



## **Anti-Israel Bias of Directors and Speakers at Title VI-Funded Middle East Studies Programs 2014 - 2015**

### **Introduction**

In the Fall of 2014, the U.S. Department of Education awarded more than \$13 million dollars for the 2014 – 2018 funding cycle to Middle East Studies National Resource Centers (NRCs) at 16 universities across the country. (See Appendix 1). The money was awarded under Title VI of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which was established to provide funding for university programs that equip students with a full and unbiased understanding of the regions and countries of the world that are vital to U.S. security interests. To that end, the law stipulates that programs receiving Title VI funding must demonstrate that their activities reflect “diverse perspectives and a wide range of views.”

While scholars of all disciplines are free to express their political opinions and engage in political activism outside of the university, the directors of NRCs bear a special responsibility for ensuring that their personal political biases do not unduly influence their centers’ programming and thereby subvert the Congressional intent of Title VI. The following study carried out by AMCHA Initiative suggests that several directors of recently-funded NRCs may have allowed their anti-Israel biases to stifle the expression of “diverse perspectives and a wide range of views” and calls into question their ability to fulfill their obligations under federal law.

AMCHA’s study found that more than 42% of all NRC directors have expressed public support for anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaigns, with more than a quarter of all NRC directors supporting a boycott of Israeli universities and scholars. In addition, those directors who supported BDS were more than twice as likely to host Title VI-funded public outreach events with BDS-supporting speakers, strongly suggesting that these directors may be injecting their own anti-Israel bias into their centers’ programming.

Furthermore, in light of the very real possibility that a significant number of NRC directors may be using their federally-funded centers to promote boycotts of Israel that violate the letter and spirit of Title VI, run counter to the principles of academic freedom, are illegal under federal and state law and have been deemed antisemitic by several state legislatures, the results of this study raise the question of whether such centers should continue to receive federal funding.

## **Research Methods**

AMCHA used the websites of the 19 Title VI-funded Middle East studies programs on 16 university campuses to collect information about all of the Israel-related public outreach events that included one or more speakers, which were sponsored by each of the programs in the 2014 – 2015 academic year.

The anti-Israel bias of each of the 19 Title VI-funded program directors and each of the speakers at the program’s Israel-related events was evaluated by investigating each director’s and speaker’s expressions of public support for anti-Israel BDS campaigns. BDS support was assessed by determining whether directors or speakers had signed one or more publicly available petitions or open letters calling for boycotting, divesting from or sanctioning Israel or Israel-related activities (e.g. education abroad programs in Israel), or had made statements of support for BDS in their publicly accessible writing or speaking.

Support for BDS campaigns was used as the sole criterion for determining anti-Israel bias because, unlike other measures of bias, it is objective and verifiable. In addition, while not all individuals who are biased against Israel have shown public support for BDS, it can be safely assumed that anyone who has shown public support for anti-Israel BDS campaigns has an anti-Israel bias, making BDS support a rigorous measure of anti-Israel bias.

## **Findings**

### ***Directors***

Of the 19 directors of Middle East studies programs funded by Title VI, 8 directors (42%) have shown an anti-Israel bias by expressing public support for BDS:

- 5 directors (26%) have endorsed an academic boycott of Israel:
  - Columbia University Middle East Institute: Lila Abu-Lughod
  - Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies: Osama Abi-Meshed (Abi-Mershed’s predecessor, Rochelle Davis, who is noted as the grant recipient, is also an endorser of the academic boycott of Israel)
  - Georgetown University Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding: John Esposito
  - New York University Havok Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies: Helga Tawil-Souri
  - Duke University Middle East Studies Center: Miriam Cooke
- 2 directors (11%) have endorsed BDS petitions regarding the “occupied territories”
  - Princeton University Program in Near East Studies: Cyrus Schayegh
  - University of Washington Middle East Center: Ellis Goldberg (The incoming director, Arzoo Osanloo, has endorsed the academic boycott of

Israel)

- 1 director (5%) has endorsed a call to shut down the Israel Abroad program at the University of California
  - University of California Berkeley: Emily Gottreich (Gottreich's predecessor, Nazer AlSayyad, who is noted as the grant recipient, also signed the call to shut down the Israel Abroad program at UC)

### ***Speakers at NRC Public Outreach Events***

Of a total of 111 speakers who participated in Israel-related events sponsored by Title VI-funded Middle East programs in the 2014 – 2015 academic year:

- 45 speakers (41%) have endorsed BDS
- In NRCs where directors have endorsed BDS, 31 of 53 speakers (58%) have endorsed BDS.
- In NRCs where directors have not endorsed BDS, 15 of 58 speakers (26%) have endorsed BDS.

(See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of speaker information by NRC program).

### ***Public Outreach Events***

Of a total of 92 Israel-related speaker events sponsored by Title VI-funded Middle East programs in the 2014 – 2015 academic year:

- 39 events (42%) have included one or more speakers who support BDS.
- In NRCs where directors have endorsed BDS, 23 of 34 events (68%) included one or more speakers who support BDS.
- In NRCs where directors have not endorsed BDS, 16 of 58 events (28%) have engaged in BDS activity.

(See Appendix 3 for a breakdown of events including BDS-supporting speakers by NRC program).

### **Conclusions**

An examination of the anti-Israel bias of the directors of Middle East NRCs and of the invited speakers at Israel-related NRC events raises serious concerns about whether some of these NRCs have not only violated their Title VI funding requirements but subverted the Congressional intent behind the law.

AMCHA’s study found that 42% of the directors of Title VI-funded Middle East studies programs have shown themselves to be so egregiously biased against Israel, a single country of the more than 15 Middle Eastern countries within their academic purview, that they have supported efforts to economically, culturally or academically harm it. In theory, the animosity towards Israel displayed by NRC directors should not affect the programming within their centers. In practice, however, there is evidence to suggest that these directors’ anti-Israel bias significantly affects the programming that their centers host or sponsor.

AMCHA’s investigations revealed that while 41% of all of the speakers at Israel-related events sponsored by NRCs in 2014 – 2015 have expressed public support for anti-Israel boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) campaigns, those who spoke at NRCs with BDS-supporting directors were more than twice as likely to support BDS as the speakers at Israel-related events sponsored by NRCs whose directors had not expressed public support for BDS. Similarly, while 42% of all Israel-related events sponsored by Title VI-funded programs included one or more speakers who support BDS, events at NRCs whose directors support BDS were 2.4 times as likely to include speakers who support BDS. These results clearly suggest that the anti-Israel political bias of NRC directors is likely to translate into an anti-Israel bias in Title VI funded-outreach events, in violation of Title VI’s “diverse perspectives” requirement.

Even more problematic, however, is the fact that more than a quarter of federally-funded NRC directors have publicly endorsed a specific kind of anti-Israel boycott that targets Israeli universities and scholars, calling on faculty to “refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions,” and to “place pressure on [their] own institution to suspend all ties with Israeli universities, including collaborative projects, study abroad, funding and exchanges.” Were these NRC directors to carry out the measures they have publicly endorsed – and at least one NRC director, Emily Gottreich (UC Berkeley), has already done so by signing a petition calling for the suspension of study abroad programs to Israel at the University of California – they would be subverting their essential mandate as a Title VI-funded NRC to maintain linkages with institutions of higher education in the Middle East. Moreover, engaging in an academic boycott of Israel has not only been condemned by more than 250 university presidents as a violation of academic freedom and identified by several state legislatures as antisemitic, but it is a clear violation of state and federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of national origin.

Congress must take measures to ensure that federal monies are not given to Middle East studies programs whose unambiguous bias and animosity towards Israel violate the letter and spirit of Title VI, distort the academic mission of the university, spread antisemitism and run the risk of violating both state and federal law.

## Lead Researchers

**Leila Beckwith** is Professor Emeritus at UCLA and the co-founder of AMCHA Initiative. After receiving her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, Beckwith went on to teach and do statistical research for more than 30 years at the Neuropsychiatric Institute and the Department of Pediatrics at UCLA. She has published more than 80 research publications in scientific, peer-reviewed journals. She is a board member of the California Association of Scholars and Scholars for Peace in the Middle East. A renowned scientist and researcher, she has been an editorial board member of *Child Development*, *Infant Behavior and Development*, and the *Infant Mental Health Journal*, as well as an ad hoc reviewer for research papers submitted to *Developmental Psychology*, and grants submitted to the National Science Foundation and the National Foundation for the March of Dimes. Beckwith served as an appointed member of research review committees for the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute of Drug Abuse and the National Institute of Child Health and Development. She was also a prevention research advisory committee member for the National Institute of Mental Health and a principal investigator for research grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute of Child Health and Development, and the Center for Disease Control.

**Tammi Rossman-Benjamin** is cofounder and director of AMCHA Initiative, and was a faculty member in Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the University of California Santa Cruz from 1996 - 2016. Rossman-Benjamin has written articles and reports about academic anti-Zionism and antisemitism and lectured widely on the growing threat to the safety of Jewish students on college campuses. She has presented her research in scholarly talks and academic conferences at several universities, including Indiana University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Harvard University and McGill University. Rossman-Benjamin's research has been featured in several volumes on antisemitism. In July 2010, she co-organized a two-week scholarly workshop entitled "Contemporary Antisemitism in Higher Education" at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Articles and opinion pieces from Rossman-Benjamin have been published in *Newsweek*, *The Hill*, *New York Daily News*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Contra Costa Times*, *Jewish Journal of Los Angeles*, and dozens of others.

## Appendix 1

### Designated National Resource Centers Receiving Funding Under Title VI of the Higher Education Opportunity Act 2014 – 2018

UNIVERSITY	FUNDED PROGRAM(S)	FUNDING 2014 - 2018
Columbia University	Middle East Institute	\$800,000
George Washington University	Institute for Middle East Studies	\$800,000
Georgetown University	Center for Contemporary Arab Studies; Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies; Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding; Program for Jewish Civilization	\$800,000
Indiana University	Center for the Study of the Middle East	\$860,000
Princeton University	Program in Near East Studies	\$800,000
New York University	Havok Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies	\$1,020,000
University of Arizona	Center for Middle Eastern Studies	\$880,000
University of California Berkeley	Center for Middle Eastern Studies	\$1,080,000
University of Chicago	Center for Middle East Studies	\$1,040,000
University of Michigan	Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies	\$800,000
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill; Duke University	Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations; Middle East Studies Center	\$960,000
University of Pennsylvania	Middle East Center	\$920,000
University of Texas Austin	Center for Middle Eastern Studies	\$880,000
University of Washington	Middle East Center	\$840,000
Yale University	Council on Middle East Studies	\$940,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$13,420,000</b>

## Appendix 2

### Support for BDS among NRC Directors and Speakers at Israel-Related Events Sponsored by Title VI-Funded NRCs in 2014 – 2015

University/Program	Director Supports BDS	# Speakers	# BDS Speakers	% BDS Speakers
Georgetown – CCAS	YES	4	3	75%
New York University	YES	20	14	70%
Columbia University	YES	10	5	50%
Duke University	YES	2	1	50%
UC Berkeley	YES	8	4	50%
George Washington		6	3	50%
UT – Austin		2	1	50%
Princeton University	YES	9	4	44%
University of Chicago		13	5	38%
Yale University		9	3	33%
UNC – Chapel Hill		5	1	20%
University of Michigan		11	2	18%
University of Arizona		3	0	0%
Georgetown – PJC		6	0	0%
Indiana University		3	0	0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>111</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Total – BDS Director</b>		<b>53</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Total – non-BDS Director</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>26%</b>

### Appendix 3

#### Israel-Related Speaker Events in 2014 - 2015 sponsored by Title VI-Funded NRCs with One or More BDS-Supporting Speaker

University/Program	Director Supports BDS	# Events	# Events w/BDS Speakers	% Events w/BDS Speakers
Columbia University	YES	3	3	100%
Georgetown - CCAS	YES	3	3	100%
New York University	YES	11	9	82%
UC Berkeley	YES	7	4	57%
Duke University	YES	2	1	50%
George Washington		4	2	50%
UT – Austin		2	1	50%
University of Chicago		10	4	40%
University of Michigan		5	2	40%
Princeton University	YES	8	3	38%
Yale University		9	3	33%
UNC – Chapel Hill		6	2	20%
University of Michigan		11	2	18%
Georgetown - PJC		5	0	0%
Indiana University		3	0	0%
University of Arizona		3	0	0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Total - BDS Director</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>Total - non-BDS Director</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28%</b>