

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
DAILY BRUIN

Submission: UCLA center violating law with anti-Israel bias

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The Middle East is crucial to our national security interests, but it is imploding in internal turmoil and murderous inter-ethnic and inter-religious warfare. It is replete with failed states and barbarism. There are millions of displaced persons and hundreds of thousands of deaths. The United States' efforts, the expenditure of our resources and the lives of our soldiers in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan have failed to bring stability, democracy or human rights. Our policies are in disarray.

Yet, since at least 1965, the federal government, under the Higher Education Act, has given millions of dollars to American universities in order to secure accurate and deeply informed knowledge and understanding of international studies, including the Middle East, its ideologies, political movements and economic pressures.

The UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, designated by the federal government as a National Resource Center of Excellence, is one of the 129 international and foreign language centers receiving federal funding. The center received more than \$1,300,000 from the Department of Education under Title VI of the Higher Education Act between 2010 and 2013. Part of that funding was to inform the public about the Middle East, and as Congress directed, to do so in a way that would be balanced and unbiased. As the law states, activities funded by Title VI grants would "reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views."

However, a study just released by the AMCHA Initiative – "Antisemitic Activity and Anti-Israel Bias at the Center for Near East Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 2010-2013" – indicates that CNES violated the law's requirement to be unbiased and instead promoted anti-Semitic discourse and anti-Israel bias. In the study, all public events that were recorded on audiotape or videotaped occurring during 2010-2013, sponsored or co-sponsored by CNES, pertaining to Israel or the Arab-Israel wars, were analyzed for anti-Semitic discourse and anti-Israel bias using a definition of anti-Semitic activity derived from the U.S. State Department, as well as a definition of bias as pervasive criticism of Israeli government policies, society and/or people.

Despite the perfect storm of historical changes occurring in the Middle East – the Arab Spring leading to the Arab Winter, the Egyptian uprisings, Syria’s civil war, the Libyan government dissolution – CNES showed a disproportionate, excessive focus on Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Of the Middle Eastern countries considered by CNES, more than 1/4 of the public events were devoted to Israel. Of all the Middle East political conflicts, a majority of events – 61 percent – focused only on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Moreover, 93 percent of the events discussing Israel showed anti-Israel bias. A large majority, 75 percent, included anti-Semitic content. The discourse demonized and delegitimized Israel, with a significant minority condoning terrorism against Israeli civilians, as well as promoting boycott and divestment efforts.

The bias is not surprising, as all three CNES directors had publicly expressed support for boycott, divestment or sanctions against Israel, including calling for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Such a boycott could constitute a violation of the requirement of CNES as a National Resource Center to maintain linkages with institutions of higher education in the Middle East.

In addition, all three directors, despite directing a program that is intended to encourage study abroad in countries in the Middle East, have publicly opposed the University of California Education Abroad Program in Israel, on the highly dubious grounds that Israel discriminates against Palestinians and deprives Palestinians of the “right to education.”

Although millions of tax dollars under Title VI of the Higher Education Act have been accepted by UCLA, the troubling anti-Israel bias of CNES has distorted its scholarly and educational mission, and has violated its federal funding requirements. By engaging in an obsessive focus on the one stable nation that has established civil rights for its ethnic, religious and gender minorities, CNES failed to analyze and predict the disturbances and chaos in the Middle East. Misled by personal political biases of the directors and other faculty, CNES has failed in its mission to understand and inform the public about this turbulent area that continues to be a crucial threat to the security of the U.S.

As a citizen, taxpayer, professor emeritus of UCLA and faculty member for more than 30 years, I am outraged.

Beckwith is a professor emeritus and the co-founder of the AMCHA Initiative, a nonprofit organization that combats anti-Semitism on college campuses across the United States.