

*SENT VIA EMAIL*

President Timothy D. Sands  
314 Burruss Hall (0169)  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

*November 9, 2021*

**RE: 79 organizations urge strong response to GPSS academic boycott resolution**

Dear President Sands,

We are 79 civil rights, religious and education organizations who are deeply concerned by the Virginia Tech Graduate and Professional Student Senate's recent passage of a morally reprehensible [resolution](#) that includes a demand for your university to implement an academic boycott of Israel consistent with the [guidelines](#) of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).

In the [statement](#) you issued in response, you noted the free speech rights of those who support the resolution. What your statement failed to address is that you and the Virginia Tech administration have the same free speech rights, which include the right to reject and condemn the resolution. **More importantly, your statement failed to recognize the possibility that GPSS members, many of whom serve as Graduate Teaching Assistants, may implement elements of the academic boycott on campus and in their own classrooms, in ways that would directly and substantively harm undergraduates on your campus, particularly those who are Jewish and pro-Israel. We urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that this does not happen at Virginia Tech.**

It's crucial to understand that although an academic boycott of Israel targets Israeli universities and scholars, its implementation on US campuses such as Virginia Tech can't help but violate the academic and civil rights of undergraduate students. For example, the PACBI guidelines call for boycotters to work towards closing their own institution's academic exchange programs in Israel; refuse to write letters of recommendation for their students who want to study in Israel; and disrupt or shut down educational activities about Israel or featuring Israeli scholars or leaders at their own schools. All of these actions directly subvert the educational opportunities and academic freedom of undergraduate students who want to study about or in Israel.

In addition, the PACBI guidelines' call to fight against "the normalization of Israel in the global academy" will undoubtedly influence what instructors who are committed to implementing the boycott guidelines choose to teach in their classrooms. Courses adhering to this anti-normalization principle would not only pervert Virginia Tech's academic mission by substituting anti-Israel indoctrination for education, but also foment hatred towards Israel and its supporters, a hatred that can easily translate into acts of aggression towards Jewish and pro-Israel students on campus. Indeed, recent studies not only [corroborate](#) the fact that instructors who support an academic boycott of Israel are far more likely to include anti-Israel content in their courses, they also show a strong [correlation](#) between anti-Zionist instruction and acts targeting Jewish and pro-Israel students for harm, including assault, intimidation, destruction of property and suppression of speech.

In formulating a comprehensive follow-up response to the GPSS vote, we hope you will consider how top administrators at the University of California responded to a similar set of circumstances in 2014. When members of the UC graduate student instructors union voted to endorse the BDS movement, the Office of the President sent [a letter](#) notifying every UC Chancellor of the need to inform graduate student instructors that they are obligated to adhere to several university policies which prohibit them from using their instructional positions to promote political propaganda or advocacy, including the promotion of a boycott of Israel. And in 2018, after a number of instructors on US campuses had stated that, consistent with PACBI guidelines, they would refuse to write letters of recommendation for students wanting to study in Israel, all ten UC Chancellors signed a [statement](#) confirming their "longstanding opposition" to an academic boycott of Israel, which provided: "We believe a boycott of this sort poses a direct and serious threat to the academic freedom of our students and faculty, as well as the unfettered exchange of ideas and perspectives on our campuses, including debate and discourse regarding conflicts in the Middle East."

We understand that you recently embarked on a multi-year Campus-Climate-Initiative-commitment with Hillel International. We commend you for that, and we encourage you to work in that partnership to educate your graduate students, faculty, students and staff about the serious harms of an academic boycott and its deleterious impact on campus climate. In the meantime, however, we strongly urge you to take the following simple and immediate steps:

- Inform all Graduate Teaching Assistants that they must strictly adhere to university policy prohibiting the use of their GTA positions for the purpose of political advocacy and activism, including the implementation of an academic boycott of Israel. If no such policy currently exists at Virginia Tech, we recommend that the Board of Visitors establish one.
- Issue another public statement that unequivocally rejects the GPSS's demands for the university to implement an academic boycott of Israel, specifically acknowledges the harms of an academic boycott for members of the Virginia Tech community, and affirms your commitment to ensuring that no student will be impeded from studying about or

in Israel, or will be subject to unfair discrimination or harassment, because of the implementation of such a boycott on your campus.

Earlier this year, in a [message](#) to your campus community, you aptly noted that “institutions of higher education must...recognize that significant segments of society have lost trust in higher education to teach our students without political bias.” In recent years a major contributor to the erosion of public trust has been the unbridled politicization of college and university classrooms by instructors complying with the guidelines of an academic boycott of Israel. Taking steps to prohibit such behavior will go a long way towards restoring public trust. We look forward to hearing what steps you have taken to guarantee all students on your campus a safe and effective learning environment consistent with the high academic standards of Virginia Tech.

Thank you for your leadership and for your efforts to ensure that the public trust in your university is well deserved.

Sincerely,

Academic Council for Israel  
Alums for Campus Fairness - National  
Alums for Campus Fairness - Tufts  
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Davis  
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside  
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA  
Amariah  
AMCHA Initiative  
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists  
American Council of Trustees and Alumni  
American Truth Project  
Americans Fighting Antisemitism  
Americans for Peace and Tolerance  
B'nai B'rith International  
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources  
Binghamton University Zionist Organization (BUZO)  
Boston Israel Action Committee  
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law  
Bulldogs for Israel (Brooklyn College)  
California Association of Scholars  
CAMERA on Campus  
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore  
Christians and Jews United for Israel  
Club Z  
Coalition for Jewish Values

Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA)  
CUFI on Campus  
Davis Faculty for Israel  
Eagles Wings  
Education Without Indoctrination  
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)  
Fight Back Now  
Fuel for Truth  
Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors  
Hasbara Fellowships  
Herut North America, U.S. Division  
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel  
Iranian American Jewish Federation  
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization  
Israel in NYC  
Israel Matters  
Israel on Campus Coalition  
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)  
JAM  
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
Legal Insurrection Foundation  
Michigan Jewish Action Council  
Middle East Forum  
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)  
National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel  
National Council of Young Israel  
National Jewish Advocacy Center  
NCSY  
NH4Israel  
North Carolina Coalition for Israel  
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations  
Progressive Zionist Union (PZU)  
Rabbinical Alliance of America  
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel  
Russian Jewish Community Foundation  
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East  
Simon Wiesenthal Center  
StandWithUs  
StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism  
StandWithUs Saidoff Legal Department  
Stop Anti-Semitism Now  
Stop BDS on Campus  
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism

Students Supporting Israel at City College of New York  
Students Supporting Israel at Columbia  
Students Supporting Israel National  
Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus  
The Israel Christian Nexus  
The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America  
World Jewish Congress North America  
Young Jewish Conservatives  
Zachor Legal Institute  
Zionist Organization of America

Cc: Board of Visitors  
Frank Shushok, Jr., Vice President for Student Affairs  
Byron Hughes, Dean of Students  
Mark B. Rotenberg, Hillel Int'l Vice President, University Initiatives & Legal Affairs  
Susan Kurtz, Executive Director Hillel at Virginia Tech