



Response to the AAUP's "Statement on Academic Boycotts"

August 12, 2024, Washington D.C. The [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) writes to express its profound dismay at the recent decision by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to [end](#) its two-decade steadfast opposition to academic boycotts, which fundamentally contradict the bedrock principles of open inquiry, unfettered intellectual exchange, and academic freedom.

We call on AAUP campus chapters, and other academic and civil rights organizations, to voice their opposition to this damaging and ill-advised policy shift and hope that this will lead the association's leadership to revisit its position.

We are deeply concerned that this AAUP reversal will legitimize efforts to boycott Israeli higher education. Its new "[Statement on Academic Boycotts](#)" comes at a time when universities across the United States are facing pressures to cut ties with Israeli academic institutions over the war in Gaza, and when Israeli scientists and students are being subjected to an [alarming degree of ostracism](#). The AAUP's new stance will undoubtedly be referenced by scholar-activists in order to justify these pernicious activities to shun and isolate Israeli academics.

The AAUP's [new statement](#), approved by its Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure last month and now adopted by its national Council, supersedes the association's [2006 report](#) that rejected "systematic academic boycott" as a threat to the core values that define the academy, including the "principles of free expression and communication on which we collectively depend." Notwithstanding that some of the association's members, including those in leadership positions, found this categorical opposition to academic boycotts "controversial," for nearly twenty years the AAUP has rightly held firm to the view that academic boycotts are contrary to its mission of protecting the academy as a forum for free scholarly inquiry.

Today, this longstanding policy is in no need of any "reconsideration." Indeed, given current harmful trends that are so detrimental to the open exchange of ideas, the AAUP should not be dropping its opposition to academic boycotts. It should instead be doubling down to galvanize support from the scholarly community to uphold a principle that is foundational to scholarly pursuits—not chipping away at and undercutting it.

Academic boycotts inevitably – and inequitably – harm scholars. The AAUP's [insistence](#) in its new statement that institutional boycotts can be implemented without targeting "individual scholars and teachers engaged in ordinary academic practices" is untenable. As has been well documented in numerous recent [reports](#) and [surveys](#), the boycott of

Israel's universities and colleges cannot be meaningfully separated from the faculty and students who work, teach, and study in them. In fact, boycotts are akin to a blacklist, punishing academics on the basis of their nationality, political views, and the policies and actions of their government.

Back in 2005, also amid devastating hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians, the AAUP correctly denounced academic boycotts because they "strike directly at the free exchange of ideas." This is as true today as it was then. Academic boycotts violate freedom of communication and relationships among scholars, students, and academic institutions. They should not be considered "legitimate tactical responses" to disagreement, however intense, over the policies of foreign governments.

Boycotting academic institutions ostensibly in order to defend academic freedom is completely nonsensical. There are many ways in which AAUP members can work to support freedoms and rights for scholars and students around the world without implementing discriminatory activities, severing ties among cross-national researchers, and denying their own students the educational opportunity to study abroad.

AEN is a national organization that builds networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel.