

University of California Irvine targets students opposing genocide in Gaza

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10 December 2023

Millions across the globe continue to demonstrate in opposition to the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza by the Israeli government. Students and youth in particular have participated en masse in these demonstrations on every continent.

Fearful of the mass protests that implicate US and Israeli imperialism and the legitimacy of the entire capitalist system, the response of the Biden administration and state institutions—including university and school administrations—has been to clamp down on these actions. This has taken the form of censorship, criminalizing students and clubs, and outright trampling on democratic rights, freedom of speech and political expression on campuses.

At the University of California, Irvine (UCI) in Southern California, students associated with Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) are facing victimization and the club's status is under direct assault. Students have released a statement explaining serious allegations made against SJP club members that threaten their status and graduation prospects. The university has also levelled charges against a Jewish student who peacefully spoke out against the genocide in a Q&A portion of a talk sponsored by the UCI Political Science department and the Israel Institute.

According to the SJP statement, five board members of SJP are having their academic future threatened with bogus allegations of violating numerous Student Conduct Policies in regard to their participation in the National “Shut It Down for Palestine” student walkout. This was a protest organized by SJP and sixteen other organizations.

The students and board members of the SJP are being accused of violating at least three codes:

102.16 Failure to Comply, “Failure to identify oneself to, or comply with the directions of, a University official or other public official acting in the performance of his or her duties while on University property or at official University functions; or resisting or obstructing such University or other public officials in the performance of or the attempt to perform their duties.”

102.14 Disorderly or Lewd Conduct, and *102.13 Disruption* which includes, “Obstruction or disruption of teaching, research, administration, disciplinary procedures, or other University activities.”

These accusations make it clear that UCI is attempting to shut down and censor opposition to the genocide in Gaza and Zionism more broadly.

The UC Irvine administration piled up charges against the students and the organization, laying the framework for revoking the club's official status. The call to disaffiliate SJP and other anti-genocide groups, such as Jewish Voices for Peace, from club status has been a major demand by right-wing and Zionist forces and has already been carried out at Columbia and Brandeis universities in the Northeast.

UCI officials are also claiming that SJP members are in violation of the same three codes, *102.16 Disturbance of Peace*, *102.14 Disorderly/Lewd Conduct*; and *102.13 Disruption*, for supposedly disrupting a talk on UCI campus held by Professor Alon Burstein of the Israel institute, titled, “The Israel-Hamas War: Five Week Update,” held on November 14.

The SJP board members facing the accusations explained, “These vague allegations were given to us board members individually regarding events of the SJP organization as a whole, so it is unclear whether the university is targeting us individually or as an organization. We understand the vagueness of this case to coincide with the university's attempt at censoring SJP behind closed doors, while simultaneously leveraging UC policies to protect their Zionist allies and attack Palestinian students.”

If these SJP members did not meet with the UCI Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct by December 8, they face an academic hold on their student status, which prevents them from graduating or receiving their diplomas. The vindictiveness of the attacks on the UCI SJP and its members must be taken as a serious warning to workers and youth everywhere who must come to their defense.

In addition to the attacks on SJP and its members, an unnamed UC Irvine Jewish graduate student is being targeted for being among a group of graduate students who staged a protest speaking at the talk by Alon Burstein.

In a statement on the incident, the graduate students were

interested in “challenging his [Burstein’s] narrative of neutrality” during a question and answer portion of the talk. However, “The student barely had the chance to identify herself as a descendant of Holocaust survivors before faculty members and other attendees in the crowd stood up and began aggressively yelling over the student’s response, and verbally assaulting her and other individuals who were there to support the student’s statement for Palestine.”

As the speaker was verbally assaulted, others silently held up signs with the names of thousands of murdered Palestinian children. One of the sign holders was allegedly spit on and assaulted by an audience member who pushed them out of the room and police were called against the protesters.

John, an engineering student at UCI, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I followed the SJP UCI, on Instagram. I feel like it’s just unjust. Simple statements cannot just get you an academic hold on your records. That’s what I’m thinking. The Instagram page made a whole post about it and they offered people a chance to sign a petition to protest this, that it’s not proper for that to happen. People want to get their voices out because it’s not just. Like you said, the working class will have to play a big role in helping to bring all this war to an end. That’s very true.”

Nora, a public health major said, “It is shocking! Having to lose what you worked so hard for, for what is just. This is truly unfair, I’d say. I think it honestly can also just violate our right to freedom of speech, to not be allowed to fight for a country that is under just severe attack. It is truly saddening. And I thought that being on this campus, hearing that it is a bit more liberal than other places, you would be able to stand for something like this. It really is shocking. I think we should call for a ceasefire because people are just losing their lives. This is another genocide, and we’re just watching it happen. The students are activists. They have been holding rallies and educating others about the situation. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that and I don’t think that’s antisemitic.”

George, who studies computer science at UC Irvine, told reporters, “The fact that these Palestinian students may get their degrees revoked, that’s a complete violation of their First Amendment right. It’s just a violation of freedom. It’s completely unconstitutional. People have been posting about it, but I don’t think most of the people here are taking any other meaningful actions other than reposting things on Instagram. I would like to try doing something that will make an actual impact.”

This aggressive subversion of academic freedom, and the freedom of speech, to militarism in support of genocide, exposes the hostile class politics of ruling elite who directly run the UC system. Eighteen members of the UC Board of Regents are handpicked by the governor of California, and seven are ex-officio members, meaning they are composed of top officials in the current political establishment including Governor Gavin Newsom. The entire institution is run by the Democratic party which has made clear it will not call for a ceasefire and will

continue supplying Israel Defense Forces with billions in arms and weapons.

Since October 7, at least 17,487 Palestinians have been killed, including 7,112 children, as well as 56,400 wounded by the genocidal campaign being carried out by Israel according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Due to the devastated infrastructure throughout the Gaza strip, counting the casualties has become much more difficult and irregular. According to aid agencies, the situation is getting worse by the hour with most of the population of Gaza currently homeless and trapped in a small coastal enclave without access to food, clean water, shelter, or medical care. Israel has continued attacking what little remains of the healthcare infrastructure in Gaza, leading to rapidly deteriorating conditions to displaced and injured Palestinians.

The ruling class is shaken and deeply threatened by the popular resistance to these crimes. The retaliation against students at UC Irvine is meant to send a message to other students, and the working class more broadly who dare speak against genocide and crimes against humanity. The American population will be forced in 2024 to make the false choice between a fascist Trump and “Genocide Joe” Biden eleven months from now, but they are looking for a true political alternative.

It is critical that the protests against the atrocities begin to take on overtly political character. Students, workers and youth must build an independent, international, and socialist movement against imperialist war. This war cannot be stopped without the support of the masses in Israel and the imperialist centers, including the United States.

Strikes by California CSU faculty and lecturers, New York Postdoc workers, and New Jersey nurses include demands to end the genocide. Students and workers interested in this perspective should contact the WSWS today to get involved.



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