

Presentation to the Bar-Ilan Conference on Academic Freedom
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Academic freedom is not synonymous with freedom of speech.

Difference between someone expressing an opinion at Speakers Corner in Hyde park and a classroom at Oxford or Rabin Square and Bar Ilan or Lafayette Square in front of the White House and a classroom at Georgetown

Academic freedom implies an academic, scholarly component.

A Geography department wouldn't allow a professor to teach that the earth is flat, and certainly wouldn't stand by silently if a professor in political science taught such a thing. But social science departments allow professors to teach the equivalent about Israel.

Academic freedom has become shield a to tolerate anti-Israel, often anti-Semitic teachings. In America, the only place where anti-Semitism is tolerated is the university. No other minority allows attacks on its members – you can't criticize African-Americans, women, or gays. Only Jews-directly or indirectly via Israel – are fair game.

Georgetown is about to host a conference of an organization that condones terrorism and calls for Israel's destruction. Members of the faculty have opposed this largely on the grounds that it violates university guidelines because participants were being asked to agree to accept political views that included divestment from Israel and an end to the occupation of all of Palestine (meaning Israel). The Jewish community chose to remain silent for fear of provoking a free speech fight and giving the conference more publicity.

No other minority group would stand by and allow a university to host a conference that would attack its members. Georgetown would never host a conference, for example, by the KKK or other such bigoted group.

And as others have pointed out, the faculty anti Semites who claim academic freedom protects whatever they say, try to silence anyone who dares challenge them by labeling them McCarthyites.

And make no mistake, there is a double standard. Professors sympathetic to Israel would never think of inserting their personal views in the classroom. In fact, these professors are often the most committed to pure academic freedom, but anti-Israel professors have no such loyalty, and see their role as advancing their agenda and so they do not hesitate to insert their anti-Israel views into their courses, even if they are not directly related to the Middle East. Thus, it's common to have anti-Israel attacks in courses such as geography, literature and film.

This conference's focus on the boycott is somewhat misplaced. The boycott is a symptom of the disease.

You can see the problem if you look at the response of MESA to the boycott. The MESA president sent a letter in May to the AUT condemning boycott. At the MESA conference in December, however, when the president reported at the business meeting that the letter had been sent it provoked an uproar. Members protested that such a letter would be sent in their name and called for a vote to have it reconsidered. By a vote of 44-1, the members in that session called for the MESA board to have the letter reconsidered. The resolution that was adopted further specified that if the letter wasn't reconsidered, there should be a vote of the full MESA membership on the letter, with the clear implication that the organization should have supported the boycott.

The problem in the U.S. is a shortage of scholars who teach about Israel and an abundance of pseudo-scholars who teach courses on Israel who are hostile toward their subject. To give an example from just one university, at American University, an anthropology professor used a comic book as a text that is in the vein of *Der Stürmer*. Another professor crossed out the word "Israel" on a student's exam and wrote in the margin, "Zionist entity." Another handed out maps of the Mideast without Israel on them.

The point is not that no one should be allowed to criticize Israel, but professors who do so in their classroom have an obligation to be sure their critique is rooted in scholarship.

What do we do?

The commitment to "academic freedom" makes it virtually impossible to do anything about faculty who use this cover to teach a biased version of history. Rather than try to fight these endemic structures, the best strategy is to provide alternatives for educating students about Israel. In the study "TENURED OR TENUOUS: Defining the Role of Faculty in Supporting Israel on Campus," I offered five recommendations for addressing the problem: Establish centers of Israel studies; endow chairs in Israel studies, bring visiting Israel scholars to campus, provide teacher training to faculty in other fields to allow them to offer courses on Israel, and encourage young students to pursue graduate degrees in Israel studies.

AICE created the Israel Scholar Development Fund to help pursue some of these goals. Specifically, the fund:

- 1) Identifies U.S. and Israeli scholars who could be placed in visiting professorships.
- 2) Offers universities grants to hire a visiting scholar.
- 3) Briefs scholars on issues, provides them media training, and encourages them to educate the public through public lectures and media appearances.
- 4) Offers \$10,000 awards to encourage undergraduates to go into graduate studies related to Israel, M.A. students to pursue doctorates in Israel studies, and/or Ph.D. candidates to write dissertations on topics related to Israel and the Middle East.

- 5) Offers grants to universities to hire postdoctoral fellows to support Israel scholars.
- 6) Offers grants to scholars and institutions to support conferences, publications and research related to Israel.
- 7) Offers subsidies to allow students to pursue research and take courses in Israel.
- 8) Strategically promotes Israel studies by identifying institutions that could and should have pro-Israel scholars.
 - a) Advises philanthropists on where positions should be created to have the greatest impact, and how to do it so their intentions are not frustrated (e.g., an anti-Israel scholar is chosen instead of a pro-Israel one).