



## Statement in Response to the Campaign to Boycott Courses about Israel at the University of Chicago

As members of the Academic Engagement Network's Section for Women Faculty, Section for Junior Faculty, Section for Jewish and Israel Studies Faculty, and Interest Group for Faculty in the Midwest, representing scholars from all ranks and in various disciplines at U.S. universities and colleges, we write to reaffirm our February 2022 [statement](#) opposing calls to boycott [courses](#) about Israel and Zionism at the University of Chicago and to express our deep concern and dismay regarding the continued campaign to delegitimize such courses.

This academic boycott campaign, which was [started](#) by the university's Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter in January 2022 with Instagram posts exhorting students not to enroll in "SH\*TTY ZIONIST CLASSES," has escalated this semester to an alarming degree. Indeed, agitators are now [demonstrating](#) outside of the classroom where another [targeted course](#), "Security, Counter-Terrorism, and Resilience: The Israeli Case," is being held, making it difficult for students to enter the room and disrupting the learning experience.

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. 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.

We are proud to be affiliated with the [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN), an educational nonprofit organization that works with nearly 900 faculty members on over 275 campuses to counter antisemitism and the denigration of Jewish-Zionist identity while upholding academic freedom and freedom of expression. As such, while we acknowledge that SJP's Instagram posts – though not class disruptions – fall under the umbrella of protected speech, we find these postings and their calls for academic boycott disturbing for two reasons:

First, and perhaps most importantly, 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. Compounding the call for academic boycotts, 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.

Second, SJP's use of the word *Zionist* as pejorative casts as beyond-the-pale a core component of Jewish identity and is thus experienced by the vast majority of Jewish students as deeply offensive. Its stance is that *any* engagement with contemporary Israel is inherently illegitimate, a position that will only further isolate Jewish students, many of whom already feel uncomfortable expressing their views about Israel on campus and openly identifying as Jewish or Zionist.

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.