

New York University professors speak out to defend IYSSE club status and support free speech

Our reporters
2 March 2017

The Student Activities Board (SAB) announced that it will decide on the club status application of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and other clubs at New York University (NYU) on Friday, March 3.

Last semester the SAB rejected the IYSSE's application, falsely claiming that it is too similar to other clubs and that the university does not have enough money to fund all organizations that complete the requirements for club status. In response, the IYSSE launched a campaign to oppose the decision and the anti-democratic club application process, mobilizing hundreds of students to sign petitions or attend IYSSE meetings and rallies.

In recent weeks, a number of professors have written to the university supporting the IYSSE and calling for the democratization of the club application process.

The IYSSE appealed to professors in an email sent last week noting that "last semester 40 of 46 applicants were denied," and that the club application process is "deeply flawed and anti-democratic, open to decisions based on political bias." The IYSSE rejected NYU's claim that the IYSSE's aims are "too similar to those of other clubs:"

"The IYSSE represents the student movement of the Socialist Equality Party, a distinct political party with a unique history, perspective, and program. To suggest that we join with existing clubs linked to rival political parties, we believe, is an undemocratic attempt to dictate the terms of political discussion and debate at NYU."

Professor Bertell Ollman of the NYU Department of Politics responded with the following letter to the SAB:

"As an NYU professor, who received a large part of

his education at the Univ. of Wisconsin and Oxford from the different political clubs I joined and the even larger number I didn't belong to but whose meetings I often attended, I must tell you how shocked I was to learn how few such clubs get the official stamp of approval, with all the advantages that entails, at my home university.

"You must be aware that such clubs offer the best opportunity for like minded students to get together to discuss, among other things, the practical implications of what is taught in most of their courses... without the imposing presence of their professors. I have always thought that university courses and club activity complement one another in ways that contribute to the best possible education. If resources are the problem, why not reduce the number of professors and administrators, and let student clubs of all kinds flourish?

"I have no doubt that the quality of the overall education on offer at NYU would improve, and we might even save some money, which could then be used to lower the cost of our tuition."

The SAB responded by defending its decision to block the IYSSE, writing that it could not approve all organizations because of what it said were a lack of funds and space on the campus.

Ollman then replied:

"Thanks for your response. But I'm afraid you have turned the key question around: IT IS - Should the SAB accept its role as an instrument of the NYU Administration's apparent desire to devote as little funds as possible to all the students who want to form clubs to enrich their university experience, or change sides and become the spokesperson for all the students

who want to form clubs? It's a CHOICE for you and, obviously, also for the Administration. Nothing is fixed in stone, especially how much money and spaces the University, which has a lot of both, makes available to clubs. Otherwise, you are in the impossible position of trying to decide which clubs are already represented and which not (no two political clubs, for example, are alike). Think on it.”

Several other NYU professors have written in to the SAB. Hasia R. Diner, Director of the Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History at NYU, wrote:

“To the SAB Club Board: Why would you deny a club the right to official status here on campus? Has the club harmed any one? Has it discriminated against any other students? Has it threatened anyone? Do you deny other political clubs this status? It is not your place, as I understand it, to sit in judgment of a club’s worth or its ideas. That is not what a university it supposed to be. I do not necessarily share this group's views; indeed I am not familiar with them, but that is irrelevant. Change your position in the name of fairness.”

Liza Featherstone, Adjunct Professor at the Arthur Carter Journalism Institute, wrote:

“Please recognize the International Youth and Students for Social Equality as an official NYU club. Not to do so is clearly political discrimination and an infringement on NYU students’ freedom of association. Students should have access to a wide range of political organizations. As well, it sounds as if you may need a fairer and more democratic process to decide which clubs to recognize.”

This is only a selection of the letters the IYSSE received in support of its fight for club status. The IYSSE welcomes the support from professors and is prepared for the next stage in its fight for socialism at NYU and among the working class of New York City.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact