

Resolution on Academic Freedom in Times of War and Conflict

Since October 7, 2023, US universities have faced tremendous challenges to academic freedom. These challenges emerge in a global climate of restrictions on Palestine-related speech, along with a national climate of attacks against the study of ethnic and racial inequality and structural and systemic injustices. The Israel-Palestine war has brought difficult and contentious issues to the forefront: the history of the conflict itself, the history of antisemitism and its definitions, the nature and definitions of ethno-states and apartheid, settler colonialism and genocide, international human rights, and humanitarian law.

As outlined in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)'s 1915 "[Declaration of Principles](#) on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure," academic freedom is a foundational principle of university education precisely because it allows for the study of difficult and contentious issues through informed discussion. This is why the AAUP has [called upon](#) college and university administrators to fully protect the academic freedom of faculty and students to teach, conduct research, and speak out about important issues both on and off campus at this heightened moment of tension.

We recognize university administrators are under great pressure from powerful outside actors and stakeholders who conflate criticism of Zionism or of the policies of the state of Israel with antisemitism and urge the censoring of such speech. While we abhor antisemitism, as we do all forms of racism, we assert the right of faculty and students to criticize states and political ideologies. Universities must not allow outside forces to [weaponize antisemitism](#), which puts Jewish members of our community in jeopardy and creates conditions that interfere with freedom of expression and narrow the space of free and open inquiry on our campus.¹

To realize its academic mission, Stony Brook University must uphold its fundamental commitment to critical education and knowledge production and constructive community engagement. Rather than policing, censoring, or silencing difficult discussions, we must foster open debate and dialogue, cultivate transformative learning environments, and support the faculty, students, and staff leading these efforts.

To this end, we present the following resolution:

WHEREAS Governor Hochul's [Dec 9th 2023](#) memo stated that "calling for the genocide" of any group of people would be "considered a violation of the SUNY code of conduct, and would lead to swift disciplinary action."

WHEREAS President McInnis' [Dec 11th 2023](#) memo stated that "calling for the genocide" of any group of people "would be considered harassing or discriminatory behavior and would invoke the disciplinary process."

¹ This opening section is largely paraphrased from [NYU-AAUP's recent statement](#).

WHEREAS President McInnis' memo directs the Stony Brook community to ReportIt!, the university's mechanism for reporting discrimination, sexual misconduct, and accessibility barriers, and effectively repurposes this system for monitoring speech on campus.

WHEREAS neither Governor Hochul nor President McInnis defined what types of speech would qualify as a "call for genocide."

WHEREAS we are not aware of any groups or members of our community who have made any explicit calls for genocide against any group.

WHEREAS the mass media and social media have consistently mischaracterized peaceful protest against or criticism of Israel's policies as being equivalent to calls for genocide.

WHEREAS there are no campus policies or guidelines at present to support Stony Brook students, faculty, or staff who have been wrongly accused of antisemitism or who have faced doxing, online harassment, or intimidation for expressing controversial views.

BE IT RESOLVED that the University Senate calls upon current and future leaders of Stony Brook University and the State University of New York...

to issue an explicit statement of support for the academic freedom of faculty, students and staff, which includes freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action.

to assert that critiquing local, state, federal, and foreign government policies and actions do not give rise to a hostile environment, and to protect the rights of faculty, students, and staff to criticize state and political ideologies.

to cease weaponizing antisemitism, to stop perpetuating a Palestinian exception to free speech, and to reject bad-faith complaints against supporters of justice for Palestine.

to move swiftly in developing and implementing clear policies and guidelines for providing support to faculty, students, and staff who come under attack for supporting Palestine or expressing controversial views.

to stop encouraging the Stony Brook community to use ReportIt! to police speech on campus.