

UC Faculty - Anti-Semitism is Often Expressed as Anti-Zionism

March 8, 2016

Dear Board of Regents,

We are 130 UC faculty, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who are appalled and frightened by the anti-Semitism that has been allowed to fester for far too long on our campuses.

We are grateful for your leadership and commitment in this area. Like us, you recognize the seriousness of this growing problem. We commend you for rejecting the vague and overly-broad initial Principles Against Intolerance proposal that would have done nothing to mitigate the anti-Semitic bigotry Jewish students currently face at UC, and for forming a task force to draft a statement with teeth. We understand the new statement will be voted on at your next Regents meeting in March. We are writing to ask for your continued assistance in addressing this threat in a meaningful way.

As firsthand witnesses to the growth of this scourge, we can tell you unequivocally that the rise in anti-Semitism largely stems from a lack of understanding of when healthy debate about Israel and the Middle East ends, and anti-Semitism begins.

For example:

- During a UC Santa Cruz student government meeting on a bill supporting Israel, members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) were shouting “down with Israel” and then others chimed in “down with Jews.”
- At UC Santa Barbara, stereotypical and demonizing statements of Jews were made during a vote to divest from Israel. As one student reported, “I am disgusted by the normalization of anti-Semitic language so casually thrown around at the meeting. In those eight hours, I was told that Jews control the government, that all Jews are rich, that Zionism is racism.”
- Members of SJP at UC Santa Cruz protested in front of the Chabad rabbi’s house around the Jewish high holidays. The Chabad rabbi is a religious figure on campus and not affiliated with any pro-Israel groups.
- At UCLA and UCSC, Jewish members of student governments were questioned about their eligibility and credibility by members of anti-Zionist groups.
- The appearance of swastikas and other anti-Jewish postings dramatically increase during divestment campaigns.
 - At UC Berkeley, “Zionists should be sent to the gas chamber” was scrawled on a university building in the wake of a student senate campaign to pressure the university to divest from American companies that do business with Israel.

- At UCLA, “Hitler did nothing wrong” was carved into school property after a contentious BDS campaign.
- At UC Davis, swastikas were spray-painted on a Jewish fraternity only days after fraternity brothers spoke against divesting from Israel.

The vast majority of UC community members are not engaged in anti-Semitic behavior. But our students need guidance. They need to understand when healthy political debate crosses the line into anti-Jewish hatred, bigotry and discrimination, and when legitimate criticism of Israel devolves into denying Israel’s right to exist.

For the revised Statement of Principles to make a meaningful difference for Jewish students, it must include language acknowledging that contemporary anti-Semitism is all too often expressed as anti-Zionism.

We all want what’s best for UC – a safe and welcoming community for students of all different races, religions, countries and sexual preferences. We all want to return our campus to one that respects and values diversity. Thank you once again for your commitment and leadership.

Sincerely,

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