

From: Tammi Benjamin <tbenjami@ucsc.edu>

Subject: concerns about possible retaliation for Title VI complaint

Date: February 14, 2013 at 10:39:26 AM PST

To: chancellor@ucsc.edu

Cc: President <President@ucop.edu>, regentsoffice@ucop.edu, Charles Robinson <charles.robinson@ucop.edu>, "Jesse M. Bernal" <jesse.bernal@ucop.edu>, Carole Rossi <crossi@ucsc.edu>, herbie@ucsc.edu, Ashish Sahni <ashish@ucsc.edu>, alma@ucsc.edu, sfujioka@ucsc.edu, fjcrosby@ucsc.edu, E James Carter <ejcarter@ucsc.edu>, Helen Shapiro <hshapiro@ucsc.edu>, dslater@ucsc.edu, Juan Poblete <jpoblete@ucsc.edu>, Adrienne Waite <ajwaite@ucsc.edu>, dej@ucsc.edu

Dear Chancellor Blumenthal,

I am writing to you about a matter of great personal concern.

It has come to my attention that there is an on-line petition attacking me for remarks I made at an invited talk on the topic of campus anti-Semitism, which I gave at a synagogue in Boston last summer. Referencing a short YouTube clip taken out of context from a much longer video of my entire talk, the petition accuses me of racism, defamation, and censorship; vilifies me for filing a Title VI complaint on behalf of Jewish students at UCSC; and calls on President Yudof to publicly condemn me.

Since its posting a few days ago, the petition has been circulated widely to students and faculty at UCSC and through a number of different listservs, including that of the Resource Center for Non-Violence, a Santa Cruz-based community organization well-known for sponsoring many anti-Israel and anti-Semitic events, and of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), an organization which, according to the Anti-Defamation League, supports armed resistance against Israel and has ties to terrorist organizations. In addition, a defamatory article containing the full text of the petition and calling me "a well-known anti-Palestinian racist and inciter of accusations against students and professors who criticize Israeli policies," was published on-line in the *Electronic Intifada*, an on-line publication whose founder is a prominent member of the ISM and who advocates for the elimination of the Jewish state.

The petition attacking me was written by UCSC senior Rebecca Pierce and other members of the Committee for Justice in Palestine (CJP), a SOAR-sponsored, university-funded group on our campus.

Among the signatories of the petition is Debra Ellis, Porter College and Kresge College Coordinator of Conduct and Education (formerly the Cowell College Coordinator for Residential Education). Over the last several years Ms. Ellis, both in her capacity as a UCSC administrator and through her affiliation with the Resource Center for Non-Violence, has worked closely with CJP students in planning anti-Israel events on our campus, including the Cowell College-sponsored "Pulse on Palestine," a virulently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic event which I describe at length in my [Title VI complaint](#) (pp. 3 - 7). As you know, at the UCSC-sponsored "Teach-in on Islamophobia" in June 2011, Ms. Ellis handed out materials and solicited student endorsements for the U.S. Boat to Gaza, one of the boats participating in the illegal "Freedom Flotilla II" organized by the ISM, on which Ms. Ellis herself would be a passenger.

In the comments section of the petition, Ms. Ellis wrote this:

"Numerous students, faculty and staff, at University of California, Santa Cruz have been the target of hate speech and intimidation by Tammi Rossman Benjamin and her supporters. The language she uses in the video and on campus is Islamophobic, racist, inaccurate and hateful. The University of California is charged with protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech, not hate speech. There will always be a "Tammi Rossman Benjamin." Responsibility lies with The University of California and the Office of the President to confront and condemn this type of language and misrepresentation of the university by one of its employees. The world is watching. Will The University of California protect targeted students or remain silent and risk being seen as an Islamophobic, racist, and hateful institution of higher learning? Please support diversity and inclusion and condemn hateful attacks on our Muslim/Arab students."

I believe Ms. Ellis' ad hominem and defamatory remarks about me were written in retaliation for my having filed a Title VI

complaint arguing that the Cowell College-sponsored event "Pulse on Palestine," which she had helped to organize and promote, contributed to a hostile environment for Jewish students at UCSC. As you may know, retaliation against a Title VI complainant is a violation of federal law.

Besides their potential illegality, Ms. Ellis' remarks are also an indicator of an extremely troubling pattern of behavior among some administrators and faculty on our campus, who have attempted to demonize, delegitimize, and silence students and faculty who exercise their first amendment rights to speak out about anti-Jewish bigotry. For example:

- In early November 2011, several Jewish students sent emails of complaint, as well as a petition signed by 70 Jewish students, to Wendy Baxter, Director of Academic and CoCurricular programs at Colleges 9&10, about a program being presented by those Colleges later in the month, which included a screening of the film *Between Two Worlds* followed by Q&A with the filmmakers Deborah Kaufman and Alan Snitow. The students were very upset about the event, because they knew that the film focused on in-fighting in the Jewish community, particularly between Jews who support Israel and those who seek to harm it through boycotts and other means, and that it painted pro-Israel Jews such as themselves as extremists seeking to silence legitimate criticism of Israel. In their correspondence with Ms. Baxter, several of the students expressed feeling that Colleges 9&10 administrators were using the film as a way of marginalizing, delegitimizing, and silencing pro-Israel Jewish students who were critical of College administrators for misusing the University to promote their own anti-Israel political agenda. (Colleges 9&10 are mentioned on pages 7 - 9 of my Title VI complaint for refusing to remove their sponsorship of an event, "Understanding Gaza," even after numerous students and a faculty member had complained to the same College administrator, Wendy Baxter, and other University administrators, arguing that such an event would contribute to a hostile environment for Jewish students and that

it was therefore highly inappropriate for Colleges 9 & 10 to be sponsoring it). Emphasizing that they did not seek to shut down the event, the Jewish students requested that Colleges 9&10 simply remove their official sponsorship from the event. Ms. Baxter, however, refused their request and showed insensitivity to their concerns. (To add insult to injury, in an official newsletter that film directors Kaufman and Snitow posted on-line a month after their visit to UCSC, they disparaged and demonized the Jewish students who had requested that Colleges 9&10 remove their sponsorship of the event. Under the heading, "***The construction of a McCarthyite network inside the Jewish community***," the filmmakers complain about Jewish groups receiving "massive funding...that oppose *any* criticism of Israel," and imply that this is what happened at UC Santa Cruz. They wrote: "Between Two Worlds" encountered this [McCarthyite] network at UC Santa Cruz where a group petitioned the university not to sponsor a screening of our film. The would-be censors are connected to a larger campaign trying to use the U.S. Civil Rights Act to silence debate, claiming films like ours create a hostile environment for students.")

- When Guy Herschmann, one of the students who had complained to Ms. Baxter about Colleges 9&10's sponsorship of *Between Two Worlds*, turned to you and Colleges 9&10 Provost Helen Shapiro for help in this matter, neither of you responded. Instead, Associate Chancellor Ashish Sahni urged Guy to file a hate/bias report about the upcoming event, which he did. Despite the fact that Guy had clearly indicated in his complaint that he wanted to speak with Dean of Students Alma Sifuentes about the matter immediately, she did not follow-up with Guy about his complaint until February 22, more than three months after the event.
- In the winter of 2012, a student journalist for the City on a Hill Press (CHP) wrote an in-depth, 3-part series of articles investigating my Title VI complaint. The student, who was neither Jewish nor pro-Israel, conducted several hours of interviews with me, and I

found her to be exceedingly professional and objective. However, after her first article was published on May 24, the student was berated by Susan Watrous, a UCSC lecturer and CHP faculty advisor, who told the student that her piece was "irresponsible," "horribly biased" and "journalistically unacceptable." Ms. Watrous was furious with the student for writing a piece that she felt gave legitimacy to my Title VI complaint. (The article in question has been removed from the CHP archives -- the only article of that issue to be removed -- but you can see it [HERE](#)). Ms. Watrous, who has personal friendships with the leadership of the Committee for Justice in Palestine, then conducted a series of meetings between the CJP and the CHP editorial staff that ended in a highly unusual, [formal apology](#) being issued to the CJP in the next issue of the City on a Hill Press, for having printed the article about my complaint during "Palestinian Awareness Week." Furthermore, Ms. Watrous refused to publish the other two articles in the student journalist's series about my complaint, causing the student considerable emotional distress and violating her freedom of expression. And in what appears to be a disturbing continuation of Ms. Watrous' attempt to delegitimize me and my complaint, I was told that the CHP will soon be running a story which features the defamatory petition. If such an article appears, I will consider it a further act of retaliation against me.

It has been nearly two years since the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights opened an investigation into my Title VI complaint on this campus. Since then, as demonstrated by these examples, Jewish students and faculty who identify with the Jewish state have felt more, not less, harassed and intimidated. The petition and defamatory campaign being waged against me now will make it significantly more difficult for Jewish students and faculty to voice their concerns about the hostility they are experiencing.

Please tell me what steps you intend to take to address the poisonous atmosphere for Jewish students and faculty who speak out

against anti-Jewish bigotry, and how you will ensure our physical, emotional, and intellectual safety and freedom of expression on this campus. Perhaps this is a good time to educate the campus community about Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as well as the federal whistleblower protections which it affords and which our university is legally obligated to uphold.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Tammi Rossman-Benjamin
Lecturer in Hebrew