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## **100+ Scholars Call on U of Chicago to Prevent New “Physical Disruption[s]” of Israel Course**

Washington, DC, Feb 27, 2023 – More than 120 scholars from all ranks and various disciplines at U.S. universities and colleges [urged](#) the University of Chicago to condemn and prevent the new physical disruptions of “Security, Counter-Terrorism, and Resilience: The Israeli Case,” a course being taught by Meir Elran.

As first [reported](#) by the *Chicago Maroon*, agitators are now demonstrating outside the classroom, making it difficult for students to enter the room and disrupting the learning experience. According to the scholars, the academic boycott campaign was [started](#) by the university’s Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter a year ago with Instagram [posts](#) exhorting students not to enroll in “SH\*TTY ZIONIST CLASSES” and has [escalated](#) this semester to an alarming degree” with these new physical disruptions.

“Simply put, these protests are meant to intimidate. Respectful debate and even criticism of a course and its content are welcome, but protests that are designed to demean an instructor and intimidate students are not acceptable,” wrote the signatories who are members of the Academic Engagement Network’s (AEN) Women Faculty, Junior Faculty, Jewish and Israel Studies Faculty, and Faculty in the Midwest committees. “University leaders should uphold the right of students to protest and to express a wide range of viewpoints. But when protests disrupt teaching and learning they should be treated as violations of campus policy and antithetical to the core academic principle of open intellectual exchange. Students have a right to study in a safe learning environment. We are committed to maintaining a respectful and welcoming campus for all, and we trust that the University of Chicago administration is as well.”

The signatories go on to warn that “virulent in-person disruptive protests may understandably dissuade students from signing up for certain courses for fear that they will be harassed, shamed, and ostracized. Such an environment of prejudice hinders the ability of students to take advantage of the full range of the University of Chicago’s academic offerings and, in this case, deprives them of the opportunity to learn about the history, politics, society, and culture of another country, all of which is critical knowledge to have in our increasingly globalized world.”

While preventing the disruptions are of immediate concern, the scholars also call on the university to publicly condemn the ongoing campaign to boycott Israeli professors and courses. They note that tolerating a relentless campaign to boycott courses from one semester to the next throws the University of Chicago’s commitment to academic freedom and open inquiry into question. They also point out that since Zionism is a core component of Jewish identity, using the word *Zionist* as a pejorative term, as SJP does, is deeply offensive to the vast majority of Jewish students. In 2021, the Pew Research Center reported that [more than 80% of American Jews](#) consider Israel “essential” or “important” to their Jewish identity.

“For these reasons, we call on the University of Chicago administration to reaffirm the institution’s commitment to academic freedom and robust intellectual debate on contentious issues by publicly condemning the ongoing campaign to boycott Israeli visiting professors and Israel-themed courses and to do everything possible to prevent the physical disruption of these classes. We believe that it is only through such forceful and unequivocal responses that campuses can remain vibrant spaces for learning, dialogue, and growth,” wrote the scholars.

AEN is an independent, non-partisan national organization that engages, educates, and empowers university faculty to counter anti-Semitism and support a robust dialogue about Israel and Jewish identity on U.S. campuses. It is comprised of more than 850 faculty members on nearly 300 campuses across the United States who seek to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promote robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and respond to antisemitism on campus when it occurs. Former Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler and U.S. Representative Donna Shalala serve on AEN’s Advisory Board, chaired by the former President of the University of California Mark G. Yudof. Deborah Lipstadt was an AEN Advisory Board member before taking on the role of U.S. Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.