



Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias in Higher Education Classrooms

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Students on U.S. campuses are increasingly facing antisemitism and anti-Israel bias that originates from members of the faculty and that often occurs within academic spaces, including the classroom. According to a 2025 [survey](#), more than a quarter of Jewish students reported observing antisemitic behavior from college faculty. While today many campuses are calmer due to better enforcement of student codes of conduct, the reality is that at many schools a positive campus climate for Jewish students continues to be undermined by biased courses and teaching practices.

Faculty are increasingly being approached by distraught Jewish students for help in navigating difficult and challenging situations:

- an instructor presents historically inaccurate material about Israel in a course that has nothing to do with the Middle East;
- a syllabus focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict includes readings written and produced by virulently anti-Israel propaganda groups and activists who endorse terror violence;
- a professor devotes class time to encouraging anti-Israel political activism and portrays Zionism in inflammatory terms;
- a faculty member cancels class and offers extra credit to encourage attendance at anti-Israel protests, walk-outs, and rallies.

These moments can be isolating, alienating, and demoralizing. Many faculty instinctively want to help, but often struggle with what to do next. Is the issue best addressed privately—colleague to colleague? Should the incident be exposed publicly? Is it best to contact the college or university leadership, and if so, should the Department Chair, Dean, or Provost—or some other faculty body—be approached? How can courses and classroom dynamics be addressed without infringing on the bedrock principle of academic freedom?

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) have co-written this brief guide to address these questions.¹ The guide draws on numerous instances in which our organizations have helped faculty arrive at effective solutions in support of Jewish and Zionist students. Rather than offering one-size-fits-all advice, this guide provides a framework for responding thoughtfully, professionally, and strategically while upholding the values of higher education.

¹ This guide focuses on challenges that emerge in classroom settings. While faculty engage students in many ways outside of the classroom and offer different types of campus educational programs beyond their courses, such as extracurricular conferences, convenings, and initiatives, our concern here is with manifestations of antisemitism and anti-Israel bias in the classroom.

Academic Freedom and Academic Integrity at Colleges and Universities

Universities and colleges are responsible for delivering quality education to their students—they exist to advance and transmit knowledge, not to serve as venues for political indoctrination. The power inequalities between faculty and students, however, can heighten student vulnerability to potential faculty coercion—even when this isn't a faculty member's intention. Students may fear that expressing disagreement with a professor's views might adversely impact their grade or other interactions at a later time, such as a request for a letter of recommendation. Students therefore need to be protected from these risks, which can interfere with their learning.

Academic freedom² gives faculty the right to decide how to approach a subject, including how best to explore materials and what materials to assign in a course. Faculty should also be free to present and discuss controversial ideas in their classes. However, faculty are members of learned professions whose special position at universities and colleges also carries certain obligations and responsibilities. Specifically, faculty should not use their authority in the classroom to influence students to make particular choices related to political activism. Faculty should not distort the instructional process by turning the classroom into a space for advancing specific partisan interests. Nor should faculty evaluate students based on their political beliefs, viewpoints, or activism. Student coursework and assignments should be graded and evaluated based on academic standards that apply equally to all students.

While faculty establish the curriculum and decide what should be studied in their courses, they should also strive to encourage the free pursuit of learning. This includes teaching various sides of controversial subjects within their fields and subject-matter competencies. Students should also be permitted, and even encouraged, to express their opinions and to disagree with the information or viewpoints presented in a course by making well-reasoned rebuttals, without being demeaned or ridiculed. Especially with regard to their formally organized and approved courses, faculty have an obligation to model a respectful learning environment for students. They should not significantly insert material unrelated to the course of instruction or subject students to their particular views or opinions concerning topics that are extraneous to the subject matter of the course, thereby deviating from the purpose of the class.

Faculty should refrain from shortchanging student learning by presenting only their own or favored perspective. Within their fields and subject-matter competencies, the perspectives and materials that professors choose to bring into the classroom are subject to their discretion but good pedagogical practice is to expose students to the diversity of thought on a subject within the scholarly literature. Political indoctrination occurs when faculty refuse to allow students to evaluate and assess various sides of controversial subjects and the different assertions, theories, and frameworks published in peer-reviewed material.

² For an expanded discussion and additional resources see Hillel International and Academic Engagement Network, Best Practices and Principles: Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Responsibilities of Students and Faculty (May 2024) at https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AENxHillel-BestPractices-May2024_v2.pdf and ADL, Addressing Antisemitism and the Limits of Academic Freedom (August 2026) at <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/addressing-antisemitism-and-limits-academic-freedom>

Recommended Action Steps for College and University Faculty

These recommended actions are designed for faculty who are committed to the values of open inquiry and academic freedom and who also want to ensure welcoming and respectful classroom learning environments for Jewish, Zionist, and other students. They draw on approaches recently adopted successfully by faculty affiliated with our organizations.

Start with Your Goal When a Student Raises a Classroom Concern

Before deciding how to respond to a student who approaches you regarding a classroom incident, ask yourself: What am I trying to accomplish?

Your answer should shape your approach. In some situations, the goal may be to correct a particular factual error or to broaden the scholarship presented to students in a particular course. In others, it might be to help a colleague understand how their classroom rhetoric or course assignments are affecting and being experienced by Jewish and Zionist students. Sometimes, after repeated incidents and recurring efforts to address student complaints, the goal may shift from persuasion to assisting students in creating a record that can support institutional intervention and action.

Beginning with your objective will make your response more helpful for the students.

Assess the Classroom Concern Before Choosing a Response

Not every problematic classroom incident is the same, and treating them all alike often makes conversations less productive.

Ask yourself what is actually happening.

Is it that course material about Israel or Jewish identity is ideologically one-sided? Is a colleague teaching contested and complex historical or contemporary empirical claims as settled truth, omitting significant bodies of peer-reviewed scholarship—or is the problem rather that the instructor is blurring education with anti-Israel advocacy, creating an environment where students may perceive that this type of political expression will be rewarded?

Here, it is essential to obtain all the available information and facts. For example, the issue at hand may be solely a pedagogical problem. That is, students are being exposed to only one perspective on a controversial topic, or discouraged from expressing disagreement.³

While many challenges may be pedagogical and concern the presentation of course material, an egregious incident may rise to the level of antisemitic harassment or intimidation. Jewish students may be stereotyped, collectively blamed for Israel's actions, subjected to conspiracy theories or confronted with rhetoric that rejects the legitimacy

³ More serious would be if a student alleged biased grading; that is, that students were being evaluated on the basis of their conformity with the instructor's preferred perspective on Israel and the Middle East, rather than on neutral grounds of academic performance.

of Jewish identity or belonging. Materials brought into the classroom may be pseudo-scholarship, including attacks on Israel which employ antisemitic tropes and canards, accusations of Israel's fundamental illegitimacy, demands that Israel be eliminated or that Zionism be confronted and eradicated.

The more precisely you can identify the issue, the more helpful will be your advice to the students and the more credible – and persuasive – your response will be, should you decide to bring the matter to the attention of college or university leadership.

Lead with Shared Academic Values

Faculty may be more receptive to concerns when they are framed in terms of the standards already central to academic life, rather than as a direct challenge to their judgment or intellectual honesty.

Instead of beginning with, "That was antisemitic," consider opening with a question or an observation that invites reflection and offers more constructive grounds for engagement.

For example: "I'm curious how you decided which readings to assign on the syllabus for this topic."

Or: "I'm concerned that students may be seeing only one scholarly interpretation presented without exposure to other well-established perspectives in the peer-reviewed literature."

It could also be helpful to make the impact concrete. Research suggests that people are more persuaded by specific examples of how antisemitism affects individuals than by abstract discussions of antisemitism as a social problem.

For example, consider approaching your colleague with the following statement: "Several Jewish students told me that they no longer felt comfortable participating after that discussion because their own lived experiences were not also being presented."

This shifts the conversation away from accusatory claims and toward a shared responsibility to foster a welcoming learning environment for all students.

Keep Conversations with Colleagues Grounded in Specific Classroom Conduct

Often one-on-one conversations can create the best opportunity for reflection. In a private meeting, it is possible to ask questions, identify specific concerns, and give your colleague a chance to respond in a setting that offers psychological safety.

That said, one of the quickest ways for what should be a collegial discussion to quickly spiral into an unhelpful, unproductive and heated argument is to get pulled into a debate over political labels.

Whenever possible, describe the specific conduct that concerns you rather than casting aspersions or assigning motives. Instead of accusing a colleague of being "antisemitic" or "anti-Zionist," focus on what specifically occurred in the classroom or what readings appear on the syllabus.

For example:

- "The lecture presented a contested historical claim as though there was no serious scholarly disagreement about it."
- "Jewish perspectives were absent from a class discussion about Jewish self-determination."
- "Students who disagreed with the dominant narrative that featured on the syllabus felt discouraged from participating."

Specific observations are harder to dismiss than are broad accusations.

Similarly, when discussions turn to Israel, the Jewish experience, or Jewish identity explain what concerns you in concrete rather than ideological terms. If appropriate, describe why Israel matters personally to you and many Jewish students and why anti-Zionism is often experienced as offensive, threatening, and hurtful. Research indicates that establishing a personal connection is generally more persuasive than are abstract political explanations.

Match Your Response to the Setting

It can be helpful to suggest to students that their response should depend not only on what was said, but where, by whom and in front of whom.

For example, if a professor makes a problematic statement in class, there may be value in responding briefly in the moment, particularly if silence could leave the impression that the claim is uncontested. Yet, students should appreciate that the matter is unlikely to be resolved on the spot. A simple registering of disagreement can allow for a fuller conversation at a later time, perhaps during office hours.

Escalation should be based on the conduct and its consequences. When in doubt, encourage the students to document what happened and seek confidential guidance about their options, including by reaching out to ADL via campus@adl.org.

Note: You should be factual and non-conclusory in documentation and seek legal counsel before sharing written characterizations of a colleague's conduct with third parties.

When to Engage College or University Leaders About Classroom Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias

Not every colleague is interested in dialogue.

If a faculty member repeatedly dismisses concerns, retaliates against students or colleagues who disagree, or continues alleged misuse of the classroom after concerns have been raised, further debate is unlikely to be productive.

At that point, your priorities change.

Encourage students to document classroom incidents carefully. They should save relevant emails, syllabi, assignments, or in-class slides and handouts. Dates, context and communications should be documented while the incidents are still fresh. In sum, encourage students to preserve their own contemporaneous accounts.

Documentation grounded in specific facts – rather than assumptions about intent – will be far more valuable if institutional intervention and action become necessary.

Additionally, if a colleague is unwilling to engage in dialogue, consider reaching out to relevant institutional bodies or college or university leadership. Faculty curriculum committees could be approached by raising concerns regarding a syllabus that only includes virulently anti-Zionist materials, thus depriving students of alternative resources about Israel. Such committees are typically mandated to review course curriculum, recommend revision, and to approve courses for degree requirements and catalog placement.

You can also contact Department Chairs, Deans, Provosts or other academic leaders responsible for program and curriculum oversight. Where there are multiple cases of biased courses or allegations of faculty professional misconduct, the Office of the Provost could be asked to offer guidance to the faculty regarding institutional policies and their rights and responsibilities, both in and outside of the classroom.⁴

A one-sided course that fails to expose students to the wide variety of scholarly literature about Israel, Jewish identity, and the Jewish experience can also be redesignated as a special-topics class or an elective, rather than as a mandatory or Core Curriculum course that fulfills degree or general-education graduation requirements. Courses selected as mandatory for majors or minors or that satisfy a liberal arts Core should be balanced classes that offer a rich learning experience geared toward building critical thinking skills—not ones that teach from a narrow perspective.

Build Jewish Faculty and Staff Community on Campus Across Political Differences

On many campuses anti-Israel faculty are now organized into chapters of the Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine network (FSJP). While there is nothing wrong with faculty forming affinity groups, our organizations and others are increasingly concerned that this network is sowing divisions on campus by encouraging the academic boycotting of Israeli universities and researchers, promoting vehemently anti-Zionist programming, and challenging reasonable and content-neutral time, place, and manner policies for protests and demonstrations that have been implemented to restore calm.⁵ In order to effectively counter this development, Jewish and Zionist faculty and staff must also collectively organize, even as they may disagree sharply about current events in Israel. Those disagreements can make collective action difficult, but need not prevent Jewish faculty and staff from building community or addressing shared concerns—especially with regard to improving the campus climate for Jewish and other students, which will be an identifiable common goal.

In establishing such a faculty and staff group and defining its mission, start with areas of common ground rather than those requiring political consensus. A Jewish staff and faculty group might focus on supporting students, sharing information about campus resources, responding to anti-Jewish stereotypes, promoting open inquiry and viewpoint

⁴ See, for example, Benjamin Hermalin, “Political Advocacy, academic freedom, and instruction,” Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor & Provost, UC Berkeley, October 25, 2023 at <https://evcp.berkeley.edu/news/political-advocacy-academic-freedom-and-instruction>.

⁵ For extended discussions of the divisive activities of the Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine network (FSJP), see for example: <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/faculty-and-staff-justice-palestine-fsjp>

diversity, challenging the erosion of scholarly standards, and ensuring that students know where to turn when problems arise.

An effective staff and faculty group does not oblige its members to agree on every political question. It requires enough trust to recognize shared interests and to act together when Jewish students (and staff or faculty) need support.⁶

When College and University Students Confide in You but Are Afraid to Report

Students may confide in a trusted faculty member but hesitate to file a complaint, particularly when they fear retaliation or believe their identity will make them easily identifiable by their professor. Your role is not to pressure a student to voice a complaint. It is to make sure fear, uncertainty, or lack of information are not the reasons they may choose to remain silent.

Helping students to understand their options, including what confidentiality or anonymity the institution can – and cannot – provide, is essential. As noted above, you should encourage them to document specific incidents, including dates, assignments, and relevant communications. When appropriate, offer to help them prepare an account or accompany them to the appropriate college or university office to share their experience.

Be particularly sensitive when a student could be identifiable even in an ostensibly anonymous complaint – for example, when there is only one Jewish student in a small class. Additionally, before promising confidentiality, learn what your institution's policies require with regard to disclosing student allegations of bias, discrimination, or harassment.

If a student does not want to file a complaint, consider whether you can raise broader concerns about pedagogy, classroom climate, or academic standards without identifying the student.

Note: faculty must comply with FERPA before sharing or characterizing student experiences with administrators or in written documentation, and should work with the institution's Title VI or civil rights office rather than acting unilaterally.

⁶ AEN now supports Jewish and Zionist faculty and staff chapters on over 50 campuses nationwide through its Faculty Against Antisemitism Movement (FAAM) initiative. For a partial list and group mission statements and websites, see <https://www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/faculty-affinity-groups>

Quick Reference for Choosing the Right Response

Situation	First Step
Factual error or incomplete scholarship presented in class	Ask questions and recommend additional materials be added to a course syllabus
One-sided syllabus	Focus on pedagogical excellence and academic standards; suggest that the course be removed from mandatory degree requirements
Jewish students report feeling targeted or excluded in class	Center their experience and work with colleagues and/or college or university leaders to restore an inclusive classroom environment
Repeated incidents (or retaliation)	Document, preserve evidence, and consider institutional channels

A Final Word

Jewish faculty should not feel responsible to confront every vehemently anti-Israel colleague or to correct for every inaccurate claim that their colleagues raise about Israel or Jewish identity. Choosing not to engage is sometimes the right professional judgment.

But neither should Jewish faculty feel compelled to remain silent when academic standards are compromised or Jewish students are marginalized, disrespected, or made to feel unwelcome—especially in a classroom setting. Like every member of the academy, you have the right – and, at times, the responsibility – to advocate for rigorous pedagogy, the fair treatment of all students, and an educational environment in which Jewish students can thrive and participate fully and confidently.

If you believe conduct may rise to the level of being actionable, consult institutional legal counsel or the Title VI office to assess whether conduct meets the legal threshold.

Support and Further Assistance

AEN provides year-round strategy sessions, educational resources, and online and in-person networking opportunities for U.S.-based Jewish and Zionist faculty across ranks and disciplines. To learn more, contact info@academicengagement.org. To learn more about research-based messaging strategies and how to apply them in campus settings, consider scheduling an ADL presentation for your Jewish campus community. To inquire, contact campus@adl.org.

About ADL

ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913 to protect the Jewish people, ADL works to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment to all. In the face of rising antisemitism and extremism, we protect, advocate and educate, through a mix of programs and services using the latest innovations and technology, and seek to create a world without hate. More at adl.org.

About AEN

AEN is a national organization that mobilizes 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. More at academicengagement.org/ and www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/.

