

Letter to University of California Board of Regents Regarding Ethnic Studies Admissions Requirement Proposal from 99 Organizations

SENT VIA EMAIL

September 18, 2023

Dear Members of the University of California Board of Regents,

We are 99 education, civil rights and religious organizations who are deeply concerned about a proposal for a UC ethnic studies admissions requirement that is still being considered by the UC Academic Senate, despite strenuous opposition from [UC faculty](#) and members of the [public](#) in 2022. If the proposal is ultimately approved, virtually every high school in the state will be offering ethnic studies courses based on the course criteria developed by the UC ethnic studies “experts” promoting this proposal. This is a deeply alarming prospect, given the openly antisemitic sentiments of these “experts,” and their own contention that anti-Zionism constitutes a core element of “authentic” ethnic studies. **We urge you to help stop the proliferation of antisemitism in CA high school classrooms by immediately rejecting the UC ethnic studies admissions requirement proposal and publicly guaranteeing that no version of it will be accepted in the future.**

The [University of California Ethnic Studies Council](#), representing 300 faculty in ethnic studies departments throughout the University, recently launched a campaign to revive and aggressively [promote](#) within the Academic Senate the proposal to make “critical” ethnic studies - a politicized and activist-driven version of the discipline - a course requirement for UC admission. The proposal’s authors, who are members of the Council’s leadership team, [argue](#) that following the state Legislature’s passage of a bill mandating an ethnic studies high school graduation requirement (AB 101), a UC ethnic studies admission requirement, with course criteria developed by the Council’s “experts,” would allow these “experts” to “set the standard of what a college preparatory ethnic studies course should consist of.”

In order to appreciate our deep concerns, it’s crucial to see how the UC ethnic studies “experts” pushing this proposal understand their discipline’s core beliefs, goals and pedagogical practices, and how

these will directly harm high school students if the ethnic studies admissions proposal is approved.

Christine Hong, founder and recent chair of UC Santa Cruz's Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) department, director of its affiliated Center for Racial Justice and a leader of the UC Ethnic Studies Council, is co-chair and spokesperson of the UC Academic Senate-appointed Working Group for developing the ethnic studies admissions requirement. She is the lead writer of the course criteria aiming to set the state-wide standard for high school ethnic studies courses.

In addition, Hong and two other members of her CRES department are part of the [Founding Collective](#) of the recently established and highly controversial Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism. Six other ethnic studies-affiliated faculty from five other UC campuses – including the chair of the UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Department, former chairs of ethnic studies departments at UC Riverside and UCLA, and faculty from UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara –are on the Institute's growing Advisory Board.

The Institute [states](#) that its mission is “to support the delinking of the study of Zionism from Jewish Studies” and proudly [claims](#), “[O]ur opposition to Zionism...is a first principle.” The “[Points of Unity](#)” guiding the Institute's work identify Zionism as “a settler colonial racial project” linked to “group supremacy,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “racism,” and commit Institute members to “join in resistance” against Zionist repression.

It is important to emphasize that the vast majority of Jews worldwide view Zionism as the religious, historic, and ethnic ties binding Jews to the Land of Israel. In fact, a Pew Research Center study found that 80% of Jews view Israel as integral to their Jewish identity. As such, the Institute's demonizing portrayal of Zionism and commitment to opposing and joining in resistance against it represent a broadside attack on Jews and Jewish identity that is antisemitic in both intent and effect.

Nevertheless, when she was interviewed in a recent [podcast](#) alongside Emmaia Gelman, a fellow Institute founder and acting director, **Hong stated that the Institute's understanding of Zionism is “part and parcel” of the field of ethnic studies.** Drawing on antisemitic tropes of Jewish power and malevolence, both Hong and Gelman went on to accuse Jewish organizations in North America of being “antagonists” in all of ethnic studies' struggles against racism and colonialism. Hong asserted

that Jewish groups' attempts to keep antisemitism out of high school ethnic studies classrooms in California were examples of "U.S. fascism," while Gelman accused the Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish organizations that fight antisemitism of "racism" and "white supremacy."

Moreover, Hong and three other UC ethnic studies faculty are helping to organize the Institute's inaugural [conference](#) in October, half of which is slated to take place at UCSC. Entitled "Battling the 'IHRA Definition': Theory and Practice," the conference is intended to provide academics and activists with tools for delegitimizing the most authoritative and widely-accepted definition of antisemitism, falsely claiming it "both amplifies and hides repressive power and state violence."

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) [definition](#) accurately understands that almost all Jews are inextricably linked to the Jewish state -- home to nearly half of world Jewry -- and rightly identifies physical and verbal threats to Israel's existence, and hence to Jewish self-determination and the safety of Jews worldwide, as forms of antisemitism. It is considered the gold standard for defining antisemitism and is used by the White House, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Education, and more than 1,000 governments and NGOs. The Institute's inaugural conference, whose purpose is to attack the IHRA definition by denying the connection between Zionism and Judaism, is another example of how the Institute and its members promote antisemitism.

The Institute's deplorable conference is co-sponsored by Hong's CRES department at UCSC and its affiliated Center for Racial Justice. **This conference is also sponsored by the UC Ethnic Studies Council – the group behind the UC ethnic studies admissions requirement proposal.**

Beyond the extensive affiliation of UC ethnic studies "experts" with this Institute and conference, numerous UC ethnic studies faculty, including the chairs of ethnic studies-associated departments on six UC campuses, have expressed public support for an academic boycott of Israel. The boycott's [guidelines](#) call for shutting down all university activity supporting "the normalization of Israel" and promote the expulsion of Zionism and its supporters from the academy. Many UC ethnic studies faculty have also signed a [statement](#) pledging to bring the antisemitic boycott onto their campuses and into their classrooms, including Hong, who also [committed](#) her entire UCSC department to doing the same.

In addition, the UC Ethnic Studies Council recently sent [a letter](#) to Governor Gavin Newsom and Superintendent of Schools Tony Thurmond that underscores how highly inappropriate it is for these individuals to be developing the state's ethnic studies standards. Not only did the Council express their firm belief that anti-Zionism should be one of the "animating commitments" of high school ethnic studies courses, they attacked the guardrails inserted into AB 101 by legislators wanting to ensure that required ethnic studies high school courses do not "reflect or promote...bias, bigotry, or discrimination," especially antisemitism. Despite the fact that AB 101's guardrails were drawn directly from the CA Education Code, the Council called them "censorship" and "racism," and derided Governor Newsom's recent [reminder](#) to schools that ethnic studies courses must adhere to these legally-binding guardrails. The Council's letter also employed antisemitic dog-whistles, referring to Jews as "highly funded lobby groups."

The information provided above makes it crystal clear that the UC faculty driving the ethnic studies admission requirement proposal view opposition to Zionism and activism to harm the Jewish state and its supporters as core components of their ethnic studies discipline. They promote antisemitic stereotypes of Jews and the Jewish state and encouragement to antisemitic activism as "part and parcel" of ethnic studies courses at the University of California and beyond.

Alarming, although the UC Ethnic Studies Council's proposal was sent back to the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools committee (BOARS) for extensive revisions in 2022, at its June 2023 [meeting](#), BOARS members voted to endorse the proposal's draft course criteria that Hong's Writing Group had provided, moving the disastrous proposal one step closer to approval.

This proposal is an outrage. It is both wrong and highly dangerous. At a time of record high antisemitism, it must be stopped. We urge you to immediately reject the UC ethnic studies admissions requirement proposal and publicly guarantee that no version of it will be accepted in the future.

Thank you for your consideration,

Academic Council for Israel
Alums for Campus Fairness - National
Alums for Campus Fairness - Tufts
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Davis

Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA
Amariah
AMCHA Initiative
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Council of Trustees and Alumni
American Jewish Congress
American Russian-Speaking Jews Alliance
American Values
Americans Against Antisemitism
Americans Fighting Antisemitism
Americans for a Safe Israel
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
Association of Jewish Psychologists
Atlanta Israel Coalition
B'nai B'rith International
Binghamton University Zionist Organization (BUZO)
Boston Israel Action Committee
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Bruins for Israel
Bulldogs for Israel (Brooklyn College)
California Association of Scholars
CAMERA Education Institute
CAMERA on Campus
CAMERA's Partnership of Christians and Jews
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore
Christians and Jews United for Israel
Club Z
Coalition for Jewish Values
Coalition of Hindus of North America
Combat Anti-Semitism Movement
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA)
Creative Community for Peace
Davis Faculty for Israel
Education Without Indoctrination
Educators Caucus for Israel - UTLA
End Jew Hatred
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)
Fight Back Now
Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors
Hillel at Davis and Sacramento
Hillel of San Diego

Hillel of Silicon Valley
Inland and Desert Hillel
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization
Israel in NYC
Israel Matters
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)
Israeli-American Civic Action Network
Israeli-American Civic Education Institute
Ithaca Area United Jewish Community
JAM
Jerusalem Education Fund
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana
Jewish Institute for Liberal Values
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
LatinX for Quality Education
Legal Insurrection Foundation
Middle East Forum
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
National Association of Scholars
National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel
National Jewish Advocacy Center
NH4Israel
North Carolina Coalition for Israel
Peer K-12
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rabbinical Alliance of America
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
Russian Jewish Community Foundation
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Simon Wiesenthal Center
StandWithUs
StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism
StandWithUs Saidoff Legal Department
Stop Anti-Semitism Now
Stop BDS on Campus
StopAntisemitism
Students and Faculty for Equality at CUNY (S.A.F.E. CUNY)
Students Supporting Israel at San Jose State University
Students Supporting Israel National
Students Supporting Israel of Santa Monica College

Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus
The Daniel Pearl Foundation
The Deborah Project
The Lawfare Project
World Jewish Congress North America
Young Israel of Bedford Bay
Young Israel of Century City
Zachor Legal Institute
Zionist Organization of America

CC: UC President Michael V. Drake
Chair of UC Academic Senate Susan Cochran
Chair of UC Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools
(BOARS) Barbara Knowlton
UC Chancellors
Governor of California Gavin Newsom
California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond