



Academic Engagement NETWORK

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Keep Up With Us



December 2017 Newsletter

Latest Updates

AEN now has **511 members on 193 campuses**. We will soon be starting a national membership drive to increase our numbers and will be calling on AEN members to suggest new names for us to invite and recruit.

AEN Member Survey

Over 100 AEN members responded to our first member survey. Your responses were informative and insightful, and we deeply appreciate your contributions. We will be closely analyzing these to determine trends in faculty motivations, goals, and experiences, as well as to outline ways in which AEN can better tailor its programs and resources to meet the needs and interests of its members.

AEN at AJS

More than 40 AEN members attended the annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference in Washington, DC. Ken Waltzer and Linda Maizels of AEN were among the participants.

Blackmer, Associate Professor of English and Judaic Studies at Southern Connecticut State University, who briefly detailed personal attacks she had received during the most recent conflict in Gaza. David Rosen, Professor of Anthropology & Sociology at Fairleigh Dickinson University, detailed his efforts to oppose BDS within the American Anthropological Association and described increasingly hostile anti-Israel sentiments within the association. Carl Ehrlich, Director of Jewish Studies at York University in Toronto, spoke about ongoing controversies on his campus, including a successful campaign by pro-BDS activists to have the York University Faculty Association vote in favor of divesting from select arms manufacturers. Andrew Pessin, Professor of Philosophy at Connecticut College, described UT-Austin professor Ami Pedazhur's experience with confronting - and later facing a lawsuit from - a disruptive anti-Israel group at one of his events, and warned against pre-emptive self-censoring occurring among some Jewish and pro-Israel groups.

From left: Corinne Blackmer, David Rosen, Carl Ehrlich, Andrew Pessin. Photo credit: Raeefa Shams.



Upcoming AEN Programs

From January 14-17, 2018, AEN will be holding the first of its **Regional Short Courses** in Atlanta, GA. These courses, which were developed in partnership with the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, will give AEN members an opportunity to learn more about contemporary Israel, develop

Brandeis Schusterman Center; Ilan Troen, Stoll Family Professor Emeritus of Israel Studies at Brandeis; and Ken Stein, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University. AEN Advisory Chair Mark Yudof will give a talk on "Freedom of Speech and Campus Disruption." Ken and Linda of AEN will also participate.

On January 25, AEN will be sponsoring, together with the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, a Symposium on Free Speech and Campus Violence and Disruption, in Chicago, IL. The symposium will explore a number of timely issues relating to free speech on campus that are relevant to AEN and its members. For example, one panel explore the questions, "What kind of forum is a university?" and "What is the scope of permissible time, place and manner regulation?" Others will address such topics as the heckler's veto, the speech rights of protestors and of invited speakers, and free speech, hate speech and the campus climate. Panelists will include Tim Killeen, President of the University of Illinois, Richard Herman, formerly Chancellor of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Professors Geoffrey Stone and Charles Lipson of the University of Chicago, Mark Rotenberg of Hillel International, and many others. A keynote address will be given by United States Associate Attorney General Rachel Brand. All AEN members should have received an invitation to this program - please let us know if you would like us to resend the invitation.

Microgrant Events

University of Massachusetts - Amherst

On November 29, at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, Jewish Studies professor and AEN member Jonathan Skolnik hosted the event, "Antisemitism and Islamophobia: Historical Perspectives and Civic Engagement Against Hate in 2017," featuring Skolnik, Jay Berkovitz (the Chair of UMass's Judaic and Near Eastern Studies department), and Susannah Heschel (Director of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College). The event, which was attended by over 50 people, was conceived to counter a JVP- and SJP-sponsored program on the "exploitation of antisemitism," which was scheduled for the same time.

In an **interview** with the *Algemeiner*, Skolnik stated that he was "...hurt and upset that five academic departments at a serious university would lend their names and co-sponsorship to a provocative, one-sided panel on 'antisemitism,' co-sponsored by controversial political groups, and featuring three professors with similar radical political views but zero scholars of antisemitism," and that he and his colleagues "...decided to do...the best thing that universities can do: invite informed researchers and practitioners with diverse perspectives to discuss important subjects, for the benefit of students and the community."



Evergreen State College

On October 22, Evergreen State College's Jewish Student Union, with the support of AEN member and Cultural Studies professor Nancy Koppelman, hosted two guest speakers from Judar/Shorashim/Roots, a Palestinian-Israeli grassroots initiative fostering dialogue, understanding, non-violence, and transformation in the Middle East. Over 75 attendees heard Antwan Saca, a Palestinian activist, and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, an Israeli settler, each describe their histories, their attachments to their land, and their mutual commitment to co-existence.

AEN micro-grants are available to AEN members in amounts of up to \$4,000 for the 2017-18 academic year. Initiatives may be aimed at countering BDS and its claims about Israel, educating about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, affirming academic freedom and free expression on campus, exploring relevant aspects of Israeli society, culture, and diversity, and combating antisemitism. If you are interested in applying for an AEN micro-grant, please fill out the **application** on our website.

Campus and Association Updates

University of Michigan

In response to the decision of the University of Michigan's Central Student Government (CSG) to pass a pro-BDS resolution on November 15, six of the eight members of the University's Board of Regents signed a joint **statement** on December 14 declining to meet the demands of the resolution, and "strongly oppos[ing] any action involving the boycott, divestment or sanction of Israel."

arguments to distance themselves from the broader BDS movement and convince CSG members of the resolution's validity.

New School Panel on Antisemitism

A panel on "Antisemitism and the Struggle for Social Justice" was held at NYC's New School on November 28, 2017. The panel, which included Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour and JVP head Rebecca Vilkomerson, caused **significant controversy**, as it was billed as an event on anti-Semitism, but included no serious discussion of antisemitism, nor any panelists with any academic or professional background relating to the study of antisemitism.

Susan Shapiro, a faculty member at the New School's School of Public Engagement (and one of AEN's newest members), **wrote an article** for the *New York Daily News* about the absurd and hypocritical nature of the event: "Believing in free speech doesn't mean Manhattan universities should honor a perpetrator of religious hatred with a bigger platform. Let's at least be honest and change the title of Sarsour's panel to 'How to Cleverly Repackage Anti-Semitism,' or, more accurately, 'How to Further Divide the Left so We're Stuck With Four More Years of Trump.' "

Ken Waltzer also **addressed the panel** (and Indiana University professor Shaul Magid's misguided defense of the panel's validity in *Tikkun*) in the *Times of Israel*, arguing that the event simply reiterated the JVP line on antisemitism, which is that Jews use the charge of antisemitism to silence pro-Palestinian voices: "The screed Shaul Magid offers...defending the recent panel on 'Antisemitism and the Struggle for Social Justice' held at the New School on November 28, 2017, staffed by Linda Sarsour, Rebecca Vilkomerson, and others, is an exercise in vapid self- and in-group-justification."

Lawsuit against the American Studies Association

Plaintiffs in an ongoing lawsuit against the American Studies Association (ASA) and several former ASA officers have filed an **amended complaint** adding new claims and allegations and naming additional defendants in the case. According to the amended complaint, emails unearthed as part of the lawsuit **appear to show** that the ASA's decision to adopt a boycott of Israel was orchestrated by a small group of academics, including Jasbir Puar and Steven Salaita, who infiltrated the ASA's leadership with the express goal of singling out Israel for condemnation. The emails also appear to show that ASA boycott supporters coordinated with international anti-Israel activists, such as Omar Barghouti, a founder of the BDS movement. AEN Advisory Board Member Steven Davidoff Solomon has served as expert advisor to the plaintiffs in the case.

Faculty Letter against Hatem Bazian at UC Berkeley

lecturer and Students for Justice in Palestine founder Hatem Bazian. The students' letter had urged the administration to take "decisive action" against Bazian, following the recent discovery of anti-Semitic tweets he shared this summer. The faculty letter stated: "We condemn such anti-Semitism and demand that Lecturer Bazian desist from associating any of his anti-Semitic postings with our University, directly or indirectly. We note that one such expression was posted on a website associated with the University, was taken down after faculty protested, and now has returned to the website. Such outrageous actions surely would not be tolerated were the target other ethnic, racial or religious groups."

Disciplinary Actions against Rutgers Professor

Rutgers University will be taking **disciplinary action** against Professor Michael Chikindas for "post[ing] extensive bigoted, discriminatory, and anti-Semitic material on social media." A **letter** sent to faculty (and signed by President Robert Barchi and Chancellor Deba Dutta) announced that Chikindas will no longer teach required courses or serve as director of the school's Center for Digestive Health. He will also be required to take part in a cultural sensitivity training program, and "will be subject to ongoing monitoring if and when he returns to the classroom." AEN member Miriam Elman had previously **criticized** the administration for its lack of action on the issue.

Please feel free to **reach out**, if there is a situation on campus you would like AEN to know about.

Member Writings

In the *Jerusalem Post*, Amy Elman **discussed** the European Parliament's new working definition of antisemitism, in particular its focus on the delegitimization of Israel. "The working definition's strength is its controversial recognition of contemporary antisemitism's principal preoccupation – the Jewish state. As such, the definition specifically identifies Israel's demonization and the double standards to which it is held as antisemitic. Moreover, it characterizes Israel's delegitimization (i.e., "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination") as antisemitic."

In his blog *Zip Dialog*, Charles Lipson **shared** his views on the Trump Administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "Since Jerusalem is actually Israel's capital and since it will continue to be so in any putative peace settlement, I don't see how this blocks such a settlement...The US Consulate—and future Embassy—are in WEST Jerusalem. Everyone (except people who believe in Israel's annihilation) understand that West Jerusalem will be part of Israel forever. No voluntary peace settlement will change that."

their own history of encouraging extremism. "No sensible statesman will discount the potential human and policy costs of a proposed action, regardless of who is to blame for imposing the costs...But the BDS movement, which has thrown caution to the winds thus far, and encouraged violence and extremism, has no right to fret about this weighing now."

Also in *Commentary*, Marks **critiqued** the pro-BDS leanings of Duke University Press. "Like universities themselves, university presses preserve their credibility by applying, without bias, high standards of scholarship to the texts they publish."

We know that our members have lots to say and share about developments in the US, Israel, and around the world. If you are writing, speaking, blogging, or tweeting, please let us know!

We would also like to wish all members and friends a happy Hanukkah and best wishes for 2018.

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