

University of Michigan holds disciplinary hearings against anti-Gaza genocide protesters

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The University of Michigan (U-Mich) has brought new disciplinary charges against 11 current and former students for their involvement in campus protests held last year against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. The charges carry a range of penalties, including suspension, formal reprimand and a lifetime ban from the campus.

Those targeted include leaders of student groups in the pro-Palestinian Tahrir Coalition, including Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE, the U-Mich chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine), the Muslim Student Association, the Arab Students Association, and Jewish Voice for Peace. They include four former members of the Graduate Employees Organization, Local 3550 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

According to a July 21 statement from the Tahrir Coalition, U-Mich brought the disciplinary charges between June 15 and July 1. On July 21, the No Detention Centers in Michigan (NDCM) coalition published a statement denouncing the university's charges.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan demands an end to disciplinary hearings and the dropping of all charges. This is a witch-hunt against students and workers whose only "crime" is to have opposed the genocide in Gaza. Pro-Palestinian students and workers face slanderous accusations of antisemitism for peacefully protesting against the war crimes of US imperialism and the Zionist Israeli regime.

The IYSSE calls on all youth and workers at U-Mich, across the country and internationally to oppose the frame-up of anti-genocide protesters at the University of Michigan and universities throughout the US and around the world. The IYSSE demands that the GEO and AFT defend their members and all students facing disciplinary charges and take strike action to halt the university's

repressive measures.

As of this writing, the only references to the charges have appeared in the Tahrir Coalition's weekly email newsletter, an "email zap" campaign solely advertised through the same newsletter and a GEO statement denouncing the charges published on its website on July 16 and distributed through its Twitter/X account.

The GEO statement rightly draws attention to the "grave threat" the charges pose to students' and workers' democratic rights and the fact that graduate student workers, in entering into contract negotiations with the U-Mich administration later this year, will "encounter an authoritarian administration that has no qualms breaking its own rules and deploying violence against the campus community, mirroring the worst tendencies of the Trump administration."

However, the GEO bureaucracy and the Tahrir Coalition leadership have not announced any plans to mobilize their memberships and organize a response among workers and youth at U-Mich and beyond. The GEO's statement, despite acknowledging its looming contract negotiations with the university, makes no threat to strike or lead any other labor action to defend the rights of its members, students and faculty.

The charges are part of a national campaign to suppress opposition to US imperialism's crimes abroad, directed in Michigan by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer and coordinated with the U-Mich Democratic-dominated Board of Regents. Between 2023 and 2024, the Democratic Biden administration served as the nerve center for this national repression campaign. Now, in 2025, the campaign continues, combined with the fascist Trump administration's plans to subordinate the entirety of higher education to its interests and dictates, with the tacit support of the Democratic Party.

A report published in the *Detroit Metro* four of the 11 facing discipline were among the pro-Palestinian protesters charged by Democratic Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel for their involvement in anti-genocide protests on the U-Mich Ann Arbor campus.

Last September, the Board of Regents called on Nessel to press charges against 11 protesters arrested during the pro-Palestinian encampment at U-Mich. Of the 11, Nessel charged seven with felonies for resisting and obstructing a police officer, punishable by a maximum sentence of two years in prison, alongside misdemeanor trespassing charges.

On January 15 of this year, Nessel announced charges against three protesters who participated in a “die-in” demonstration on the university’s central quad, the Diag, during the annual Festifall club event. All three received felony charges for resisting and obstructing a police officer alongside a misdemeanor charge for trespassing. One of the protesters, Samantha Lewis, was also among the seven charged with a felony and misdemeanor in September.

In late April, Nessel’s office launched coordinated raids with local and state police on five locations across southeast Michigan. Those targeted in the raids were accused of participation in what Nessel’s office described as “coordinated criminal acts of vandalism and property damage” across multiple counties, allegedly totaling \$100,000 in damages. Police refused to present warrants, broke down doors, seized electronics and compelled DNA samples.

Within less than two weeks of the raids, Nessel announced the dropping of several felony charges against U-Mich protesters, ultimately dropping all charges over the following weeks.

The means for the university to carry out this repression internally have long been under construction. In July 2024, the U-Mich Board of Regents revised the university’s student conduct code, creating the investigator position in the Office of Student Conflict Resolution (OSCR). The investigator works directly with the U-Mich police and surveillance networks to collect information and file complaints against students, faculty and staff on behalf of the university.

Earlier this year, U-Mich hired Donovan Golich to fill the Student Conduct Investigator position. Golich made a name for himself as a brutish enforcer at the University of Virginia in 2024. During his tenure, Golich served as a complainant during the U-V administration’s attempt to withhold the diplomas of students involved in pro-

~~Palestine~~ protests. A leaked recording revealed Golich violently swearing and threatening fraternity members during a complaint investigation.

In June, a report published by *The Guardian* revealed that U-Mich is hiring private investigators employed by Detroit-based City Shield to monitor pro-Palestinian student protesters. According to the report’s findings, U-Mich paid Ameri-Shield, City Shield’s parent company, at least \$800,000 between June 2023 and September 2024.

The creation of the Student Conduct Investigator position and the hiring of outside consulting firms to gather information and file complaints against students on behalf of the university led to the administration’s banning of SAFE on January 16. The ban marked the first-ever suspension of a legacy student organization in the university’s history.

Revisions to the conduct code made by the Board of Regents enable the administration to define virtually any protest action it wishes to suppress as “disruptive” to the university’s functioning. On this basis, it allows the administration to subject students, staff and faculty to a wide range of disciplinary measures.

Additionally, the revisions have ended the right of those targeted with complaints and disciplinary charges to request an appeal panel of students, faculty and staff, effectively erasing due process. U-Mich’s vice president of student life, Martino Harmon, has overruled two “not-guilty” verdicts by the Central Student Judiciary to sanction students in the past 12 months.



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