



**Middle
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June 2, 2017

Dr. Timothy P. White
Chancellor
California State University
twhite@calstate.edu

Dr. Joseph I. Castro
President
California State University Fresno
josephcastro@csufresno.edu

Dear Chancellor White and President Castro:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep concern about Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Rudy Sanchez's abrupt cancellation of the search for the Edward Said Professorship in Middle East Studies at California State University, Fresno. Based on the evidence available to us it appears that the AVP Sanchez's action violated generally accepted academic procedures and standards and thereby undermines academic freedom at CSU.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

According to the information we have gathered, the search committee for the Edward Said Professorship was constituted in April 2016. The committee had interviewed candidates, selected four finalists, brought them to campus for visits, and submitted its ranked list of preferences to Dean Saul Jimenez-Sandoval. Then, on April 26, 2017, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Rudy Sanchez announced the cancellation of the search due to "concerns" that were brought to his attention, including an alleged violation of Academic Procedures Manual 301 regarding the selection of the search committee. It is very unusual to raise a question about the composition of a search committee a year after it was constituted and approved.

EEO search committee member Professor Joe Parks has confirmed that this interdisciplinary search committee was appointed by the Dean, who was in full agreement with the process. The search committee consulted regularly with AVP Sanchez. Other search committee members believe its composition and functioning were consistent with committees that had previously conducted searches for interdisciplinary positions in Women's Studies Program and the Armenian Studies Program.

There was no expression of "concern" about the composition of the search committee or any violation of APM 301 until the names of the four finalists, all of whom are of Arab and Muslim origins, were announced and invited for campus interviews, and colleagues were invited to attend their lectures. The cancellation came at the end of the process, after the search committee had forwarded a ranked list of finalists to the Dean, and after the Anthropology Department had unanimously voted to house the prospective hire.



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Search committee members have reported inappropriate and prejudicial comments from their CSU Fresno faculty colleagues and emeriti. We have good reasons to believe that the explicit and implicit sentiments expressed in those comments unduly influenced the decision to cancel the search. We share the concerns of Professor Joe Parks, the Equal Employment Opportunity representative on the Search Committee, who wrote in response to the cancellation of the search,

“I believe the administration ‘caved’ to racism because the four finalists were of Middle Eastern ethnicity.... I believe the administration violated the integrity of the academic search and the Academic Freedom of Higher Education in the United States of America.”

We expect the California State University, Fresno administration to respect generally accepted academic procedures and uphold academic freedom by revoking the cancellation of the search, restoring the search committee and the search, and proceeding to the selection of a final candidate based on the list of finalists recommended by the search committee.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Baron" followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall" in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc :

Dr. Saul Jimenez-Sandoval, Dean of Arts and Humanities, California State University
Fresno

Dr. Lynnette Zelezny, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, California State
University Fresno

Dr. Rudy Sanchez, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, California State
University Fresno