

Santa Cruz Sentinel

Guest Commentary | Letter to UC Santa Cruz chancellor on 'anti-Zionist' conference

By SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL |

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Dear Chancellor Larive,

We are UCSC faculty members representing dozens of Santa Cruz Jewish community leaders and members, UCSC alumni and students, who share grave concerns about the upcoming inaugural conference of the Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism ([ICSZ](#)), "Battling the 'IHRA definition': Theory & Activism" (Oct. 13-14).

Although this conference has been roundly condemned in the Jewish community for its deeply offensive, antisemitic content and goals, our letter focuses on the troubling fact that the conference is co-sponsored by three academic units at UCSC: the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Department, the Center for Racial Justice, and the Center for Creative Ecologies.

While these three units may justify their co-sponsorship as a legitimate expression of academic freedom, we vehemently disagree for the following reasons:

First, in violation of academic freedom, these UCSC departments are engaging in viewpoint discrimination by sponsoring a conference that applies an ideological litmus test in determining who may participate. While the requirement that all speakers and attendees must "confirm their agreement" with the ICSZ's anti-Zionist "[points of unity](#)" was deleted from the [webpage](#) announcing the conference, its on-line [registration form](#) makes it clear that commitment to these principles still serves as a de-facto litmus test for participants. By calling the conference "a working meeting for scholars and activists of ICSZ's community," and describing the "points of unity" as "common ground for the Institute's community of activists and academic researchers" that must be reviewed by anyone "interested in joining our community," organizers have found a more devious but equally effective way of limiting attendance to only like-minded anti-Zionist participants.

Even in the absence of an explicit loyalty oath confirming agreement with the ICSZ's anti-Zionist "points of unity," three UCSC academic units are sponsoring a conference that is undoubtedly engaging in the very viewpoint discrimination you recently [described](#) as "antithetical to UC Santa Cruz values as a public university."

Second, the sponsoring UCSC departments are taking a formal ideological position on a highly politicized and divisive matter that will inevitably harm faculty and students in their department who disagree with that stance.

Limiting this conference to the expression of anti-Zionist viewpoints and activism necessarily means that its sponsors endorse these viewpoints and calls to action as well. As co-sponsors of the conference, the three UCSC units are formally identifying their departments as anti-Zionist and committed to working toward anti-Zionism's ultimate goal of eliminating the Jewish state. Even if these departments do not demand ideological conformity of their faculty and students, the mere fact that these units have taken such a highly charged political position serves to marginalize and threaten faculty and students who disagree with the department's stance, and may well feel personally threatened by it.

Lastly, the departmental sponsorship of this conference and its antisemitic goals will undoubtedly foment antisemitism at UCSC. The vast majority of Jews worldwide understand Zionism as the religious, historic and ethnic connection of Jews to the Land of Israel and view that connection as integral to their Jewish identity. As such, this conference, whose purpose is to undermine the most widely accepted definition of antisemitism (IHRA) by denying the connection between Zionism and Judaism, represents a broadside attack on Jews and Jewish identity that is antisemitic in both intent and effect. The fact that three UCSC academic units publicly endorse viewpoints and activism that legitimize the hatred of Jews and Israel and seek their harm can't help but create an extremely toxic environment for Jewish and pro-Israel faculty and students on your campus.

It is an outrage that three departments at a publicly funded university are not only sponsoring a politically motivated and directed conference that limits participation to those who agree with the conference's antisemitic goals, they are committing their department to embracing these goals, thereby threatening their own faculty and students, and members of the entire campus community. This is not a legitimate expression of academic freedom, but rather an egregious abuse of it.

Please tell us what steps you intend to take to address this departmental abuse. By failing to act, you are enabling the spread of academic antisemitism and the creation of a hostile and unsafe campus for many Jewish students and faculty.

This letter was co-authored by Ilan Benjamin, Distinguished Professor of Chemistry; John Jordan, Professor of Literature, Emeritus; David Kliger, Distinguished Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus and former Executive Vice Chancellor; Darrell Long, Distinguished Professor of Engineering, Emeritus; Marc Mangel, Distinguished Professor of Mathematical Biology, Emeritus; Ethan Miller, Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, Emeritus; and Ike Nassi, Adjunct Professor of Computer Science.

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