

# UCLA Must End Harassment and Bullying of Jewish Students

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## Tammi Rossman-Benjamin



Tammi Rossman-Benjamin is a lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the cofounder and director of AMCHA Initiative, a non-profit organization devoted to investigating, documenting and combating campus antisemitism in the United States. Rossman-Benjamin has written articles about academic anti-Zionism and antisemitism and lectured widely on the growing threat to the safety of Jewish students on college campuses. She recently was a speaker at the 2014 Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism conference in Jerusalem. She also recently delivered a scholarly paper examining the academic boycotters of Israel at an international scholars conference that took place at the University of Indiana's Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism.

*Editor's Note: Susan Tuchman, co-author of this op-ed, is Director of the Zionist Organization of America's Center for Law and Justice.*

In an attempt to target, harass and intimidate pro-Israel Jewish students at UCLA, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) recently demanded that candidates for student government positions **sign a statement** pledging they will not go on any trip to Israel sponsored by three Jewish organizations.



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Notably, SJP has targeted only Israel and three Jewish organizations that sponsor trips to Israel. Not a single church or mosque that pays for or sponsors Israel trips was singled out.

This is an outrageous and impermissible violation of students' right to free expression, their right to free association, and their fundamental right to travel and move freely. SJP cannot be permitted to infringe on any student's personal liberties and freedoms, or to bully students into not associating with certain Jewish groups that are dedicated to building love and support for Israel.

SJP's motive is clear: to stack the deck with anti-Israel activists. Last **February**, SJP tried to get the student government to endorse an anti-Israel divestment resolution. The effort failed. SJP is now trying a different way to achieve the same goal, by manipulating the composition of the student government so that it is filled with anti-Israel activists who support SJP's hateful agenda.

Since the student government rejected SJP's divestment resolution, members of SJP have engaged in what a **UCLA student leader** has described in the UCLA newspaper as "hate speech against the Jewish community" and a campaign of "cyberbullying toward both the Jewish community and council members that voted against the resolution."

Students who opposed the anti-Israel divestment resolution reported feeling uncomfortable even walking on campus because of the hate mail they received. This is outrageous. Students must feel safe on campus.

SJP is the only university-funded student organization at UCLA whose very mission targets an ethnic minority for hatred and vilification and whose activities routinely harass, intimidate, threaten and seek to silence members of that ethnic minority on campus.

SJP's discrimination tactics and attempts to prevent pro-Israel Jewish students from having equal access to positions in student government violate both the **UCLA Principles of Community** and its **Student Conduct Code**.

**UCLA Chancellor Gene Block** and **President Janet Napolitano** recently expressed concern about SJP's tactics, without mentioning the group by name. That is a significant first step, but more must be done.

First, the UCLA leadership should publicly condemn the SJP by name and strongly denounce the group's effort to delegitimize educational trips to Israel by some organizations but not others, so that pro-Israel Jewish students will be excluded from the student government and a pro-Israel viewpoint will be eliminated from discussions.

Second, UCLA should severely sanction the SJP for violating UCLA's rules against harassment and discrimination. The sanction should include a requirement that the SJP publicly apologize to fellow students, particularly pro-Israel Jewish students, for targeting, disrespecting and hurting them.



Former Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and current president of the University of California system Janet Napolitano (AP)

Anti-Jewish harassment, intimidation and bullying are the hallmark of SJP. This group needs to finally get the message that their misconduct will no longer be tolerated, and there will be tangible consequences when they violate university rules and harm fellow students.

When Vassar's SJP chapter published a vile **Nazi cartoon**, Vassar President Catharine Hill condemned it as "racist" and "anti-Semitic," committed to a full university investigation and a review of SJP's status on campus, and demanded the SJP take responsibility for its actions.

When SJP at Northeastern University slipped mock eviction notices under hundreds of dorm rooms earlier this spring, the group was immediately **suspended**.

The UC Board of Regents, President Napolitano and Chancellor Block must likewise act swiftly and decisively to show the entire UC community that student freedom, safety and well-being are their number one priority.

*Rossman-Benjamin is a lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the co-founder of AMCHA Initiative, an organization that combats antisemitism at institutions of higher education.*

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