



Add Language to HEA to Ensure Taxpayer Dollars Are Not Used Against U.S. Interests

Problem:

Taxpayer dollars should not be used to implement an academic boycott of Israel or any country.

Background:

Department of Education-designated Middle East Studies National Resource Centers (NRCs) receive millions of taxpayer dollars under Title VI of the Higher Education Act (HEA) to “promote access to research and training overseas, including through linkages with overseas institutions.” The purpose is to equip university students and faculty with a full and unbiased understanding of regions and countries vital to U.S. security.

An academic boycott, on the other hand, seeks to deny access to research, training and education in and about the targeted country, and to break linkages with the targeted country’s educational institutions. For example, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel urges faculty to shut down student abroad programs in Israel; refuse to write letters of recommendation for students who wish to study in Israel; scuttle colleagues’ research collaborations with Israeli universities and scholars; and cancel or shutdown student- and faculty-organized education activities about Israel or featuring Israeli scholars or leaders. All of these boycott-compliant activities directly subvert the purpose for which NRCs receive federal funding.

Title VI Funding is Being Abused by Pro-Boycott Faculty:

During the application process, many NRCs boast about their numerous educational and research opportunities to study in and about Israel and the Hebrew language, as well as their linkages with Israeli education institutions. However, after receiving the federal dollars, they fund speakers and organize events which advocate for boycotting Israeli academics, Israeli exchange programs and Israeli institutions.

- More than one-third of Middle East studies NRC directors have endorsed the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. Two directors called for a shut down of their school’s study abroad program in Israel.
- A 2016 study of the 15 Middle East Studies NRCs found that those directors who had endorsed the Palestinian academic boycott of Israel were more than twice as likely to host federal-funded outreach events with speakers who supported boycotting Israel.
- A 2017 study found that American Middle East studies departments with one or more faculty members who had endorsed an academic boycott of Israel were five times more likely to sponsor public outreach events with pro-boycott speakers.
- In 2018 the NRCs at New York University and the University of Michigan hosted events that encouraged and defended the right of faculty to implement an academic boycott of Israel.

Immediate Legislative Action Needed to End this Abuse:

No area studies program should receive federal funding if its director or faculty members engage in behavior that thwarts the very purpose of that funding.

Legislative language should be inserted into the HEA bill that (1) warns NRC directors and affiliated faculty that implementing an academic boycott of one of the countries in the NRC’s purview would be a direct subversion of the stated purpose of the Title VI funding and (2) requires NRC directors to sign a statement affirming that neither they nor any of their program’s affiliated faculty will, as part of their academic responsibilities, implement an academic boycott of any of the countries within the purview of their program in such a way as to restrict or limit the academic opportunities of their students or colleagues.