Students Supporting Israel at Columbia University

Incident Report on Harassment and Violations of University Policies and State and Federal Rules by the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)

As one of the nation’s most prestigious institutions of higher education, Columbia University has an obligation both to its students, and faculty constituency as well as the broader American academic community to foster and protect nuanced and constructive dialogue on complicated issues affecting New York, America and the world. Unfortunately, groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) and Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) have monopolized the conversation on campus relating to the Israeli-Arab conflict and have systematically maligned, harassed and silenced groups like Students Supporting Israel (SSI) and other pro-Israel voices on campus, who provide alternative -- and critically important -- views on these issues, in clear violation of their rights under both Columbia rules and regulations, and U.S. law.

Columbia’s Student Governing Board (SGB) makes clear its goal: “Since its founding, SGB has traditionally served as the guardian of free speech and students’ rights on campus, and remains the only governing board comprising students from all four undergraduate schools.” Among SGB’s responsibilities is its mandate to “[a]djudge disputes between groups, review complaints received in writing, and take disciplinary action when required.”¹

In interrupting, silencing, harassing and intimidating Jewish and pro-Israel students at Columbia, the behavior of SJP, JVP and CUAD contributes to an unacceptably hostile environment for those who wish to exercise their constitutionally protected rights in ways that differ from the narratives of these groups. Although their right to protest is unequivocal, and we have no desire to suppress their protected expression, one individual’s right to protest does not supersede another individual’s right to lawfully assemble, speak and listen. “The right to demonstrate, for example, cannot come at the expense of the right of others to counter demonstrate, to teach, or to engage in academic pursuits requiring uninterrupted attention. As is true of the larger community in which the University sits, the University must protect the rights of all to engage in their callings and express their own views.”²

Since SSI has started its activities on campus, SJP has continuously attacked SSI’s right to freedom of speech, expression and association in different ways and using a variety of inappropriate methods, as outlined below. For these reasons, we hereby request that the SGB adjudicate the dispute between SSI and these groups, review the complaints as described below, and take the required disciplinary action to effectuate the Rules of University Conduct and “protect the rights of all to engage in their callings and express their own views.

¹ http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sgb/
Among other violations of the Rules of University Conduct, SJP and its members have engaged in repeated violations of the following provisions of Columbia regulations. Some of the members who committed some of these violations have graduated but many have stayed. Individuals such as [redacted] and more, as can been seen on the different videos and pictures. Since some of the violations mentioned were done this past semester in continuation to previous semesters (such as vandalizing flyers), it is safe to assume that the graduation of many members did not stop SJP from their aggressive and unethical behavior on this campus.

These are the violations:

I. **Rules of University Conduct §440, Affirmative Statement**: The University may restrict expression that constitutes a genuine threat of harassment, that unjustifiably invades an individual’s privacy, or that falsely defames a specific individual.

- **Physically threatening behavior demonizing Jewish students walking on campus**: During the fall semester of 2017, outside of an event that was entirely unrelated to the supposed mission of SJP (and certainly of SSI), SJP members started a hostile, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic chant simply because they recognized SSI members walking by. Video of this event shows a small handful of horrified and terrified Jewish students standing huddled together while surrounded by a raging mob of around 50 angry activists encroaching on them in a physically threatening and intimidating way. Such behavior should be taken seriously and warrants action to protect those students who were simply walking on campus as Jews and supporters of the Jewish state.

II. **Rules of University Conduct §440, Affirmative Statement**: The University has an obligation to assure members of its community that they can continue in their academic pursuits without fear for their personal security or other serious intrusions on their ability to teach and to study.

For all the reasons described in this incident report, it is abundantly clear that Jewish and pro-Israel students have unfortunately not been the beneficiaries of this declaration in the Affirmative Statement.

III. **Rules of University Conduct §443(a)(4)**: A person is in violation of these Rules when such person individually or with a group, incident to a demonstration, including a rally or picketing: uses words in a situation of clear and present danger that actually incite others to behavior that would violate Sections 443a (2) or (6)

- **Publicly recruiting activists to disrupt and shut down our protected speech and assembly**: SJP as part of CUAD openly and unabashedly call on other members of the Columbia community (and beyond) to join them in disrupting the speech of SSI events.

3 [LINK TO VIDEO]
IV. **Rules of University Conduct §443(a)(6):** A person is in violation of these Rules when such person individually or with a group, incident to a demonstration, including a rally or picketing: misappropriates, damages or destroys books or scholarly material or any other property belonging to the University, or to another party, when that property is in or on a university facility, and by such actions causes or threatens substantial educational, administrative or financial loss.

- **Ripping, covering and/or vandalizing SSI flyers.** SSI’s flyers have been torn down, covered or vandalized on countless occasions, in violation of SSI’s freedom of speech. Students have repeatedly found SSI flyers on the floor or in trash cans, but have not noticed any other group’s flyers receiving similar treatment. SSI has video of two SJP members removing SSI flyers from a tack board in the Butler library, and has photographs of vandalized flyers and of CUAD (which is a coalition of SJP and JVP) flyers having been placed on top of SSI flyers in a clear attempt to block SSI’s messages from appearing. These efforts are an attempt to stop members of SSI from succeeding in engaging the student body in a critical—and constitutionally protected—conversation. By removing these flyers, SJP activists are trying to silence SSI’s voice. SSI has repeatedly called this issue to the attention of their group advisor and their SGB representatives, yet the problem has only grown. These activities will not stop unless SJP and its members face the repercussions of this violation of the student code of conduct.

V. **Rules of University Conduct §443(a)(7):** A person is in violation of these Rules when such person individually or with a group, incident to a demonstration, including a rally or picketing: interfering for a short period of time with the entrance to, exit from, passage within, or use of, a university facility, but does not substantially disrupt any university function

VI. **Rules of University Conduct §443(a)(8):** A person is in violation of these Rules when such person individually or with a group, incident to a demonstration, including a rally or picketing: continues for more than a very short period of time to physically prevent, or clearly attempt to prevent, passage within, or unimpeded use of, a University facility, and thereby interferes with the normal conduct of a University function

VII. **Rules of University Conduct §443(a)(13):** A person is in violation of these Rules when such person individually or with a group, incident to a demonstration, including a rally or picketing: briefly interrupts a University function.

- **Shouting down of Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, the Honorable Danny Danon.** On February 13th 2017, Danny Danon was invited by SSI to speak to Columbia students about his work in the UN and the struggles it entails. During his speech, Danon was interrupted multiple times. Members of SJP and CUAD were shouting threatening and bigoted remarks in the middle of his speech. Danon’s planned speech was shut down by the disruption and the individuals who came to exercise their constitutionally protected rights to hear, speak and assemble were unable to do so. The individuals involved in this unlawful disruption were SJP (Zach, Hassan, Jeff, Jenin, and more) who have been
responsible for similar improper conduct. Furthermore, during the Fall 2017 event of “BDS 101,” members of SJP and CUAD admitted to have planned and disrupted Danon’s event. There was a Facebook event planning the protest and disruption.

- **Shouting down of a speaker during Syrian aid event.** On March 6, 2017, SSI brought 3 organizations who volunteer to provide aid to Syrian refugees. One of these organizations was an Israeli one, and when the Israeli representative started speaking, SJP members started screaming at him. When asked to stop, the SJP representatives ignored the requests. It is shameful and unfathomable that anyone would protest someone, because of his/her country of birth, who is providing desperately-needed goods and services to victims of one of the world’s most horrific ongoing atrocities.

SJP has also arguably violated the following provisions of federal and state law, while engaging in activity as a member of Columbia SGB:

**IX. In New York, several members of SJP could likely be held liable for defaming members of SSI, having clearly satisfied the elements of the common law tort:** 1) a false statement; 2) published to a third party without privilege or authorization; 3) with fault amounting to at least negligence; 4) that caused special harm or defamation per se.

- **Painting Israelis as terrorists in gross misrepresentation of reality.** On numerous occasions, members of SJP and CUAD have referred to the IDF as a terrorist organization--while they seemingly support *actual* U.S. designated foreign terrorist organizations. We have seen comments on our Facebook page repeating the slanderous statements emanating from these groups. The comments refer not only to SSI members who served in the IDF, but also to the many IDF veterans who now are part of the Columbia community and are being inaccurately and unjustifiably accused of horrific acts for having served--again, as every Israeli does--in the IDF. There are literally dozens of former soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces who are enrolled students and active members of the Columbia academic community. Every person born in Israel is required to join the military, and is drafted at the age of 18, in order to ensure that the Jewish homeland is protected from the innumerable enemy states and terrorist groups sworn to its destruction. Discrimination and, worse, incitement to violence against IDF veterans--so, literally any Israeli, with few exceptions--is patently unacceptable and clearly breaches the §440. Affirmative Statement.

- **Slandering SSI members and leaders.** SJP member and Columbia teaching assistant [redacted], as part of their group, held a sign defaming SSI President Rudy Rochman (a former soldier in the IDF) accusing him of murdering Palestinians. [redacted] held this pernicious poster for the entirety of an event which Rudy attended quietly and respectfully. Such bullying is reprehensible, and leads to an overall intimidation of proud Jewish and Zionist students on campus and a suppression of speech critical to a nuanced dialogue and debate. It is unlawful, and contrary to the mission of any university, let alone an institution like Columbia. Another example of an attempt to slander SSI’s leaders is when [redacted] was wrongfully accused of violence. A month after SSI’s activity during the 2016 apartheid
week, [redacted] was emailed to report to the Student Life office about an issue they refused to give details about. [redacted] complied and found out that [redacted] was being accused of physically assaulting a girl (which till this day we do not know who this was) during apartheid week. Since the claim was made as a result of conflicting ideologies leading to the fabrication of a false situation, it is safe to assume the claim was made by an SJP or CUAD member who was conducting the apartheid week. If this was not enough, under the same breath [redacted] was also accused of harassment and following girls from SJP and JVP to their apartments. These charges were immediately dismissed once [redacted] demanded (with the assistance of lawyers) to see evidence of these accusations. The Student Life office issued an apology for putting [redacted] through a series of false accusations.

X. New York Consolidated Laws, Penal Law § 240.20, Disorderly conduct: A person is guilty of disorderly conduct when, with intent to cause public inconvenience, annoyance or alarm, or recklessly creating a risk thereof: 1. He engages in fighting or in violent, tumultuous or threatening behavior; or 2. He makes unreasonable noise; or 3. In a public place, he uses abusive or obscene language, or makes an obscene gesture; or 4. Without lawful authority, he disturbs any lawful assembly or meeting of persons...

- **Spring 2017 Hebrew Liberation Week.** When SSI Columbia decided to showcase their narrative during Spring 2017 Hebrew liberation week, a few of their friends who came to show support were called “disgusting Zionists.” Another supporter was spat on, twice—an action which in many cases rises to the level of criminal assault.

- **Physically threatening behavior demonizing Jewish students walking on campus:** As was already discussed above, during the fall semester of 2017, outside of an event that was entirely unrelated to the supposed mission of SJP (and certainly of SSI), SJP members started a hostile, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic chant simply because they recognized SSI members walking by. Video of this event shows a small handful of horrified and terrified Jewish students standing huddled together while surrounded by a raging mob of around 50 angry activists encroaching on them in a physically threatening and intimidating way. Such behavior should be taken seriously and warrants action to protect those students who were simply walking on campus as Jews and supporters of the Jewish state. Because this type of incident has happened on other occasions on campus, it could be prosecuted as Harassment in the first degree.
XII. New York Consolidated Laws, Penal Law, § 240.26 Harassment in the second degree: A person is guilty of harassment in the second degree when, with intent to harass, annoy or alarm another person: 1. He or she strikes, shoves, kicks or otherwise subjects such other person to physical contact, or attempts or threatens to do the same; or 2. He or she follows a person in or about a public place or places; or 3. He or she engages in a course of conduct or repeatedly commits acts which alarm or seriously annoy such other person and which serve no legitimate purpose.

XIII. Student Governing Board Constitution, Article 7, Part 2: “A group may not become a member, or a member group may be derecognized from membership, if that group, to the discretion of the Executive Board, has permitted itself to be used to cover or obscure the activities or objectives of another group or persons for the use of the University’s name or facilities.”

The unfortunate reality is that SJP as a group is, on a constant and regular basis, used not to advance any of its own ideas, academic or otherwise, but instead to demonize and delegitimize another group – SSI – as well as any students associated with it. In addition to all of the explicit violations outlined above, SSI students have also been victimized by persistently obnoxious and harassing behavior by SJP and its members. SJP glorifies convicted terrorists on its social media who have been active in campaigns resulting directly in the death or maiming of Jews in Israel and around the world; it also posts disgusting anti-Semitic caricatures on social media, one of which glorifies violence against Jews, depicting a Palestinian beating an Israeli “Wonder Woman”; SJP’s members call all Israeli soldiers baby killers and fascists (although every Israeli is mandated to serve) and tell Zionists to “get out” of campus events. One despicable activity SJP undertook was during Israeli Memorial Day (Yom Hazikaron), when they depicted a “mock checkpoint” on campus in order to libel all Israeli soldiers (i.e., all Israeli people) by acting out a scene in which “soldiers” were beating a pregnant Palestinian Arab woman.

The general impact and behavior towards pro-Israel students on campus is alarming, and students who vocally support Israel are targeted on campus by SJP members in various ways. While we understand and respect their First Amendment right to express themselves, even in hateful and hostile ways, the persistent attacks on Jewish and pro-Israel students and campus leaders contribute to an overall hostile environment for those of us who are active in dialoguing on critical and complex issues -- without ever participating in or encouraging behavior that would make others on campus feel maligned or unsafe.

Ultimately, if no action is ever taken to ensure that SJP and its members comply with all applicable University policies, SSI and its members will continue to be threatened by SJP’s behavior and will continue to have their rights – as both Columbia students and Americans – violated. The decisions by SJP members to flagrantly ignore any and all rules that apply to their behavior result directly from the past refusal to enforce the rules and hold them accountable; until action is taken, their behavior will only get worse, and SSI students will only be more and more vulnerable.

There is a reason why the Rules of University Conduct include an Affirmative Statement declaring that emphasizes “Columbia's commitment to the right of freedom of expression for every member of the University and our ability to openly demonstrate, rally, picket, and circulate petitions, while still protecting the rights of others and allowing the University to continue to function normally.”
While SJP members have been protected in their free expression – which we also support – SSI members have not. Instead, we have been systematically denied our right to engage in the same protected activism, because of the actions of SJP, and because for so long, those actions have gone unpunished.
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No platform! Racists Not Welcome at Columbia U
https://www.facebook.com/events/1260288454048775/

Danny Danon, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, has been invited to give a talk at Columbia University. Danon refers to African migrants as “infiltrators” and “a national plague”; he cheers the murder of activists delivering aid to Gaza; he wants to strip Palestinians in Israel of all rights unless they sign a loyalty oath to Israel “as a Jewish