



## DeVos urged to cut funding for Middle East studies programs that back Israel boycotts

By Bianca Quilantan

12/04/2019

More than 80 education, civil rights and religious organizations are urging Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to prevent federal funding for Middle East studies programs whose leaders or affiliated faculty support an academic boycott of Israel.

The groups, [in a letter to DeVos dated Wednesday](#), said they are concerned that directors of some Title VI-funded Middle East Studies National Resource Centers “have pledged support for an academic boycott of Israel or engaged in boycott-compliant behavior, including attempts to shut down their universities’ study abroad programs in Israel.”

They say that violates the purpose of Title VI, which authorizes federal funding for international studies and foreign language programs.

“It is unacceptable that federal funds could be used to implement an academic boycott that directly contravenes the purposes for which these funds have been granted,” the groups wrote. “Area studies programs whose directors or affiliated faculty engage in such behavior should be ineligible to receive or renew Title VI funding.”

The letter was led by the AMCHA Initiative, which documents anti-Semitic activity in higher education.

In their letter, the groups asked DeVos to issue a statement warning program directors and faculty that implementing an academic boycott of one of the countries in the program “would be a direct subversion of the stated purpose of Title VI funding.”

They also want DeVos to require program directors applying for or renewing funding to sign a statement affirming that they won't implement an academic boycott of any of the countries within the purview of their program.

Earlier this year, in a [letter published in the Federal Register](#), the Education Department threatened to strip funding from the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies because of its emphasis on understanding the "positive aspects of Islam," and its lack of courses that presented the "positive aspects" of religious minorities in the Middle East, such as Christians and Jews.

The Trump administration has said the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies, which currently receives \$235,000 annually under Title VI of the Higher Education Act, was out of compliance and needs to submit plans to address its curriculum, or else its federal aid will be cut.