a crisis of leadership, as administrators have capitulated helplessly to threats by strident pro-Israel donors, legislators, and litigants. Bullying by donors such as Bill Ackman, Leon Cooperman, Ken Griffin, Robert Kraft, Ronald Lauder, and Marc Rowan is well-known, as are the McCarthyite attacks by legislators such as Elise Stefanik, Virginia Foxx, and Jim Banks. Less high-profile, but increasingly important to the crackdown, are civil suits by litigants who claim antigencide protests violate their rights. The most prominent cases are [Frankel v. Regents of the University of California](#), brought by three students who claim “a religious obligation to support the Jewish state of Israel,” and [Kestenbaum v. Harvard](#), which alleges that protests, walkouts, and die-ins—as well as a public statement by student groups and a law exam on the Israel-Gaza conflict—constitute “bullying of Jewish students.” Recently, suits have been filed against individual protesters and organizations supporting Palestine, such as [Manhart v. AJP Education Foundation](#), which alleges a connection between protesters and “foreign terrorist organizations,” claiming that “defendants’ tortious

conduct as a form of purported protest will metastasize in the body politic.” Cases like this attack the historic tradition of civil disobedience itself in order to protect Israel from criticism.

This crisis of cowardice among campus leaders means that our universities have abandoned neutrality to become virtual fortresses of repression and to silence protest involving Israel’s actions in Palestine. Let me make this institutional partisanship tangible by listing the projects for which IU has earmarked millions of dollars since last April alone:

- \$400K on a Cooley LLP [“Independent Post-Action Review”](#) whitewashing IU’s suppression of the spring protests and concluding with recommendations for sharpened curtailment of expressive activity, centralization of police operations, increased use of drones, CCTV surveillance, encryption, and tighter top-down information management;
- another \$100K on [fencing off, digging up](#), and installing a sprinkler system on the campus assembly grounds;
- an undisclosed amount to equip a police Emergency Operations Center with heightened surveillance capacity, as recommended by Cooley LLP;
- hundreds of thousands per year to establish and fill a new police operations role, appointing Anthony Williams as [chief law enforcement officer](#) to begin on August 1, the first day of IU’s new expressive activity policy;
- over \$2 million per year for an [across-the-board police pay raise](#) for more than two hundred IU police department officers; and
- between \$1 and \$3 million per year more for [“leadership enhancements for the Bloomington campus,”](#) including a new Office of the Chancellor to oversee campus operations and insulate our president from her faculty.

When we see expenditures in this amount to silence dissent, the critical importance of the new expressive activity policies comes into focus. After all, a key problem that emerged with the administration’s police action last April is that, despite changing policy a few hours earlier to suit them, the state police troopers could still find no plausible reason for arrest. As [an investigation](#) of police and administration emails sent the day of the arrests reveals:

More than two hours before Indiana State Police began making arrests on April 25, it appears ISP and IUPD were looking for a reason to arrest protesters. Monroe County Deputy Prosecutor Jeff Kehr told [IUPD Public Safety Superintendent Ben] Hunter in an email that declaring the Dunn Meadow group an “unlawful assembly,” as ISP had apparently advised, could not occur unless the group became a riot. “(W)hich is not what you have (yet anyway),” Kehr wrote.

Of course, under these circumstances the county prosecutor dropped charges against the protesters like hot potatoes, declaring the arrests [“constitutionally dubious.”](#)

This is where the \$400K report by the Palo Alto firm Cooley LLP comes in. One of twenty-four firms that [threatened law school deans](#) to blacklist their graduates if they were found to be among the protesters, Cooley was hired to give better legal cover for the next round of repression. What’s so dumbfounding is just how badly spent IU’s \$400K was. The policy recommended by Cooley—“to prevent disruptive and dangerous incidents” —and eventually drafted by IU’s Office of the Vice President &

General Counsel, has no peer for sheer stupidity. Among its many awful provisions, the one that the community is defying at our 11 p.m. vigils, bans all expression at that hour. Without a verbatim quote it's hard to believe what it explicitly forbids:

- (1) Participating in speech or conduct protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States
- (2) Communicating by any lawful verbal, written, audio visual, or electronic means
- (3) Participating in peaceful assembly

It is a violation to talk, email, or wear a graphic T-shirt on IU property after 11 p.m. You can't even text your family to say you're on your way home after a long evening of grading or let off steam "discussing current events with a friend," as our [ACLU suit](#) points out. Meanwhile, having dropped \$400K on Cooley to be told that it had been a bad look to enforce policy inconsistently, the administration has been goaded into going after everyone and not just those speaking up for Palestine.

Every Sunday night the police are out fingering faculty, students, and staff for reading aloud civil rights quotes by candlelight at the campus gates. Of course, ratting on friends, neighbors, and colleagues at midnight is unpopular, so the Office of Student Conduct has been sending extraordinary emails, reminiscent of East Germany's Stasi, pressuring faculty and administrators to show up at 11 p.m. to assist the brand-new chief law enforcement officer in identifying colleagues for disciplinary referral.

My own disciplinary referral from August 25 alleged that I "gestur[ed] for people . . . to form a circle . . . and provided remarks to the group" as "people were intently listening and nodding their heads." While to the uninitiated that might sound like material for a teaching dossier providing evidence of effective instruction, it resulted instead in an official letter of reprimand in my personnel file. But such details, as harmful as they are, are the farcical part of what's happening, something only an expensive law firm like Cooley could cook up to collect fees from an incompetent administration such as ours.

Much more serious than the farce—what we have to keep front and center in our efforts to restore sanity to our university and help bring just peace to Palestine, Lebanon, and Israel—is the poisonous compact between repression and deception coming from the highest level of our administrations. Our trustees (with a pair of dissenting allies on the board) just passed a resolution declaring "[Institutional Neutrality](#)"—the same board that didn't blanch at approving millions to gag and cow our campus into silence on Palestine. This is the same neutrality enjoined by [H.R. 7683](#), the campus free expression and neutrality bill that the US House of Representatives rushed to approve just last week. While our campuses like to see themselves as places of moral principle, the neutrality on our leaders' lips is not that of prudence—it is the neutrality of the graveyard.

As worn out as we are at IU Bloomington, though, I want my AAUP readers to know that every day I see new faces—students, friends, neighbors, colleagues—stepping up with their light. We're keeping watch, and we refuse to let IU be the place where civil courage goes to die.

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Fighting UT Austin's Crackdowns on Protests and DEI

By Karma R. Chávez and Lauren Gutterman*

Like many campuses during the spring of 2024, the University of Texas at Austin was the site of important student, faculty, and community pro-Palestine protests and the site of intense police and administrative crackdowns. Unlike many other large campuses though, ours also transpired the same semester that Texas S.B. 17—a law that banned diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices, officers, and considerations in hiring—went into effect. The confluence of these two political phenomena left those of us invested in free speech, academic freedom, shared governance, and due process reeling. But it also offers important lessons for our battles going forward.

In addition to our local AAUP chapter, our campus is home to a student-led Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) and the newly formed Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (FSJP), both affiliated with national organizations. While PSC has always led educational and occasional protest events on campus, its activity understandably ramped up following the events of October 7, 2023. FSJP formed later in the fall with a mission to offer educational activities, hold the administration accountable, and, most importantly, to support the students in PSC.

Within just a few days of October 7, UT Austin's administration showed its unwillingness to support Palestinian students and their allies. This was demonstrated after men claiming to have been members of the Israeli Defense Forces accosted and threatened students attending an on-campus PSC-led teach-in on October 12. Despite video evidence of the event, the university refused to respond. A few weeks later two teaching assistants were asked by students in their social work class on mental health to address the mental health needs of Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab students. As we've [written elsewhere](#), when the TAs sent a professor-approved message to the class, a student complained, and in less than forty-eight hours, the TAs were removed from their teaching posts and told they would not be reappointed as TAs the following semester. The UT Austin AAUP chapter's leaders intervened, citing procedural concerns. Students kicked off a round of protests. Four students were disciplined after they delivered a letter to Dean Allan Cole, who had dismissed the TAs. Over the course of a few months, the university rejected the TAs' formal grievances and upheld their dismissal.

In both these incidents during the fall of 2023, members of the AAUP chapter and FSJP expressed concern, [including to the president](#), about the status of free speech, academic freedom, and due process at the university. Furthermore, given that the university had issued two statements expressing support for Jewish students and concern about antisemitism while neglecting to demonstrate the same concern for Palestinians, we had special worry about the learning conditions for Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students on campus.

The spring began with PSC- and FSJP-led protests, teach-ins, and other educational events, often carried out in partnership with a wide array of coalitional partners from the campus and community. While the university continued to refuse to address the harassment on October 12, PSC and its allies continued to

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [October 11, 2024](#).

build momentum. But on March 27, Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued [an executive order](#) requiring universities and colleges to review and update their free speech policies and ensure groups like PSC are disciplined, possibly to the point of expulsion, for violating them. In addition, Abbott required institutions of higher education to include in their free speech policies the state's definition of antisemitism, which conflates critiques of Zionism with antisemitism. The direct threat to PSC, which is explicitly not antisemitic, was especially worrying to AAUP, FSJP, and our allies.

While pro-Palestinian repression on campus was growing, the university's leaders were taking steps to comply with the state's new anti-DEI law, which went into effect on January 1, 2024. They dismantled programs and services for marginalized students across campus and moved staff members into different positions unrelated to DEI. Despite these significant institutional changes, on April 2, more than sixty UT Austin staff who had formally held DEI positions [received notice](#) that they were fired. The vast majority of those receiving pink slips were [people of color](#). The university's initial announcement of the firings offered vague explanations related to redundancies, but President Jay Hartzell later told faculty that the firings were made in response to [outside political pressure](#). Emboldened by the state government, Hartzell did not back down on his decision despite repeated attempts to ask for accountability.

Meanwhile the national movement for Palestine on campuses was in full swing, and in the middle of April other universities like Columbia would announce the Popular University for Gaza, which on many campuses manifested in students making encampments in public spaces on campus. UT's PSC did not mention an encampment in its announcement of its April 24 event. It called for a walkout of class, followed by a gathering on the south lawn to include teach-ins, study breaks, artistic activities, and pizza. However, the night before UT's Popular University was set to launch, officials with the Office of the Dean of Students reached out to the registered student group to let them know that their event the next day would be canceled. In the justification, [officials wrote](#) that UT "will not allow this campus to be 'taken' and protestors to derail our mission in ways that groups affiliated with your national organization have accomplished elsewhere."

Nevertheless, on April 24 around 11:30 a.m., student organizers and protesters convened as planned, and within minutes they were surrounded by state troopers on the Speedway Mall. As shown in [extensive video evidence](#), police trapped students into an area with no exits. Student organizers can be seen in videos explaining to police that they are trying to comply with the dispersal order and announcing to protesters that they need to leave. But arrests started almost immediately without provocation. By the end of the day fifty-seven people had been arrested, and countless others had been traumatized by the experience.

Almost immediately, the AAUP chapter's leaders began drafting [a petition of no confidence](#) in President Hartzell. The cumulative effects of the extensive use of police force and arrests as well as the unjust firings of DEI staff were too much. FSJP organized an emergency protest for April 25 to call attention to the injustices of the previous day and to keep all eyes on Gaza, which was the original purpose of launching a Popular University on our campus.

In the subsequent days, more than [650 faculty signed](#) the petition of no confidence, but UT's faculty council refused to put the matter up for a formal vote. Following the events of April 24, the university

issued PSC a temporary suspension of its status as a registered student group. While supporters of the student movement on campus and in the community debated the best strategies for response, two events were scheduled for April 29. The first was a [FSJP-organized vigil](#) to honor Palestinian academics killed in Israeli's "scholasticide" in Gaza, a term referring to Israel's complete destruction of educational infrastructure, including destroying universities and slaughtering hundreds of professors and students. For an hour in the hot Texas sun, some forty faculty stood silently in regalia, holding the name of a murdered Palestinian colleague. Students handed out pamphlets explaining the meaning of our vigil to passersby. Immediately after, the [Texas State Employees Union](#) rallied to keep attention on the fired former DEI staff. As that rally was ending, a group of people chanted and encouraged attendees to join them on the South Lawn of campus.

Within minutes of their arrival on the lawn, state troopers on motorcycles descended on campus. PSC had not organized this protest, and several of its members sat with FSJP members on the sidelines watching the aggressive display of policing unfold once again. By the end of the day, [seventy-nine people had been arrested](#). Remaining protesters stayed late into the day, facing pepper spray and flash bombs, chanting "Who killed Uvalde? You killed Uvalde!" into the faces of the many police forces on campus.

UT's president remained defiant. In a later meeting for the faculty council, he defended his actions and claimed he would militarize campus again if the situation, in his mind, warranted it. The faculty council refused to pass a resolution demanding accountability and supporting the students. It eventually passed [a watered-down resolution](#) asking for explanations but, significantly, demanding amnesty for student protesters and campus community members. This would not happen. In the meantime, fifty-one Republican members of the Texas State House of Representatives sent President Hartzell a signed letter, cc'ing the executive committee of the UT Austin AAUP, supporting him and telling us to resign.

Travis County Attorney Delia Garza not only dropped trespassing charges against all the protesters but also [chastised the president](#) for this misuse of state resources. Nevertheless, the university continued with disciplinary proceedings against the arrested students and issued [a combative statement](#) attacking Garza. Faculty organized to serve as advisers to the arrested students during their disciplinary proceedings. However, the university used an unprecedented process purportedly to streamline the discipline. The Office of the Dean of Students required students to respond to a series of potentially incriminating questions supposedly intended to make students reflect on their participation and apologize for it. This was especially worrisome given that the county attorney has two years to reconsider and refile the criminal charges. Students received punishments ranging from probation to deferred suspension or outright suspension.

During the summer, as these proceedings unfolded, the university also rewrote its protest and free speech policies, adding several clauses that give administrative leaders greater authority both to limit expressive activity and to prevent students from congregating in various locations on campus, among other questionable changes that make it harder to demonstrate. As the semester started, the dean of students announced a [new office, Event Readiness and Response](#), hiring a former police officer to helm it. Although mounted state troopers were on campus October 7, 2024, in anticipation of events that may have transpired, the PSC planned a "study in" and a Students for a Democratic Society "speak out" at the

fountain went off without incident. Despite a small police presence and surveillance from staff with the Office of the Dean of Students, the rest of the week's events went off without incident.

UT Austin's AAUP chapter and FSJP have several serious concerns about what has happened so far in 2024. Among them include potentially unconstitutional free speech policies, policies that severely impact the ability for Palestinians and their allies to have academic freedom and practices that suggest a further disintegration of shared governance and due process.

The events of 2024 also bring to light several important lessons that should be taken very seriously by the AAUP and allied organizations on campuses nationwide. It goes without saying that Texas is a more repressive state than many others in which our members may reside. Nevertheless, we fear that Texas is meant to be the gold standard for reactionary university administrators and right-wing state legislators. This is affirmed by the number of states that have proposed anti-DEI legislation and antisemitism and free speech policies that mirror those adopted in Texas. This is also affirmed by the fact that no matter the general political persuasion of a given campus, university administrators around the country are in conversation with one another and are [adopting each other's policies and strategies](#).

The most important lesson is that faculty must be organized to address the grave threats facing our campuses. The content of each chapter's organization must include at least the following:

- 1) a coordinated effort to support students (and faculty and staff) who face disciplinary proceedings or termination for their constitutionally protected activities or those who work (or worked) in jobs that are under threat due to bans on things like DEI;
- 2) creating subcommittees tasked with becoming intimately familiar with university policies so that faculty can quickly and accurately respond when changes occur or when universities act in ways that may be in conflict with existing policies;
- 3) robust educational activities on protest, free speech, academic freedom, due process, and shared governance must be held throughout campus so that faculty understand their rights and the rights of students and staff (our communities need to be informed so that the chilling effect does not do the work that policies otherwise would); and
- 4) essential efforts to ensure that faculty don't cower in the face of university repression. The refusal to cower must entail
 1. continuing to talk about university repression and its impacts on students, faculty and staff and talking to and organizing with students (they'll accuse us of indoctrinating students whether we talk to them or not, so this is an opportunity to build power—plus, we all know we can't even get students to read a syllabus!);
 2. teaching exactly what we deem is relevant to teach in any given class, even if it makes us and others uncomfortable; and
 3. issuing statements and other documents into the public record to make sure our discontent is known.

It is certainly unclear whether any of these actions will right the current course of higher education. As states seek to rewrite tenure laws (like [Texas's S.B. 18](#)), which make it easier to fire faculty, our fear is warranted. But what the spring's pro-Palestine protests and the oversized police response make

abundantly clear is that when it comes to the values that we as AAUP members hold dear, *and* when it comes to the lives and livelihoods of our colleagues in Gaza, we are in the fight of our lives. Anything less than a principled, full-frontal response will inevitably fail.

Karma R. Chávez and Lauren Gutterman are members of the UT Austin AAUP executive committee and cofounders of UT Austin Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine

Being Revolutionary

By Asha Nadkarni and Laura Briggs*

Like many campuses, the University of Massachusetts Amherst had sustained protests in the 2023–24 academic year calling for the university to divest its holdings from corporations that were supplying weapons for Israel’s war, with its siege of Gaza and apparent goal of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. UMass has the dubious distinction of being one of the universities with the highest numbers of campus arrests in the last year. For faculty who have been on this campus for a long time (unlike many of our current administrators), the brutal arrests of students, faculty, and community members engaged in nonviolent protests was particularly shocking because it felt so out of character with the university’s history.

It also seemed ironically out of step with the university’s credo, “Be Revolutionary.” Trading on regional and national mythologies of American independence, this has been the UMass brand logo since 2019. In a promotional video this revolutionary spirit is described as “not waiting for change, but creating it . . . asking questions and questioning answers . . . Not to simply be different, but to actually make a difference.” Such canned and overblown sentiments are exactly what you would expect from a promotional video, but they nonetheless reference a truth: UMass has always been a very activist campus. The fact that we have one of the oldest women, gender, sexuality studies departments and one of the oldest African American studies departments—the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies—in the country speaks to the activist spirit of this campus, as these departments were created in response to student protests and demands. We’re familiar with encampments, too—from protests demanding divestment from South Africa (mentioned on the president’s website as an example of [UMass global leadership](#)) to demonstrations of solidarity with Occupy Wall Street and, just a year earlier, an encampment protesting the housing precarity of students in the context of overenrollment.

The first major event to occur last year was an October 25 class walkout by students protesting the genocidal actions of Israel in the Gaza strip. Protesters attempted to occupy Whitmore (the main administrative building on this campus), which resulted in the arrest of fifty-seven people (fifty-five students and two staff members). Students were occupying the building to protest the university’s ties with Raytheon—a weapons manufacturer with close ties to the university—and to compel the university to disclose and divest. There is a long history of students occupying Whitmore (including actions the university now [celebrates](#), like a week-long occupation in 2016 that successfully called on the five-campus UMass system to divest from fossil fuels). In this case, however, the police were called as soon as the business day ended. The arrested students were put on probation through the Student Code of Conduct process, an unnecessarily harsh sanction that prevented students from attending study abroad programs, impacted their ability to obtain housing, and could affect their applications to graduate school.

Protests, rallies, and actions continued throughout the year, including faculty participation in a New England professors’ letter in December calling for an end to US funding for Israel in the face of

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [October 25, 2024](#).

overwhelming evidence of [human rights abuses and war crimes](#). In early April, Palestine Legal filed a complaint with the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, saying that the climate at UMass for Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian students was deeply hostile, and the administration had done little in response. Eighteen students said that they have “been the target of extreme anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab harassment and discrimination by fellow UMass students, including receiving racial slurs, death threats and in one instance, actually being assaulted.”

As at other universities, students expressed their opposition to the war and to the crackdowns by university administrators through two peaceful encampments in late April and early May demanding an end to the university’s financial connections to weapons makers supplying Israel. Students erected the encampments to amplify their requests that the university disclose and divest such connections. They also once again asked the chancellor to drop the university sanctions imposed upon the students and staff involved in the peaceful sit-in in October.

The first encampment was allowed to stand for just one night before police showed up to disband it at 6 a.m. in the morning. The student activists regrouped and built a second encampment that was brutally dismantled by a militarized police force (just to give a sense: 117 state and local police cars were counted on campus, at a cost of over \$100,000 to taxpayers). This force was called while the chancellor was in a meeting with student activists about their divestment demands, which is pretty much the definition of bad faith negotiations. 134 students, staff, faculty, and community members were arrested.

As has been well documented, police used excessive force in making arrests and many students sustained injuries—including a broken leg, a dislocated shoulder, and many who were bruised. Those taken into custody were ushered to the Mullins Center—the campus sports arena—where they were forced to remain in tightly fastened zip ties for as long as ten hours and denied access to bathrooms, water, and medical care.

Two weeks later, the university began claiming that there had been an antisemitic incident at the second encampment that forced them to respond, but repeated requests by students and faculty for details of the incident or the complaint were met with silence.

The Undergraduate Student Government Association and the Graduate Student Union promptly took votes of no confidence in the chancellor, with the faculty and librarians following shortly thereafter. However, even in the wake of these votes university administration seems unrepentant. As the new academic year unfolds, it appears that the last thing they want is for students to “create change” and “make a difference” as the promotional video invites them to do. Broken bones and brutalized students taught us that if the question is free speech about Israel and Palestinians, a “progressive” campus directed behind the scenes by Democratic state leadership is no different than any other.

The authors teach at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where Asha Nadkarni is professor of English and director of American studies and Laura Briggs is professor of women’s, gender, sexuality studies.

Assault on Academic Freedom at UC Irvine

By Eileen Boris*

In yet another assault on academic freedom, civil liberties, and peaceful protest, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, associate professor of global studies at the University of California, Irvine, is facing three misdemeanor charges for her effort to protect students when an excessive force of armed riot police (from twenty-one different units) assaulted the UCI Palestine solidarity encampment on May 15, 2024. She was tackled and thrown to the ground by fully equipped troopers, an incident captured on a video that went viral on social media. She not only sustained injuries but also experienced ongoing trauma from doxing and calls for her dismissal. She has experienced rape threats and death threats. A digital billboard truck roamed the campus on September 26, at the start of the new quarter, with her image displayed as one of “UC-Irvine’s Leading Antisemites,” as if support for the Palestinian people and against the Israeli war in Gaza made one an antisemite. For her compassion and concern, this prize-winning mentor and teacher received charges of “failure to disperse at the scene of a riot,” “resisting a peace officer with the threat of violence,” and “resisting arrest.” Others arrested are facing the first two charges but only Willoughby-Herard faces threatening an officer in the process, a clear discrimination.

Willoughby-Herard is a leading Black feminist political scientist and student of South African social movements, the author of the groundbreaking *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* and numerous other works on transnational racial regimes, feminism, decolonial theory, and the making of youth activists. She is the past president of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and has held the appointment as professor extraordinarius in the Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair at the University of South Africa. That she is a tall Black woman who stood out in the crowd is noteworthy, especially given anti-Black and other racially discriminatory incidents that have plagued her campus over the last decade.

The charges against her come at a time when the University of California has issued to the individual campuses chilling new policy directives regarding “free speech” that seriously curtail protest through permit systems, outright prohibitions, and a disproportionate concern for some members of our community over others, such as Zionist—as opposed to anti-Zionist—Jewish and other students protesting the war in Gaza. New systemwide provisions are particularly worrisome. One requires that personnel advancements be paused until the resolution of any uninvestigated allegation of misconduct against a faculty member, an action that can delay promotion and merit augmentation of salaries with potential impact on lifetime earnings if not resolved quickly.

This proposal undermines the presumption of innocence. Another provision responds to a new state law that calls for disclosure of misconduct charges in the past seven years for hires of faculty and staff members as well as university investigation through background checks even without any reported misconduct. What began as protections in relation to sexual harassment appears potent for other applications.

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [November 1, 2024](#).

Opposing the whittling down of faculty rights and self-governance is the Council of University of California Faculty Associations, which filed an unfair labor practices complaint against the UC system for its treatment of students, staff, and faculty during the encampments. The complaint pointed out threats to faculty for teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for disciplinary proceedings against faculty and staff and striking academic workers last spring related to the encampments.

UC academic senates are beginning to consider these threats to self-governance. Meanwhile, more than 8,200 scholars around the world have signed an [open letter](#) to UCI Chancellor Howard Gillam and other administrators calling on them “to contact Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer to drop all charges against Dr. Willoughby-Herard and others arrested on May 15th, and to publicly recommit to protecting academic freedom and constitutionally protected speech at UC Irvine for all.”

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Cop City UCLA

By Robin D. G. Kelley*

On Monday morning, October 21, 2024, Jewish Voice for Peace UCLA and Graduate Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) [erected a Gaza solidarity sukkah](#) on UCLA's Dickson Plaza to commemorate the week-long Jewish festival of Sukkot. A sukkah is a makeshift shelter or hut symbolizing the Jewish exodus from slavery, when the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years. Gaza solidarity sukkahs went up on college campuses across the country, both to bring attention to Palestinians killed, maimed, and uprooted by Israel's genocidal war and to call on university administrators and trustees to divest from weapons and surveillance system manufacturers that do business with Israel. Days before Sukkot began, nineteen-year-old Sha'ban al-Dalou, a software engineering student in Gaza, was killed in an Israeli air strike on al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah along with his mother and two siblings. He had erected a makeshift shelter on the grounds of the hospital where he was being treated for an injury to his head.

Around noon on October 21, a staff member from student affairs informed the organizers that the sukkah violated the university's new "time, place, and manner" (TPM) policies, while UCLA Fire Marshal Ricardo Barboza claimed it [violated the city's fire code](#). [Chabad at UCLA had also erected a sukkah](#) but faced no such charges. The organizers initially ignored orders to remove the Gaza solidarity sukkah since they knew they had been singled out for their Palestine advocacy. Instead, they pitched tents and prepared to remain.

Meanwhile, Betar US, a self-identified Zionist organization, took to social media to incite violence against the sukkah encampment. In one post on X evoking Israel's pager attack on Hezbollah members, they wrote "we have free beepers for all SJP members nationally. . . . Let us know next time you want an encampment we'll join you!" They called on police to "remove these thugs" and offered to pay legal fees for any Jews willing to "make it uncomfortable" for those inside the sukkah encampment. When the co-chairs of UCLA's Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Arab Racism (of which I am a member) urgently informed the administration of these threats, we were sent a link to the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion page on how to file an incident report, along with assurances from Interim Chancellor Darnell Hunt that our concerns will be forwarded to the head of the Office of Campus Security, Rick Braziel. Braziel's office *did* act but not to protect the students. Instead, it dispatched security guards subcontracted by the university and some fifty UC Police Department (UCPD) officers decked out in riot gear to shut down the protest and dismantle the sukkah encampment. In what organizers regarded as a desecration, [security guards threw the posters and remnants of the sukkah into the bed of a pickup truck](#).

The Gaza Solidarity Sukkot gathering was the first significant test of UCLA's new [TPM policies](#). Like so many other universities, our administration spent the summer rewriting the rules governing political engagement and free speech in a concerted effort to stifle Palestine advocacy and graduate student

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [November 7, 2024](#).

labor organizing. (Recall that several University of California campuses had begun revising the rules or inventing new ones in response to the 2022 UC-wide graduate workers' strike.)

Besides a UC-wide ban on all encampments, the new regulations severely limit areas zoned for public expression to [less than 2 percent](#) of the campus: Bruin Walk—the thoroughfare linking central campus to the dorms—and outside of Murphy Hall, the central administration building. Anywhere else requires administration approval ten days in advance. Students as well as *outside groups* do not need permission to access “areas for public expression” so long as they arrive before 6:00 AM and vacate by midnight—a veritable invitation for counterprotesters across the city. “Temporary structures” and the distribution of “commercial literature” (that is, political literature) are banned without preapproval. There are now new restrictions on food distribution and the use of amplified sound (megaphones, bullhorns, and drums are banned unless approved by the administration), and hanging banners, flags, posters, or signs and using paint, ink, or chalk on university property are strictly prohibited. And despite the ongoing risk of COVID-19 infection, especially for disabled and immunocompromised members of our community, the new rules include a selective ban on masks by prohibiting any and all means to “conceal one’s identity . . . in the commission of violations of University of UCLA policies.” In other words, anyone participating in a rally, demonstration, or peaceful protest not authorized by the administration must be unmasked.

The new rules have met intense opposition from students and faculty. UCLA’s Undergraduate Student Association Council passed a sharply worded [resolution](#) indicting the policies not only for chilling free speech and student activism but also because “they place unchecked power in the hands of university administrators and law enforcement to determine the ‘appropriateness’ of student protests, which increases the risk of suppression of dissenting or politically sensitive viewpoints.”

But behind the TPM policies lay the very crux of the problem: the expansion of police power and the militarization of campus. Last spring, the University of California [spent](#) a whopping \$29.1 million to suppress the antiwar protests against Israel’s assault on Gaza and the West Bank. UCLA alone accounted for \$12.3 million or 41 percent of the entire UC-wide cost. Nearly all of the money (\$11,781,917) was used on security and law enforcement. And we recently learned that our campus UCPD has significantly [increased its annual budget request](#) for more [sponge and foam bullets, pepper balls, projectile launchers, and drones](#).

How did we get here? In the wake of the vicious [assault on UCLA’s student encampment](#) last spring, first by a mob of self-identified Neo-Nazis and Zionists, outgoing Chancellor Gene Block unilaterally created the Office of Campus Safety and appointed former Sacramento police chief Rick Braziel to lead it. Overnight, [Braziel became associate vice-chancellor for campus safety, earning a salary of \\$52,000 a month, without a search](#), a vetting process, faculty or staff input, or consideration that his appointment might be temporary or interim. The university is currently overrun with employees from at least three different private security companies in addition to the UCPD, draining precious financial resources without making our community any safer. (Braziel’s problematic record, both before and after his UCLA appointment, overwhelming evidence of police violating its own protocols, and the administration’s decision to commission the pro-law enforcement consulting group, 21st Century Policing Solutions, LLC, to “investigate” violence surrounding the encampment are detailed in the latest report by UCLA’s Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Arab Racism, available [here](#).)

In response to the unchecked violence, the unwarranted arrests of student and faculty protesters, and the administration's refusal to drop the charges, United Auto Workers (UAW) 4811, representing graduate workers across the UC; UC-AFT; the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; and the UCLA Faculty Association filed [unfair labor practice complaints](#) against the university, arguing that mob and police violence created an unsafe workplace for academic workers. UAW 4811 also organized a limited strike across multiple campuses, but a superior court judge in Orange County issued a temporary restraining order against the strike, despite the fact that the Public Employee Relations Board had twice denied the university's request for an injunction. The administration then turned to weaponizing the code of conduct to punish students as well as faculty who attempted to protect students when the administration's actions put them in harm's way.

Colleagues are still facing charges of disrupting authorized university functions, "incitement of others to disobey University rules," and even "forcible detention, threats of physical harm to, or harassment of another member of the University community." Ironically, it was faculty who warned of the escalating mob violence directed at the encampment and pleaded with the administration to take steps to secure their safety. Our administration seemed unaware that the Faculty Code of Conduct's prohibition against "threats of physical harm to, or harassment of another member of the University community" can infer a duty to *protect* a member of our community from harm and harassment. Likewise, six years ago the California Supreme Court ruled in *Regents of the University of California v. Superior Court of Los Angeles County* that "universities owe a [duty to protect](#) students from foreseeable violence during curricular activities."

In the end, we are witnessing a dangerous trend in higher education that extends beyond the question of academic freedom. The combination of severely limiting campus protest and dramatically increasing the police presence is turning universities into miniature police states. This is already happening at UCLA. The militarization of our campus; the persistent attacks on students, faculty, and staff for supporting ceasefire, divestment and disclosure; and the punitive measures deployed by the administration toward anyone even mildly critical of Israeli policies have made UCLA even less safe for everyone.

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Where Do We Go from Here?

By Malick W. Ghachem *

As we head into the new academic year, American colleges and universities that last spring were at the center of protests over Israel's war on Gaza face two major challenges. The first is the risk that administrations will double down on discipline, policing, and restrictions on student protest as solutions to the conflicts on campus. On my own campus, and elsewhere, there are indications that [this train has already left the station](#). The prospect of a "surveillance university," where campus police roam college and university grounds trying to determine whether student protesters are violating codes of conduct or probationary terms, has become very real. This is not a future any of us in the academy should want. The second risk is that American college and university leaders will continue their passive cooperation with the right-wing agenda of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce (HCEW). The thrust of that agenda is to paint pro-Palestinian student protesters as campus terrorists stoking the flames of antisemitism on their campuses while hapless university administrators sit by and watch. There have been some antisemitic incidents on American campuses, but it is a gross mischaracterization to label what has transpired in the academy over the last academic year as a pandemic of "antisemitic college chaos" (in the tendentious words of the HCEW). The combination of a punitive turn and passivity in the face of the McCarthyite political circus unfolding in Washington, DC, means that academic freedom and free expression are at a low point in our history. To turn this tide, college and university leaders must begin to make a principled case to the public that academic freedom and free expression alike require a robust space for pro-Palestinian dissent on our campuses as the epic cruelty of the war on Gaza continues.

Missed Opportunities

Changing course will require a dramatic rewriting of the script that informed the tumultuous 2023–24 academic year. From the beginning, a concerted campaign to conflate pro-Palestinian student voices with the official position of their institutions pressured college and university leaders to enter into a war of attrition with their own students. Instead of explaining that students do not speak for the university, administrators succumbed to the demand that they adjudicate the Israel-Palestine conflict on their campuses by promising to ferret out antisemitism. This is an important and laudable goal, but it involves contested definitions of the subject that are extremely difficult to apply given the need to ensure a wide berth for political expression critical of the state of Israel. Academic leaders then sought to recover the appearance of neutrality by invoking an equally problematic notion of "Islamophobia" as a substitute for the sin that dare not speak its name in America: anti-Palestinian racism. The reactionary shenanigans of the HCEW forced administrators into the untenable position of having to pretend that they exercise unilateral control over the levers of speech and protest on their campuses. Thrown into this harsh and unfamiliar public spotlight, college and university leaders then used every tool at their disposal in an effort to make the pretense a reality. Through a combination of restrictions on student protest, disciplinary processes, and police intervention, administrators ended the last academic year by investing heavily in the notion that student antiwar protests, rather than state-sponsored, right-wing campaigns to suppress dissent, constitute the principal threat to academic freedom.

* First published in the [fall 2024 issue](#) of *Academe* magazine.

These administrators appear to have done so for two reasons. First, they believed, wrongly, that institutional neutrality required them to avoid any criticism of Israel’s appalling war on Gaza. This position would have some merit but for the fact that many of these same leaders showed no hesitation (appropriately, in my view) in denouncing the horrific Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023. The second reason for institutional passivity is essentially legal and political: a fear of exposure to Title VI litigation alleging a hostile environment for Jewish and Israeli students on campus, and the prospect of a cutoff of federal funding. This latter threat is itself a core element of the right-wing assault on academic freedom. Rather than capitulate to this assault, administrations must mount a principled challenge to the authoritarian campaign of Republican politicians. Such a challenge would be entirely consistent with efforts to minimize an institution’s legal and political exposure. To the extent that administrators remain mired in a war of attrition with pro-Palestinian student protesters—and refusing to challenge the right-wing weaponization of antisemitism that seeks to suppress criticism of the war on Gaza guarantees that they will—the tension between free expression and academic freedom, on the one hand, and the preservation of a diverse and inclusive learning environment, on the other, will continue to seem like an impossible choice. There may be reasons for colleges and universities to resist the demands of the student movement protesting the war on Gaza. But academic freedom, particularly when it is [confused with the issue of institutional neutrality](#), is not one of them.

Why the current student protest movement has set its sights primarily on institutions of higher education rather than the federal government is an interesting and important question. The vastness and inaccessibility of federal institutions are probably part of the answer. But another part is that our government has itself tried to shift the focus to higher education rather than interrogate its own role in supporting Israel’s brutal war on Gaza. The correlation between the encampment movement, police crackdowns, and the appeal to academic freedom as a reason for rejecting student protest demands is striking. The first encampment, at Columbia University, went up essentially in tandem with the spectacle of Columbia president Minouche Shafik’s disastrous testimony before the HCEW on April 17, 2024. The first crackdown followed the day after. Other university encampments and crackdowns swiftly followed. None of our academic leaders seemed able to see this historical moment for what it was: the product of national and local forces that conspired together, as if on cue, to bring about the largest use of force on American campuses since 1969.

That history provides another explanation for why student protesters have centered their grievances on the university. War-related research programs and policies at both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where I teach, and the University of Chicago were at the core of student demands in the late 1960s and (especially at MIT) continue to be today. Administrators borrowed from the script of 1969 in some of their responses to the student demands. In other respects, they improvised according to the specific circumstances and logic of the Israel-Palestine conflict on their campuses. In doing so, they tended to overlook one of the key lessons of this history: that students and faculty members, no less than administrators, have always determined the contours and meaning of academic freedom and institutional neutrality. The result is a costly mess that now includes the bitter aftertaste of police intervention (not likely to be quickly or easily forgotten) and the hastily improvised, excessive, and clearly flawed disciplinary crackdowns that, on my campus at least, involved multiple miscarriages of justice that were corrected only after faculty protests. But perhaps the biggest casualty is the ideal of academic freedom, which is under real threat from the political crackdown on the antiwar movement.

At MIT, negotiations between the encampment leaders and the administration centered on student demands that the institution end the involvement of the Israeli Ministry of Defense in two faculty research programs. These discussions concluded with MIT's president, Sally Kornbluth, [proclaiming](#) that she was “not going to compromise the academic freedom of our faculty, in any field of study”—even though MIT has taken steps recently to limit faculty research programs either because of the nature of the partner (in the cases of China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia) or the source of the funding (in the case of Jeffrey Epstein). More to my point, that admirable defense of academic freedom would have been easier for faculty and students to swallow had it also been directed at the authoritarian, right-wing assault on the purpose and nature of the American research university.

The jarring character of the crackdown on the encampments has been aggravated by what can only be described as failures of listening. MIT's leadership team did not even pretend to tie its position on academic freedom to any existing scholarship or AAUP statement or to the work of any faculty committee past or present. The position is aggressive, [if not unprecedented](#), insofar as it would extend academic freedom from the realm of ideas (once the coin of the academic realm) to the choice of institutional partners and to the nature of research funding. At MIT, these are especially thorny issues because so many of our scholars are engaged in research projects that intersect with industry and government, including military agencies. Perhaps we do want academic freedom to extend this far, given the [AAUP's long-standing position](#) that “teachers are entitled to full freedom in research.” But if we do, that decision should be informed by history, applied consistently across a range of cases, and accompanied by an effort to consult a range of faculty members, who are, after all, the core repositories of academic freedom.

The MIT administration did manage to procure [an advisory opinion](#) effectively endorsing its decision to end the encampment from a new faculty-student-staff committee convened to implement the recommendations of a prior Ad Hoc Working Group on Free Expression, on which I served. The new committee, known as the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom and Campus Expression, has seen fit to publicly pronounce thus far only on the encampment issue. (The committee published some recommendations related to postering in March 2024.) It did so in order to explain why the doctrine of time, place, and manner restrictions on free speech supported ending the encampment. The committee has yet to issue an opinion or statement finding that any forms of student antiwar protest constitute protected expression. It is highly unusual, in my experience, for a faculty-led committee at MIT to issue pronouncements prior to concluding its work and issuing a draft report. I believe that my colleagues on this committee, and in the MIT administration, genuinely value free expression and academic freedom. But the public record has left an awkward impression that is not quite dispelled by any number of formal declarations of allegiance to the values of the First Amendment.

The administration has also struggled to come up with the right words to respond to the appalling brutality of the Israeli government's war on Gaza. The charitable interpretation of this failure is that it involves a confusion over the ideal of institutional neutrality. In the [same statement](#) in which MIT's president defended academic freedom, she observed that the student protesters' “grief and pain over the terrible loss of life and suffering in Gaza are palpable.” Contrast this with her October 10, 2023, [statement](#) about the horrific attacks of October 7: “The brutality perpetrated on innocent civilians in Israel by terrorists from Hamas is horrifying. In my opinion, such a deliberate attack on civilians can

never be justified.” (President Kornbluth added, “And now we are bracing for a prolonged conflict that will also gravely harm or kill many innocent Palestinians in Gaza. The suffering and destruction of human life are intolerable.”) In the first case, there is an acknowledgment of (psychological) grief and pain, with no attribution of responsibility to any state authority for the violence that has produced that grief and pain, let alone a characterization of the (il)legitimacy of such violence. In the other, there is a commendable willingness to speak frankly and even personally. Harvard University’s leadership (including its corporation, which serves as a board) has demonstrated a similar tendency in its public pronouncements, going back to October 7. Clearly, concerns over institutional neutrality cannot be the reason why American university leaders have found it necessary to mince their words in denouncing the atrocious conduct of the Israeli government’s war on Gaza.

And yet, one such university leader appears to think that the [1967 Kalven Report](#) not only prevents such moral candor but actually required police suppression of a student encampment. In an [op-ed](#) published in *The Wall Street Journal* last May, University of Chicago President Paul Alivisatos argued that, in order to uphold the sacrosanct Chicago principle of institutional neutrality, he had no choice but to call in the police to arrest pro-Palestinian demonstrators and dismantle their encampment. Turning neutrality and academic freedom on their heads and confusing the one with the other, Alivisatos effectively interred the Kalven Report. It is one thing to say that safety or the need to ensure the continued academic operations of the university required ending the encampment. (I believe that MIT’s leadership was genuinely concerned with the safety of all students when it moved to end the encampment last May.) But even those arguments must be handled with care, given that they can so easily slide into content-based suppression of disfavored speech. Some might say the Kalven Report had already perished of [self-inflicted wounds](#) present at its [creation](#). Either way, we have almost certainly reached the end of the ideal of institutional neutrality. Rumors of the report’s death were confirmed last May when Harvard issued a [new policy on “institutional voice”](#) that (correctly, in my view) rejected neutrality as a philosophical framework for the university while adhering for all practical purposes to the core prudential principles of the Kalven Report.

Echoes of the Past

How did it come to this? Another teaspoon of history is worth a pound of polemics in a field not short on the latter. Here I speak specifically of MIT’s history, but my campus’s experience holds many implications for other institutions.

The encampment movement at MIT focused on the issue of war-related research rather than (as at some other institutions) the need to divest the endowment of funds tied to Israel. This emphasis runs deep in MIT’s tradition of student protest, and it hearkens back specifically to the anti-Vietnam activism of 1969. As historian Stuart Leslie has shown in an [excellent essay](#) on the 1969 debates over MIT’s special laboratories, MIT students and faculty emphasized the university’s own role in the wartime effort rather than national wartime policy itself. The result was a protest movement that centered on whether MIT should end its relationship to the Lincoln Laboratory and the Instrumentation Laboratory, both of which were then engaged in Department of Defense–funded weapons-related projects, such as moving-target-indicator radar systems.

Assembled under the banner of the Science Action Coordinating Committee (SACC), the student leaders directly challenged the application of principles of academic freedom and institutional neutrality to such wartime research. In a 1969 statement, SACC observed,

It is frequently argued that in demanding the termination of war related research at MIT, SACC is violating the concept of a politically “neutral” university; that individual scientists should be guaranteed the “academic freedom” to pursue any research which interests them or which they consider to be important. It is feared that the introduction of political criteria to judge the appropriateness of specific research projects would undermine the university’s unique position in society as the last haven of free thought, destroy its independence, and open it to attacks by pressure groups from both the left and the right.

If you substitute the Scientists Against Genocide Encampment (SAGE)—the name of the MIT Gaza encampment—for SACC, it becomes clear that the positions on either side of the debate over MIT’s relationship to military research are largely unchanged. In this sense, although not in others, we are still living in the 1960s.

In effect, the SAGE students were answering the administration’s assertion of academic freedom with the same point the administration had been making all year long in respect of free expression: Just because you can research or say something does not mean that you should, at least not in connection with institutional partners who violate certain norms (including, most notably in this context, the Israeli Ministry of Defense). MIT’s negotiators seemed unwilling to listen to that reasonable view—perhaps more out of concerns over institutional neutrality than over academic freedom. As a result, they failed to apply the norms that MIT has already developed and applied to other controversial research programs and partnerships. The obtuseness or reticence regarding the war on Gaza contributed to the impasse between the encampment leaders and the administration.

The former, for their part, also played a role in producing the impasse, which was an essentially political conflict involving pragmatic factors rather than a showdown over abstract principles. Some of the language used by students who participated in the MIT encampment ultimately made it difficult for others outside the encampment to hear and identify with the moral justice of the antiwar cause. And the students missed several opportunities to end the encampment on their own terms.

At MIT and elsewhere, student protesters have become necessary leaders in the campaign against the unjust war on Gaza and the broader injustice of the decades-long occupation of the Palestinian territories. No one else has done as much as they to bring public attention to the systemic racism and discrimination reflected in Israel’s policies. But to say that students have been necessary leaders in this fight does not mean that their approach has been sufficient. The actions of a group of hapless university administrators engaged in a war of attrition with students are far less consequential to the subjugation of the Palestinians than those of decision-makers in Washington, DC. The protesters’ cause would also be helped by devoting more time and space to envisioning Arab-Jewish solidarity in Israel and Palestine alongside the messages of resistance and opposition. Every civil rights movement needs a vision of coexistence if it is to succeed in retaining the moral high ground, as Martin Luther King Jr. preached in [his](#)

[final book](#), written in isolation in Jamaica in 1967 (and from which I have borrowed the title for this essay).

The students and faculty involved in counterprotests, for their part, displayed a stark unwillingness to listen to the moral core of the encampment message. From the start of last year's campus conflicts, those who seek to equate criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism have shown over and over again, by their words and their deeds, that they simply do not wish to allow speech in protest of Israel's cruel war on Gaza to be heard on American university campuses. This refusal is a factor in enabling the slaughter and deprivation in Gaza to continue.

For me, the most poignant moment of the 2023–24 *annus horribilis* was when the SAGE students first met counterprotesting students in the heart of the encampment last spring. I was there at that time, and tried, with others, to help keep tempers calm. But the truth is that this encounter was one of the few moments when it might have been possible for the two groups of students to enter into dialogue with one another. Their intense distaste for one another notwithstanding, each of these groups needs to hear what the other has to say if there is to be a shared future for the people of Israel and Palestine. Yet each does so much to shield themselves from the voices of the other—increasingly with the aid of administrators (and some faculty members), who are now apparently hoping that restrictions on student protest alone can produce the physical, intellectual, and even acoustic separation that they believe will keep the peace on campus.

Reasons for Hope

There is not much good to say about where we landed at the end of the 2023–24 academic year, but let me try to identify at least a few silver linings.

First, the willingness of some American college and university leaders to invoke academic freedom is cause for hope. They should now embrace academic freedom in the name of speaking truth to power. The university officials who testified at the May 23 hearing, titled “Calling for Accountability: Stopping Antisemitic College Chaos,” [largely avoided Shafik's obsequiousness](#) and violation of long-standing academic norms. But the political circus persists. On June 3, the chairs of six House committees sent [letters to ten universities](#) announcing a Congress-wide probe into campus antisemitism and threatening a cutoff of all federal funding. And on August 21, the HCEW issued [a subpoena](#) to compel production of information related to the encampment crisis and other matters. This script seems likely to become even more bombastic and demagogic as the November 2024 elections approach, so important have the attacks on a handful of elite universities become to the Republican Party's prosecution of the culture wars.

MIT and other American universities are a bit like Florence circa 1300, as the chair of the MIT faculty, [Mary Fuller, has observed](#): riven by internal conflict and vulnerable to external pressures and interventions, most notably those of the federal government. But that was equally true of American universities in the 1960s, when Congress also threatened to withhold funding in response to universities' handling of student demonstrations. Today, once again, student protest is shaping the national political conversation. College and university leaders seem to be hoping that, if they just lie low and keep their heads down until November, the storm will pass. But even if Vice President Harris prevails in the

election, this storm is not going away. The culture wars, having previously come for our public universities, have now arrived at leading private institutions. Our fates are connected: An attack on academic freedom and free expression at the University of Florida or the University of Texas is an attack on all American universities. The public-private distinction is eroding. The wealthiest private universities have been slow to appreciate this point, in part because of the increasingly vast gulf that separates administrators and faculty at these institutions. A university like MIT now does too many other things beside teaching and research—from leasing land to forming partnerships with corporations and foreign governments—to believe that it has much of a stake in the spat over critical race theory or LGBTQ books in conservative and battleground states.

An assertion of academic freedom as a shield against political or legislative interference should entail explaining to the public that the struggle in higher education over Israel and Palestine stems not from any pathologies peculiar to the academy but from the crisis facing our government’s Middle East policy, now decades in the making. The federal government that subsidizes and enables Israel’s increasingly brazen brutalization of the Palestinian people must begin to face squarely its own failure to foster a just peace in the Middle East. A little more time spent on that mission will go a long way. Such a reckoning will help, in particular, to address the disturbing [resurgence in antisemitism](#) that we have seen around the world over the past year. Ideally, it will also aim to ensure that the Palestinian people can live in “[dignity, freedom, security, and self-determination](#)”—for those who still care that they do, and are willing to raise their voices in support of that future. The first American university leader to make these points, preferably while testifying live before the HCEW, will earn a rightful place in the history of academic freedom in this country.

A second cause for hope is that faculty members have been instrumental in pushing back against the threats to punish student demonstrators. Only that pushback prevents our universities from encountering the fate that befell Harvard in 1969–70. The draconian expulsion of sixteen students for their role in seizing University Hall in 1969—an act that has no parallel in the recent encampment episodes except for the occupation of one of Columbia’s main buildings—“changed the whole tenor of dissent at Harvard,” observed the authors of the 1970 book *The Harvard Strike*. “All future political dissent at Harvard,” they wrote, “would be circumscribed by the shift in attitude that the discipline of the University Hall demonstrators represented.” The risk that American universities today will produce a similar quashing of political dissent is real, and it extends to a broad range of issues other than the Israel-Palestine conflict. The next generation of student demonstrators is watching (some of them are even participating). An immediate priority must be to roll back the show of force on campus. At my own institution, the campus police performed an outstanding job in mediating conflict throughout the year. But asking campus police officers to enforce an ongoing disciplinary settlement is a recipe for the creation of a surveillance university. The [quirkiness of MIT’s student culture](#), its fondness for out-of-the-box thinking, and its allergy to hierarchy form a delicate ecosystem that MIT’s students, faculty, and leadership alike must take special care to preserve at this time. A heavy burden of responsibility in this area lies with my faculty colleagues who, only a few years ago, were so outspoken about free expression when the issue was diversity, equity, and inclusion, and who seem not so eager now to accept the perhaps unintended consequences of their campaign against so-called cancel culture.

Finally, the dynamics of the encampment crackdown should encourage faculty members on divided campuses to unite in standing up for academic freedom (and free expression) whenever the next effort to speak out against the carnage in Gaza is subjected to HCEW-style suppression. At MIT and elsewhere, administrators have allowed themselves to be bullied by a handful of student and faculty social media accounts into an endless pattern of whack-a-mole-style crisis management. That pattern, a reflection of the authoritarian political culture of our time, seems [likely to persist over the 2024–25 academic year](#). The case for robust protection of student protest comes down to an old version of the “marketplace of ideas” argument: The policies our government has pursued in attempting to manage the Israel-Palestine conflict for the last fifty to sixty years (those of the Biden administration very much included) have not worked. Can anyone say in good faith that the situation in Israel and Palestine is where we want it to be, regardless of where you land on the tragic events of the past year? If we could have complete confidence that our government knew what it was doing in the Middle East, then the case for suppressing student dissent would be stronger. The temptation to enforce an official orthodoxy on a matter so deeply bound up with traumatic histories and memories of various kinds will always impede the cause of peace and coexistence.

How exactly we get from here to there is difficult to say. The unstable domestic political climate, the uncertain direction of the conflict in Gaza and the West Bank, and the unpredictability of student protest tactics will continue to make improvisation necessary. Those of us who work in higher education will simply have to muddle through as best we can, being of support to students, faculty and staff colleagues, and administrators when possible while continuing the important work of teaching and research. (Being of support to our institutions includes insisting on robust protections for free expression and academic freedom, because administrators merely exercise temporary custodianship of our institutions; they are not to be confused with the college or university itself, the heart of which will always be faculty and students brought together in shared learning spaces enabled by the labors of a large and growing staff. The Kalven Report got this point essentially right.) We should not underestimate the importance of many small acts of kindness in the current conflict. But our core missions remain teaching and research. We were not commissioned to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict, but we can alleviate its side effects on our campuses until our government steps up and becomes part of the solution in the Middle East. The steps that some have outlined for America’s universities to take a role in the rebuilding of Gaza’s educational system, combined with fair treatment of student protest, can help to point the way forward.

Another idea worth considering on my own campus would be to convene a panel similar to the 1969 Pounds Panel, which brought faculty and students together (today we would add staff) to dig into MIT’s connection to wartime research and to consider the possibility of “converting” some of that research to civilian purposes. Thus far, MIT’s leadership has seemed determined to handle any questions involving research connected to foreign militaries through existing processes and protocols, which has contributed to the impasse. No doubt the hesitancy is connected to MIT’s reliance on the US Department of Defense for [almost 20](#) percent of its research budget. The line between American and foreign military action and research has not always been apparent, especially where the Middle East is concerned. Depending on how you look at it, that is either a defense or an indictment of MIT’s position (or both). Either way, a collective effort to help students understand how MIT has or has not changed in this regard seems like the kind of educational effort that could contribute to overcoming some of the deadlock of the past year.

These kinds of efforts can succeed only if we can recover a sense of common purpose on our campuses. We have lost that sense of shared mission. Tribal affiliations have taken hold of campus culture, bringing students and faculty together for certain purposes but separating them for others. Efforts to bring together students and faculty aligned with either side of the Israel-Palestine conflict have proven exceedingly challenging. Above all, we must discover a way for all of us to rally around the principles that define higher education communities: a commitment to learning and research, [curiosity](#), academic freedom, and free expression. These principles cannot be allowed to serve as buzzwords for one side or another on a charged political issue. We can care greatly about the Israel-Palestine conflict, but we can also recognize that people in other parts of the world are suffering, too, and need our attention—including neighborhoods in our own country. A community defined only by conflict has no space for the kind of generous openness that makes it a trusting one. We will have to reach out, as individuals, across the gulfs that separate us from one another, and discover at least some common ground—something that permits us to see one another in relationships of solidarity, collegiality, and even friendship. This is the precondition for a robust culture of academic freedom and free expression. It may never be perfect, and it probably never was, but it could be enough.

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How Far Have We Gone?

By Malick W. Ghachem *

In the weeks since writing [my recent piece for *Academe* magazine](#) on last year's Israel-Palestine campus conflict, the atmosphere on my own campus (MIT) has become, if anything, even more tense. The pressures bearing down on both administrators and students remain all too apparent, as does the war of attrition about which I wrote in my essay. The approaching November election casts a long shadow over an already troubled state of political discourse, both on campus and off. And the violence in the Middle East has escalated yet further, beckoning a wider regional war. Meanwhile, our military and foreign policy leadership stands by as if helpless, seemingly unable to fathom that our own policies bear significant responsibility for the unfolding chaos.

Readers both sympathetic to and critical of the perspective reflected in my essay have observed that I inject a partisan political note into the campus conflict. It is hard to write about the assault on academic freedom and free expression in higher education today without highlighting the instrumental role of Republican politicians in the culture war that has now come to the doorsteps of our leading private universities. Nonetheless, the deeply misguided support for Israel's war on Gaza (and, increasingly, the West Bank) is a function of policies and positions taken by the federal government more broadly. These dynamics go beyond party politics, and indeed now implicate even the federal judiciary, which is being asked to arbitrate the Israel-Palestine campus conflict, thereby enmeshing judges in the domestic politics that shape our foreign policy. Those who believe that a Democratic-controlled legislature is more likely to take a stand in favor of academic freedom, or that a Republican president is more likely to take a stand in favor of Palestinian equality and self-determination, should think again.

American academic leaders, for their part, are in a bit of a holding pattern, increasingly cautious about associating academic freedom and free expression with student protests as the national political winds continue to blow in unpredictable directions. The shutdown of last spring's encampments seems to have damaged, perhaps fatally, the prospects for restoring trust between administrators and student protesters. The former have dug in their heels, and the latter are increasingly in retreat and on the defensive. The political battle lines are hardening. I believe the dynamics laid out in my article are responsible for this outcome.

I write these words from Bielefeld, Germany, home to a university that was born (in 1969) of another pivotal era of international student protest. It is a bit of a reprieve to be in an environment where (as best I can tell) the controversy over student protests, and student protest itself, seem relatively absent. No doubt the history of twentieth-century Germany and German universities hangs heavily over this contemporary scene (see Michael Grüttner's essay [in this volume](#)). Exhausting as the conflict in American higher education has been, however, it is essential to resist the pressures seeking to marginalize, if not repress altogether, today's student-led protests of the devastation in Gaza. Even those academic leaders who do not share the antipathy to pro-Palestine student protest are subject to its gravitational force,

* First published on *Academe Blog* on [October 22, 2024](#).

which marshals a broad spectrum of American political discourse, from left to right, secular to religious, and in between.

At a time when one of the most right-wing, racist governments in Israel's history has been unleashing a brutal war on a stateless, brown, largely Muslim population with the indispensable support of our government, American universities have an indispensable role to play in keeping lines of communication and debate open. They must do so even while remaining vigilant about the specter of antisemitism, which must be defined, in accordance with First Amendment values, to leave adequate room for political criticism of the policies and ideologies of the state of Israel. It is all a matter of getting the balance right in light of the larger political context within which higher education must operate. Readers of my article, which also contains a message for student protest leaders, can judge for themselves whether I have done so. But however we come down on this issue, all of us should be worried about the present trend towards marginalization and repression of the student movement that culminated in last spring's encampment drama. We will all lose if this movement, which is disproportionately composed of Black and brown students whose numbers are declining owing to recent changes in admissions policies, concludes that it does not have a place on American university campuses.

If you find yourself shrugging your shoulders at this prospect or, worse, celebrating it, consider the fate of [this young man](#). In a better world, he would have come to an American university like mine to study, and then returned to help his people build a new future. Our government professes to mourn his death while providing the very military support that enabled it. The unavoidable message of our foreign policy is that brown, Palestinian-Arab lives matter less than others. In complicated but discernible ways, the Israel-Palestine campus conflict has had to accommodate this deeply rooted historical prejudice for fear of unleashing another one. We can and must do better—as a country and as citizens of the academy.

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