

# New York University seeks to blackmail 31 students into halting protests against Gaza genocide and the assault on free speech

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In the most recent blatant attack on basic democratic rights on university campuses, New York University School of Law has barred 31 pro-Palestinian law students from accessing campus facilities. The university is demanding that the students sign a contract affirming that they will “not participate in any protest activity or disruptive activity on Law School property” in order to return to campus for final examinations.

All 31 students have been deemed “personae non grata” (PNG) by the university for their participation in protest actions on campus against NYU’s attacks on pro-Palestinian student demonstrators.

On March 4, law students, members of NYU’s chapter of Law Students for Justice in Palestine (LSJP), staged an eight-hour sit-in outside NYU President Linda Mills’ office in the university’s Bobst Library. The students were protesting NYU’s suspension of 13 undergraduate students—and issuing of PNGs to several more students—for participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in December of last year.

After months of stonewalling by the NYU administration, the law students staged their protest action demanding a meeting with Mills to discuss the university’s attacks on student protesters, its position on attacks on immigrants by the Trump administration and its investments in companies with ties to Israel.

Later that day, 28 law students who had allegedly participated in the protest action received an email from Craig Jolley, the associate dean of students at NYU, informing them that the protest violated university conduct policy and they had been referred to NYU School of Law’s executive committee for formal disciplinary review. Students were prohibited from accessing the vast majority of university facilities, including residences, health services and religious centers. Exceptions were eventually made for housing, healthcare and other necessities; however, students have reported encountering significant difficulties and delays in accessing these critical services.

On April 28, another group of law students met with NYU Law School Dean Troy McKenzie to demand explanations for the issuing of PNG status to their fellow students. Following

the meeting, in which students reported receiving “absolutely nothing” from McKenzie, a small group of law students staged a peaceful sit-in outside of McKenzie’s office on April 29.

Two days later, three of those law students received PNG notices and were informed that they were being investigated for “particularly egregious” conduct.

All 31 PNG students received an email on April 30 informing them that their restrictions to accessing campus facilities and services would continue unless they signed a “Use of Space” agreement allowing access to academic buildings in exchange for a commitment not to participate in protests at the law school. As of this writing, no student has signed the contract.

These restrictions will greatly impact students’ academic records. Final examinations, which count for 100 percent of a student’s final grade, began on Monday. All PNG law students are restricted from entering university buildings in which the exams are being held.

Additionally, the restrictions will have a significant effect not simply on students’ careers, but most importantly on numerous legal cases. According to the students, around half of those with campus access restrictions also had clinical responsibilities that were being impeded by the restrictions. These students often serve as primary legal representatives for clients in cases related to deportation defense, civil rights lawsuits and other public service issues.

One law student who was declared PNG in March told The Intercept that some students’ pro bono legal work is carried out in a building now restricted unless they sign the Use of Space agreement. “Not being able to put our full energy and do client meetings,” said the student, “as an official legal services provider is not only impeding our ability to comply with our professional responsibilities as legal representatives but also putting our clients’ lives at risk.”

In a statement, echoing the statements made by the Democratic Biden administration in its crackdown last year on anti-genocide protests, Shonna Keogan, a spokesperson for NYU Law School and an assistant dean, said, “Protest activity, while permitted, is subject to time, place, and manner restrictions, and must not interfere with the educational

activities of other community members or school operations.”

“The school explicitly outlines sit-ins as permitted,” a student told *The Intercept*. “But as soon as they don’t like the sit-in or protest happening, they tell people to stop and, when they don’t, they then hand people policies on ‘failure to comply’ with orders. So, in essence they are communicating that they can immediately make any protest they want a violation of the rules based on whether they are amenable to the content.”

NYU students in multiple news reports have pointed to past protest actions that met with no repressive response from university administrators, in particular a Black Lives Matter “die-in” protest and a climate-focused sit-in protest staged inside Bobst library in 2015.

When it comes to dealing with opposition to the war machinations of American imperialism, however, the response of NYU has been particularly repressive. Since the beginning of Israel’s genocide and eruption of mass protests against the slaughter, the university—run by administrators closely tied to the military-intelligence apparatus, Wall Street and the Democratic and Republican parties—has overseen the harassment, suspension, expulsion and arrest of numerous students and faculty.

NYU has retained the law firm Latham & Watkins to assist in the investigation of the PNG students. Latham & Watkins is one of several major US law firms that have bent the knee to President Donald Trump, pledging to provide around \$125 million in “pro bono” legal services to the administration.

The university, one of the largest private universities in the US, is one of several major academic institutions complying with the fascistic policies of the Trump administration.

In February, NYU responded to Trump’s executive order preparing for mass deportations of anti-war, left-wing international students by declaring that it would “comply with the law.”

The administration made clear that it would do nothing to prevent the arrest and detention of immigrants or international students by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials. NYU’s Langone Health System, in response to the fascistic policy of the Trump administration to deploy ICE to kidnap thousands of undocumented immigrants every day, instructed its employees not to shield patients from arrest.

NYU Langone also canceled appointments for transgender children under Trump’s executive order threatening to withhold federal funds from hospitals that provide gender-affirming treatments.

NYU’s actions against democratic rights are not a result of mistaken policies that have appeared out of thin air. They are the product of the development of academia over the last 50 years. The American state and military-intelligence apparatus have embedded themselves deeply at NYU and other major universities.

The university’s Board of Trustees comprises a collection of multi-millionaires and billionaires with deep ties to Wall Street

and one or both corporate-controlled political parties. For decades, NYU has functioned as a critical component of military recruitment, domestic surveillance and censorship and technological and ideological preparations for world war.

The repressive, reactionary policies being implemented on the university campuses reflect the broader assault by the ruling class in the US and internationally on all basic democratic, social and economic rights of the working class.

Driven by an ever-intensifying economic crisis, significant sections of the corporate and financial oligarchy have turned to the most right-wing political forces to escalate imperialist war abroad, strip all obstacles to the accumulation of vast private wealth and crush any resistance to war, inequality, exploitation and destruction of democratic rights.

The escalating attacks on basic democratic rights are continuing to provoke mass opposition among students, youth and workers. At NYU, nearly 400 students, faculty, alumni and other community members have signed an open letter reiterating demands for NYU Law to clarify its suspension policies, expunge students’ disciplinary records, divest from weapons manufacturers with ties to Israel’s genocide and fire Latham & Watkins. According to *Washington Square News* (WSN), over 150 people have sent emails to the law school calling on NYU to immediately drop all sanctions against students.

Mass protests that took place last month, involving millions of people across the US and internationally, revealed the tremendous opposition to the Trump administration that is developing across the globe. Strikes and protest actions among critical sections of workers are growing internationally.

The working class is the only force capable of putting an end to war, genocide and the destruction of democratic rights. Students and youth seeking to build a mass movement against conditions that exist must educate themselves in the history of the class struggle and of the socialist, Trotskyist movement and work to mobilize this revolutionary social force in a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class against capitalism.

All students and youth who agree with this perspective should join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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