

90 Groups to Gov. Newsom Asking to Veto AB 1460, Call for Safeguards at CSU

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

August 13, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are 90 organizations writing to you regarding AB 1460, a bill that will make an ethnic studies course a graduation requirement for California State University (CSU).

We are deeply concerned that without adequate safeguards, these courses could become vehicles for one-sided political advocacy and activism that will both subvert the academic and pedagogical mission of the university and incite bigotry and harm against some CSU students. In particular, we fear that the anti-Zionist orientation of Critical Ethnic Studies – the version of ethnic studies likely to be taught in response to AB 1460 -- coupled with the willingness of many ethnic studies faculty to bring anti-Zionist advocacy and activism into their professional spaces, will foster a toxic climate for Jewish and pro-Israel students and foment harm against them. Unlike the University of California, whose Regents Policy on Course Content prohibits “political indoctrination” in the classroom, CSU does not have a policy that would prevent instructors in Ethnic Studies colleges and programs from using their classrooms for politically motivated and directed advocacy and activism, including the promotion of anti-Zionism and the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. We therefore urge you to **veto AB 1460, as well as to call on CSU Chancellor Timothy White and the CSU Board of Trustees to institute robust safeguards against using CSU classrooms and other academic or educational spaces for politically-motivated advocacy and activism.**

Here are the reasons why we are concerned that Ethnic Studies courses taught without adequate safeguards are likely to lead to the incitement of hatred and harm against Jewish and pro-Israel students:

1) Anti-Zionist Advocacy and the Promotion of BDS are an Intrinsic Part of Critical Ethnic Studies

Although the field of ethnic studies has been understood and defined in different ways over the last several decades, the text of AB 1460¹ references a “narrow conceptualization”² of the field known as “critical” ethnic studies that promotes activism to challenge “systems of oppression” as defined

¹ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1460

² In his book *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*, 8th Edition (2009), James A. Bank, a pioneer and founder of the discipline of multicultural education, writes: “One pervasive assumption many educators embrace is that ethnic studies deals exclusively with groups of color...This narrow conceptualization of ethnic studies emerged out of the social forces that gave rise to the ethnic studies movement in the 1960s. To conceptualize ethnic studies exclusively as the study of people of color is inconsistent with how sociologists define ethnicity.”

by the discipline's practitioners. Since its inception, Critical Ethnic Studies has falsely and negatively portrayed Zionism as one of these "racist," "colonialist" "system of oppression" that must be vigorously challenged, and BDS has been the weapon of choice.

For example, the 2011 conference that launched the Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA) and each of the three subsequent CESA conferences³ included numerous panels, talks and workshops devoted to the demonization and delegitimization of Israel and Zionism and the promotion of BDS. In 2014, the full CESA membership passed a "Resolution on Academic Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions," and similar resolutions were passed by the academic associations of three of the four core groups covered in Critical Ethnic Studies classes — Association for Asian American Studies (December, 2013), National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies (April, 2015) and Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (December 2013). In addition, the membership of the American Studies Association, which includes many Critical Ethnic Studies faculty, also voted to join the academic boycott of Israel (December 2013).⁴

2) Critical Ethnic Studies Faculty Have Demonstrated a Willingness to Promote BDS and Anti-Zionist Advocacy in Their Academic Programming

Faculty affiliated with Critical Ethnic Studies are more likely to support BDS than faculty associated with any other discipline. More than one-third of all U.S. faculty who support an academic boycott of Israel are affiliated with a university Ethnic Studies program, and more university Ethnic Studies programs are headed by academic BDS supporters than any other discipline.⁵ In addition, 11 of the 14 founders of the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel are associated with Critical Ethnic Studies, including five who are faculty on CSU campuses.⁶

While faculty have every right to engage in political advocacy and activism outside the university, recent studies suggest that many Critical Ethnic Studies faculty are bringing their extramural support for BDS and their anti-Zionist politics into their conference halls and classrooms: departments with faculty who support BDS are five to twelve times more likely to sponsor events with one-sided, anti-Zionist content and BDS promotion,⁷ and BDS-supporting faculty are four times more likely to include readings by anti-Zionist, BDS-supporting authors in the syllabi of Israel-related courses they teach.⁸

3) Faculty Support and Promotion of BDS is Strongly Linked to the Harassment of Jewish Students

Several studies on antisemitic activity on U.S. campuses have shown strong correlations between faculty who support and advocate for BDS and acts of harassment targeting Jewish students,

³ See: <https://criticalethnicstudies.org/past-conference-materials> and <https://criticalethnicstudies.org/conference-information>

⁴ <https://amchainitiative.org/academic-associations-endorsing-academic-boycott-of-israel/>

⁵ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Faculty-Report.pdf>

⁶ <http://web.archive.org/web/20090202085703/https://usacbi.wordpress.com/about-us/>

⁷ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Faculty-Report.pdf>

⁸ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Syllabus-Study-Report.pdf>

including physical and verbal assault, vandalism, bullying, and suppression of speech:⁹ Schools with faculty who support BDS are about five times more likely to have incidents targeting Jewish students for harm; schools with student and faculty anti-Zionist expression and BDS promotion are about four times more likely to have acts of anti-Jewish hostility; and schools that host departmentally sponsored events that include BDS-supporting speakers are twice as likely to have such incidents.

4) SFSU's College of Ethnic Studies Offers a Clear Example of How Unbridled Anti-Zionist Advocacy and Activism Can Lead to Harm of Jewish Students

San Francisco State University's College of Ethnic Studies, which is highlighted in AB 1460, is a founding institution for the Critical Ethnic Studies movement. Many of the College's faculty have expressed support for BDS, including the chairs of two of the College's departments, and College faculty have used their academic positions to promote anti-Zionism and BDS advocacy in their teaching, research and scholarship, arguing that doing so is consistent with the College of Ethnic Studies' stated mission of providing "safe academic spaces and resources...to practice the theories of resistance and liberation... [and] to actively implement a vision of social justice."¹⁰

One SFSU professor and program director in the College of Ethnic Studies' Race and Resistance Department is a founder of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and leader in the BDS movement. This professor/program director has consistently used the classroom, program-sponsored events and the program's official SFSU Facebook page to demonize and delegitimize Israel and Zionism,¹¹ to denigrate Israel's supporters -- including Jewish students at SFSU¹² -- and to promote BDS,¹³ and has done so with impunity. On one occasion, after the president of the university had published a statement affirming that Zionists were welcome at SFSU, the professor/program director posted a message to the program's official SFSU Facebook page strongly objecting to "welcoming Zionists to campus". Soon after that message was posted, the words "Zionists are Not Welcome" were chalked in huge letters on a campus walkway, with similar discriminatory messages chalked and posted in numerous other places across campus.¹⁴

This SFSU professor/program director has argued that anti-Zionist advocacy and BDS promotion are "part of my job duties...reasons why SFSU hired me in the first place," and that such advocacy and activism are wholly consistent with "the mission and raison d'etre of ethnic studies in general

⁹ See: <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Antisemitic-Activity-at-U.S.-Colleges-and-Universities-with-Jewish-Populations-2015-Full-Report.pdf>; <https://www.amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Antisemitism-At-the-Epicenter-of-Campus-Intolerance-Report-2016.pdf>; <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Campus-Antisemitism-2017.pdf>; <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitism-Report-2019.pdf>; and <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Faculty-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://web.archive.org/web/20130812155354/http://www.sfsu.edu/~ethnicst/home3.html>

¹¹ See here for a partial list of program-sponsored events and classes that included the demonization and delegitimization of Israel and the promotion of BDS: <https://tinyurl.com/AMED-events>

¹² For example, see this posting by the Professor/Program Director to the Program's Official SFSU Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AMEDStudies/posts/573870589632199>

¹³ For example, see this posting by the Professor/Program Director to the Program's Official SFSU Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AMEDStudies/posts/907963842889537>

¹⁴ <https://amchainitiative.org/fliers-posters-response-to-Wong-2.23.18>

and the College of Ethnic Studies in particular — and by extension SFSU.” And indeed, neither the previous nor current Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies has restricted or voiced objections to the professor’s use of the College’s or University’s name and resources for the express purposes of anti-Zionist advocacy and activism — even when these behaviors resulted in numerous complaints of antisemitic harassment¹⁵ and were cited in a federal lawsuit filed on behalf of Jewish students who felt that these behaviors contributed to a hostile campus climate for them.¹⁶

The example of SFSU’s College of Ethnic Studies highlights the lack of adequate safeguards against political indoctrination in the ethnic studies program that is held up as a model in AB 1460, as well as underscoring the toxic environment that can result from unbridled political advocacy and activism in academic spaces, particularly in the discipline of Critical Ethnic Studies.

Cognizant of the many significant harms that political indoctrination can cause a university and its students, the Regents of the University of California established the Policy on Course Content (Policy 2301),¹⁷ which states: “[The Regents] are responsible to see that the University remain aloof from politics and never function as an instrument for the advance of partisan interest. Misuse of the classroom by, for example, allowing it to be used for political indoctrination... constitutes misuse of the University as an institution.” In 2014, the UC Office of the President affirmed that Policy 2301 applies to both graduate student teaching assistants¹⁸ and faculty¹⁹ who use their classrooms to promote BDS. CSU has no such policy prohibiting political indoctrination. Without such safeguards, we believe that AB 1460’s plan for instituting an Ethnic Studies requirement on CSU campuses is very likely to lead to the incitement of hatred and harm, particularly against Jewish and pro-Israel students.

We therefore once again urge you to veto AB 1460, as well as to call on the CSU Chancellor and its Board of Trustees to institute robust safeguards against using CSU classrooms and other academic or educational spaces for politically-motivated advocacy and activism.

Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Academic Council for Israel
Aggies for Israel (UC Davis)
Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)
Alpha Epsilon Pi, Beta Alpha Chapter at San Francisco State University
Alums for Campus Fairness - National
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA

¹⁵ See, for example: <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/California-State-University-Letter-7.11.19.pdf>; <https://amchainitiative.org/letter-to-White-and-CSU-Trustees-Mar-2018>; and <https://amchainitiative.org/amcha-write-sfsu-president-leslie-wong-regarding-sfsu-professor-of-ethnic-studies-rabab-abdulhadi-egregious-misuse-of-university-and-taxpayer-funds/>

¹⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/SFSU-FederalComplaint>

¹⁷ <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/2301.html>

¹⁸ https://www.amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Chancellors-re-Supporting-BDS-movement-in-Classrooms-9.8.14_Provost-Dorr.pdf

¹⁹ <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/12-19-14-Benjamin-Response.pdf>

AMCHA Initiative
America Israel Cooperative Enterprise
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Council of Trustees and Alumni
American Institute for Jewish Research
American Jewish International Relations Institute
American Truth Project
American Values
American Zionist Movement
Americans Fighting Antisemitism
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
B'nai B'rith International
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources
Bobcats for Israel at Ohio University
Boston Israel Action Committee
Bulldogs for Israel (Brooklyn College)
California Association of Scholars
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore
Center for Combating Antisemitism
Chovevei Zion
Christians and Jews United for Israel
Club Z
Coalition for Jewish Values
Combat Anti-Semitism Movement
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA)
Conference on Jewish Affairs
Creative Community for Peace
Davis Faculty for Israel
Education Without Indoctrination
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)
Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors
Hasbara Fellowships
Herut North America, U.S. Division
Hillel of Silicon Valley
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization
Israel Matters
Israel on Campus Coalition
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)
Israeli-American Civic Action Network
Israeli-American Civic Education Institute
JAM
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana

Jewish Student Union at San Jose State University
Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
Legal Insurrection Foundation
Magshimey Herut
Michigan Jewish Action Council
Middle East Forum
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel
National Council of Young Israel
National Jewish Advocacy Center
NCSY
NH4Israel
North Carolina Coalition for Israel
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rabbinical Alliance of America
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
Russian Jewish Community Foundation
San Diego Asian Americans for Equality
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
StandWithUs
StandWithUs Saidoff Legal Department
Stop Anti-Semitism Now
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
Students Supporting Israel at Columbia
Students Supporting Israel at Drake University
Students Supporting Israel at San Jose State University
Students Supporting Israel at UCLA
Students Supporting Israel National
Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus
The Israel Christian Nexus
The Lawfare Project
Tufts Friends of Israel
World Jewish Congress North America
Young Jewish Conservatives
Zachor Legal Institute
Zionist Organization of America