



Academic Engagement NETWORK

In This Issue

- Latest Updates
- Microgrant and Speakers Bureau Events
- Campus Updates
- Interview with Amy Elman
- AEN Writings

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March 2018 Newsletter

Latest Updates

AEN now has **558 members on 200 campuses**. In February, AEN recruited 6 new members. So far in March, AEN has recruited 29 new members. AEN is currently doing a membership drive, reaching out to members in different regions each week asking for names of potential members - we thank all the members who have already suggested names to contact.

Recent AEN Events

On February 26, AEN Advisory Board Chair Mark Yudof spoke at an in-depth briefing hosted by the American Society of the University of Haifa, along with Ron Robin, the President of the University of Haifa. Yudof discussed the demoralizing impact of BDS debates on Jewish and pro-Israel students on campus. The talk was covered by the *Times of Israel* and *Arutz Sheva*.

On February 27, AEN Executive Director Ken Waltzer spoke at a community forum

On March 4, Mark spoke at a panel - "Israel on Campus: A Historical Perspective" - at the 2018 AIPAC Policy Conference, where he discussed the challenges posed by the BDS movement, campus opponents of free speech, and a changing campus landscape. Other panelists included Eric Fingerhut, President and CEO of Hillel International; Lisa Eisen, Vice President of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation; Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich, President of the Israel Institute; and Rabbi Yossy Gordon, Executive Vice President of Chabad on Campus International. Photo credit: Raeefa Shams.



Upcoming AEN Events

There are still a few open spots for AEN's regional short course in Cleveland, OH (May 14-17, 2018). These courses are designed to give AEN members an opportunity to learn more about contemporary 21st century Israel, develop strategies related to BDS on campus, and network with other interested faculty. You will also have the opportunity to hear from distinguished faculty - Ken Stein, Alvin Rosenfeld, Steven Bayme, Steven Cohen, Doron Kalir, Rachel Fish, David Ellenson, and others - in their fields of expertise. You can find a detailed description of the course and instructions on how to apply [on our website](#).

AEN will be hosting a National Workshop May 22-24, 2018, in Washington, DC. We will be sending out further details about program objectives, registration

Microgrant and Speakers Bureau Events

On March 21, Jonathan Marks, Professor of Politics at Ursnius College, will host J. J. Goldberg, editor at large at the *Forward*, and Jonathan Tobin, opinion editor at *JNS* and a *National Review* contributor. The two will debate critical issues concerning the State of Israel.

On April 12, Gabriel Brahm, Professor of English and Director of the Center for Academic and Intellectual Freedom at Northern Michigan University, will be hosting Mark Lilla of Columbia University to address the subject of identity politics in a talk on "Citizenship and Identity." On April 19, Brahm will host AEN member Cary Nelson to address "Academic Freedom in Times of Crisis: Collective Bargaining, Freedom of Speech, and the Chances for Peace in the Middle East."

"Identity and Citizenship."
A Very Special Lecture by **Mark Lilla**

Born in Detroit, Professor Lilla was educated at the University of Michigan and received his PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has been named a *Public Intellectual* by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *National Review*. He is the author of *The Once and Future Liberal*, *After University*, *The Reckoning*, and *The American Mind*. He was named one of the *Top 100* most influential people in America by *Time* magazine.

His latest book, *The Once and Future Liberal*, is a call to arms for liberals to turn from the divisive politics of identity and develop a vision of our future that can persuade all citizens that they share a common destiny.

April 12, 7-9 pm, Michigan Room, U.C.

Sponsored by the Department of English, the Academic Engagement Network, and the Institute for Research Studies of George Washington University.

The event is free and open to the public. All students, faculty, staff, and community are invited and welcome to attend. Light refreshments will be served.

For more information, contact Professor Gabriel Brahm at (504) 997-1500 or gbrahm@gwu.edu.

Co-sponsored by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Office of the Provost, College of Arts and Sciences, Academic Engagement Network (AEN), Institute for Research Studies at George Washington University (GWU), and Department of English.

7-9 PM • REYNOLDS AUDITORIUM
EVENT RESCHEDULED, APRIL 19

The Center for Academic and Intellectual Freedom Presents in Cooperation with College Democrats, College Republicans, and Young Americans for Liberty.

A VERY SPECIAL LECTURE BY PROFESSOR CARY NELSON
ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN TIMES OF CRISIS:
THE FUTURE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUS, AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
FOLLOWED BY Q&A

Dr. Cary Nelson is Jubilee Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Professor of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he specializes in poetry, literary theory, and Middle East studies, and an affiliated professor at Tel Aviv University, in Israel. He is a longtime labor activist and author.

The event is free and open to the public. All students, faculty, staff, and community are invited and welcome to attend. Light refreshments will be served.

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On April 17, Barry Mehler, Professor of Humanities at Ferris State University, will be hosting AEN member Yael Aronoff, who will speak on "Current Politics in the Middle East." The event will be supported by the Political Engagement Project (PEP) and will target faculty and students.

During the week of April 16-20, Yaron Ayalon, Professor of History at Ball State University, will host Dr. Raphael Danziger, the former Director of Research and Information for AIPAC and Editor Emeritus of the *Middle East Report*. This event will

Campus Updates

AEN members took an active and public role in opposing BDS during two recent student campaigns:

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, a pro-BDS referendum question ("Shall the University divest, or withdraw investments, from specified companies in the University's BlackRock portfolio that actively normalize, engage in, or fund human rights violations as defined by the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights?") **failed** by a large margin (3,133 to 1,700 votes). The Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) was instrumental in helping pro-Israel students to mobilize and conduct outreach to other student constituencies, while the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago (JUF) reached out to senior administrators throughout the process.

The AEN national office worked closely with AEN members Cary Nelson and Rachel Harris as well as with AEN Senior Consultant Richard Herman (a former Chancellor of UIUC) throughout the month-long campaign. Ahead of a student government hearing on a resolution to strike the pro-BDS referendum question from the ballot, Harris and Nelson met with pro-Israel students and provided advice about responding to questions and framing arguments. Nelson also spoke during the hearing, countering a pro-BDS faculty member who was invited to speak by students supporting the BDS referendum.

Once the referendum was on the ballot, Nelson wrote an op-ed for *Medium* (later published in the *Daily Illini*), "**Another Acrimonious Debate About Israel?**", that argued for voting "no" on the BDS referendum question and exposed the many flaws in the BDS position. Seventeen additional faculty members at UIUC signed on to the op-ed, including Jeffrey R. Brown, the Dean of UIUC's Gies College of Business, who had previously written his own **letter** against the BDS referendum.

Although the BDS referendum failed, University of Illinois President Tim Killeen released a strong **statement** against BDS on March 15, which emphasized that "[w]hile we acknowledge and affirm the rights of faculty and students to express their own viewpoints, we believe that actions such as those espoused by BDS would damage academic freedom and may have an intended or unintended anti-Semitic effect which we utterly condemn."

University of Minnesota

companies that are 1) complicit in Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, 2) maintaining and establishing private prisons and immigrant detention centers, or 3) violating Indigenous sovereignty?") **passed** by an extremely small margin (3,392 to 3,175 votes). ICC, Minnesota Hillel, and the JCRC of Minnesota and the Dakotas had worked extensively to organize student outreach efforts and communicate with administrators.

The AEN national office contacted AEN faculty members at Minnesota soon after learning that the question could be placed on the ballot. With the support of AEN staff, AEN member Oren Gross, a member of the law faculty who was also active against the failed BDS effort in 2016, wrote an op-ed in Medium, "**Say 'No' to Antisemitism on Campus,**" where he detailed how the referendum question singled out Israel and thus contributed to divisions on campus. Thirteen other University faculty members signed the op-ed, including AEN members Brian Bix, Bruno Chaouat, Alex Lubet, Alex Kamenev, William Malandra, Richard Painter, Renana Scheller, and Mikhail Shifman.

Mark and Ken also sent a **letter** to President Eric Kaler prior to the vote, urging him again to speak out against the BDS referendum as he did in 2016. On Wednesday, March 7, before the results of the vote were announced, President Kaler issued a public statement expressing concern that the inclusion of a referendum that names Israel "is exacerbating tension and fueling discrimination toward Jewish students," and invoking his public statement of last year.

After the results were announced, President Kaler spoke out again in even stronger terms. His **statement** took issue with the "flawed" form of the referendum ballot and went on to state unequivocally that "the University does not endorse — and I personally oppose — the action advocated in the referendum, which echoes, in part, the language and sentiment of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement." He noted, as he did in his 2016 statement, that his "concerns are heightened by the fact that the global BDS movement does not seem to distinguish between opposition to the policies of the government of Israel and opposition to the existence of Israel." Further, President Kaler observed that although the referendum was approved only narrowly, it "exacerbates...divisions and thus may damage our ability to come together as a University community in common efforts as we hope for — and work for — peace and reconciliation in the Middle East."

AEN member Jonathan Marks also wrote an **analysis of the vote** for *Commentary*, in which he decried the negative impact on campus. "Those Jewish students who justly feel targeted by the referendum have certainly suffered a loss. So, too, has the university itself been humiliated. In spite of the worthy effort of its president, UMN has been embarrassed by a small proportion of its student body."

to AEN members, helped with strategizing responses, and publicized member efforts through social media channels.

Interview with Amy Elman

Many AEN members have conducted research in Israel and developed connections with Israeli institutions and academics. AEN Senior Communications Associate Raeefa Shams spoke to Amy Elman, an AEN member and the Weber Professor in Social Science at Kalamazoo College, about Elman's recent research in Israel on a Fulbright grant.



Could you briefly explain the research that you're doing in Israel?

I'm on a Fulbright, affiliated with Haifa University, to research the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement's efforts to discredit Israel's adoption of progressive policies pertaining to lesbian and gay rights – efforts BDS insists serve as a smokescreen to conceal the human rights of Palestinians. My work examines the question of what impact, if any, has BDS had within Israel on those committed to the adoption, maintenance and expansion of those rights. I've conducted many interviews, most with activists in Haifa, an exceptionally diverse city that is less identified with but no less important to Israel's "gay mecca".

What spurred your interest in this topic?

LGBTQ rights hold a prominent political place for millennials. For this reason, such rights are a key arena in the struggle both for and against BDS. While LGBT rights are increasingly used as barometer by which to assess the democratic credentials of countless countries, Israel's record is contested. Its seemingly progressive reforms are regarded by its enemies as evidence of bad faith. That is, reforms that in any other country would be regarded as laudable become a nefarious public relations exercise to conceal and/or justify human rights violations (against Palestinians).

What are some interesting findings you have come across in the course of your research?

Adorno once noted that the intolerance of ambiguity is a cardinal mark of authoritarianism in the making – with this in mind, Israel's civil society is deeply democratic. It is vibrant! Many of the Israelis I've met profess their ideological contradictions with a pride that is conspicuously absent on US college campuses and political institutions. Take, for instance, an older lesbian activist who initiated the first pride march in Tel Aviv and so opposes its crass commercialization that she

the left's unwillingness to condemn the heterosexism within Arab communities. And, almost everyone has something to tell me about my subject – regardless of any connection to LGBT politics.

What are some ways in which you've been able to collaborate with Israeli academic colleagues?

I worked with both the Comper Center for the Study of Antisemitism together with Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism to host a small workshop on Public Diplomacy in the Age of BDS. From this gathering and ongoing conversations, we're promoting collegial networks and innovative ideas. As well, there is always a lecture on campus pertaining to one's interests. David Hirsh, for instance, came to Haifa and promoted his book on contemporary left antisemitism. Haifa is a vibrant university and I've been impressed with the dynamic graduate students who come from all over the world, often to tackle subjects that are of importance to us.

What are your key recommendations for US faculty seeking to do short- or long-term research or exchange programs in Israel?

Be ready to have your assumptions challenged! Israelis are insatiably interested in the world and thus they are VERY DIRECT and issue BOLD questions. In the US, we're unaccustomed to such candor. Here's a shout out to the Fulbright program – apply, you've got nothing to lose!

AEN Writings

In *Commentary*, Jonathan Marks **highlighted** the hypocrisy of pro-Palestinian advocates who complain about being silenced while also trying to disrupt Israeli and pro-Israel speakers; **expressed concern** about mainstream speakers being defined as "fascists" who should be prevented from speaking on campuses; and **analyzed** the results of a recent Gallup survey that showed sympathy for Israel at a record high. "Gallup's survey, taken after President Trump's Jerusalem decision had been made, casts some doubt on the thesis that the embrace of Israel by an unpopular president will harm Israel's standing in American public opinion. For the time being, if Gallup is right, it has had no effect at all; not even on Democrats."

In the *Forward*, AEN Senior Research Associate Linda Maizels **described** the difficulty of accurately assessing the results of surveys on campus antisemitism. "Research suggests that Jewish students, for the most part, feel comfortable on campus, but the story is more complex than the main findings publicized in recent surveys. It seems that there is only one issue these surveys clarify unambiguously: that we do not agree on a standard definition of anti-Semitism, and this makes assessing its overall impact on American campuses much more difficult."

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Also in the *Forward*, AEN member David Schraub **raised concerns** about anti-BDS legislation. "At the very least, the moral of the story here is that anti-BDS

legislation needs to be written with far more precision than we've seen thus far to remove any doubt that it encompasses obvious trouble spots individual purchasing decisions or academic speech, and Jewish groups need to be willing to come out swinging against putatively anti-BDS legislation that isn't drafted with due care."

In *Tablet*, AEN members Andrew Pessin and Doron Ben-Atar **emphasized** the corrosive impact of anti-Israel activism on campus. "[C]ampus anti-Israelism isn't merely an attack on Israel, or on Israel-friendly members of the campus community, or even Jews in general. It is an attack on the very norms and values of the university—and with it, on the norms and values at the heart of Western civilization." Pessin and Ben-Atar are the authors of the forthcoming volume, ***Anti-Zionism on Campus: The University, Free Speech, and BDS*** (Indiana University Press).

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