

October 7, 2019

Dear Board of MESA,

We are writing as scholars of Jewish Studies to express our support for the statement you wrote to the Department of Education on September 25, 2019—signed by eighteen major American academic associations—to express deep concerns about the Department of Education’s letter to the joint Middle East Studies program between UNC Chapel Hill and Duke.

We maintain that it is imperative that all scholars—and especially scholars of Jewish Studies, for whom the study of foreign languages and cultures is at the heart of our intellectual agenda—express support for academic freedom. Jewish Studies scholars and students benefit from Title VI funding for foreign language instruction and understand that good language instruction involves teaching about the cultures, arts, politics, and history of the people that use that language. Thanks to these grants, members of our field have been able to pursue the study of languages central to Jewish Studies, including Hebrew and Arabic. Thus, we concur with MESA that the DOE’s letter appears “based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how expertise in foreign languages, cultural competencies, and area and international knowledge in general is obtained. The letter also constitutes an unprecedented and counterproductive intervention into academic curricula and programming that threatens the integrity and autonomy of our country’s institutions of higher education.”

We believe the DOE’s actions targeting the Duke-UNC Middle East Studies program threaten Jewish Studies and, also, strike at the core of academic freedom. For these reasons, we write to endorse your statement.

Sincerely,

1. Rachel Adler, Ellenson Professor of Modern Jewish Thought at Hebrew Union College-Los Angeles
2. Shir Alon, University of Minnesota
3. Rebecca Alpert, Temple University
4. Allan Amanik, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York
5. Karen Auerbach, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
6. Leora Auslander, University of Chicago
7. Mara Benjamin, Mt. Holyoke College
8. Sarah Benor, HUC-JIR
9. Lila Berman, Temple University
10. David Biale, University of California, Davis
11. Lisa Bitel, University of Southern California
12. Jonathan Boyarin, Cornell University
13. Zachary Braiterman, Syracuse University
14. Steven Cohen, Retired professor of sociology

15. Aryeh Cohen, American Jewish University
16. Jessica Cooperman, Muhlenberg College
17. Deborah Dash Moore, University of Michigan
18. Marni Davis, Georgia State University
19. Rachel Deblinger, UCLA
20. Hasia Diner, New York University
21. Jodi Eichler-Levine, Lehigh University
22. Susan Einbinder, University of Connecticut
23. Ayala Fader, Fordham University
24. Marjorie Feld, Babson College
25. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, Stanford University
26. Dean Franco, Wake Forest University
27. Joan Friedman, College of Wooster
28. Sheer Ganor, UC Berkeley
29. Libby Garland, City University of New York
30. Leah Garrett, Hunter College, CUNY
31. Susan Gilson Miller, University of California, Davis
32. Shai Ginsburg, Duke University
33. Amelia Glaser, UC San Diego
34. Karla Goldman, University of Michigan
35. Benjamin Gordon, University of Pittsburgh
36. Emily Gottreich, UC Berkeley
37. Erin Graff Zivin, University of Southern California
38. Ronnie Grinberg, University of Oklahoma
39. Jeffrey Grossman, University of Virginia
40. Atina Grossmann, Cooper Union
41. Aaron Hahn Tapper, University of San Francisco
42. Liora Halperin, University of Washington
43. Alma Heckman, UC Santa Cruz
44. Kathryn Hellerstein, University of Pennsylvania
45. Hannah Holtschneider, University of Edinburgh
46. Anna Igra, Carleton College
47. Robin Judd, The Ohio State University
48. Marion Kaplan, NYU
49. Martin Kavka, Florida State University
50. Ari Y Kelman, Stanford University
51. Gwynn Kessler, Swarthmore College
52. Anne Knafl, University of Chicago
53. Rebecca Kobrin, Columbia University
54. Rachel Kranson, University of Pittsburgh
55. Jonathan Krasner, Brandeis University
56. Chana Kronfeld, UC Berkeley
57. Jacob Labendz, Youngstown State University
58. Mark Leuchter, Temple University

59. Geoffrey Levin, Harvard University
60. Laura Levitt, Temple University
61. Lital Levy, Princeton University
62. Joe Lockard, Arizona State University
63. Caroline Luce, UCLA
64. John Mandsager, University of South Carolina
65. Barbara Mann, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York
66. Jessica Marglin, University of Southern California
67. Natan Meir, Portland State University
68. David N. Myers, UCLA
69. R. R. Neis, University of Michigan
70. Derek Penslar, Harvard University
71. Shachar Pinsker, University of Michigan
72. Riv-Ellen Prell, U of Minnesota
73. Shari Rabin, Oberlin College
74. Elliot Ratzman, Penn State University
75. Cara Rock-Singer, University of Wisconsin-Madison
76. Aron Rodrigue, Stanford University
77. Bruce Rosenstock, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
78. Laurence Roth, Susquehanna University
79. Michael Rothberg, UCLA
80. Nora Rubel, University of Rochester
81. David Ruderman, University of Pennsylvania
82. Allison Schachter, Vanderbilt University
83. Benjamin Schreier, Pennsylvania State University
84. Joshua Shanes, College of Charleston
85. Adam Shear, University of Pittsburgh
86. Eugene Sheppard, Brandeis University
87. David Shneer, University of Colorado
88. Jeffrey Shoulson, University of Connecticut
89. Maeera Shreiber, University of Utah
90. Mark Slobin, Wesleyan University
91. David Sorkin, Yale University
92. Ronit Stahl, UC Berkeley
93. Neta Stahl, Johns Hopkins University
94. Deborah Starr, Cornell University
95. Sarah Stein, UCLA
96. Magda Teter, Fordham University
97. Barry Trachtenberg, Wake Forest University
98. Irene Tucker, UC Irvine
99. Anika Walke, Washington University in St. Louis
100. David Weinfeld, Virginia Commonwealth University
101. Steven Weitzman, University of Pennsylvania
102. Beth Wenger, University of Pennsylvania

103. Sarah Willen, University of Connecticut
104. Barry Wimpfheimer, Northwestern University
105. Victoria Woeste, Independent Scholar
106. Orian Zakai, The George Washington University
107. Saul Zaritt, Harvard University
108. Sarah Zarrow, Western Washington University
109. Steven Zipperstein, Stanford University