

# THE JEWISH JOURNAL

## Thinking about taking a university course on the Arab-Israeli conflict? Think again.

by Tammi Rossman-Benjamin and Leila Beckwith



*UCLA. Image via Wikipedia*

As the fall semester begins, many Jewish students will consider taking courses offered by Middle East scholars on their respective campuses, in order to better understand the current turmoil raging in the Middle East, especially the Israel-Gaza conflict.

We recommend that students exercise great care in choosing which courses they will take.

Consider this: last month, about 200 professors identifying themselves as "Middle East scholars" on more than 100 U.S. campuses signed [a petition](#) decrying "ongoing Israeli massacres in Gaza," calling on their colleagues in Middle East Studies "to boycott Israeli academic institutions," and pledging "not to collaborate on projects and events involving Israeli academic institutions, not to teach at or to attend conferences and other events at such institutions, and not to publish in academic journals based in Israel."

Many of the petition's signatories are professors affiliated with highly respected, federally-funded Middle East studies programs at universities throughout the

country: Columbia University, Duke University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, Harvard University, New York University, Princeton University, University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, University of Chicago, University of Michigan Ann Arbor, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, University of Pennsylvania, University of Texas at Austin, University of Washington Seattle, and Yale University.

Five of the signatories even direct federally-funded programs on their campuses: Lila Abu-Lughod directs the Middle East Institute at Columbia University; Miriam Cooke directs the Middle East Studies Center at Duke University; Osama Abi-Mershed chairs the Middle East and North Africa program at Georgetown University; and Sondra Hale and Gabriel Piterberg co-direct the Center for Near Eastern Studies at UCLA.

Yet despite the fact that its signatories identify themselves as "Middle East scholars," the boycott petition is extremely unbalanced and unscholarly, and holds Israel to a breathtaking double standard. For example, it laments "the ongoing Israeli massacres in Gaza" which are "ghastly reminders of the complicity of Israeli academics", without even mentioning Hamas, its genocidal aims, its firing of missiles into Israeli population centers from Gazan schools and hospitals, or its use of Palestinians as human shields.

Even more disturbingly, the "Middle East Scholars" who have signed the petition are embracing a boycott of Israel whose principal promoters call for the elimination of the Jewish state through any means necessary, including by harming Jews. The 2005 Palestinian call to boycott Israel, which forms the basis for the professors' petition, was founded for the purpose of creating "a unified effort of Palestinian factions to oppose Israel and coordinate terror attacks." The first and primary signatory of the Palestinian BDS Call was the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, which includes among its member organizations Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the PFLP-General Command, all three of which are on the U.S. Department of State's list of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations and are committed to the elimination of the Jewish state through violent means.

We believe the professors who have signed this petition may be so biased against the Jewish state that they are unable to teach accurately or fairly about Israel or the Arab-Israel conflict, and may even inject antisemitic tropes into their lectures or class discussion. Students who wish to become better educated about the conflict without subjecting themselves to anti-Israel bias or antisemitic rhetoric would do well to see which faculty members from their university are signatories of the petition before registering for their classes.

A full list of professors who have signed the petition at each U.S. college and university can be found [HERE](#).

*Rossmann-Benjamin is a lecturer at University of California Santa Cruz and the co-founder of AMCHA Initiative, a non-profit organization that combats anti-Semitism on college campuses across the United States.*

*Beckwith is an emeritus professor at the University of California Los Angeles and the co-founder of AMCHA Initiative.*