



**Middle
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Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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April 8, 2019

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader
President, Kingsborough Community College
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Dr. Vita C. Rabinowitz
Interim Chancellor, The City University of New York
chancellor@cuny.edu, Vita.Rabinowitz@cuny.edu

Dear President Schrader and Chancellor Rabinowitz:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern regarding recent attacks on faculty associated with the Progressive Faculty Caucus (PFC) at Kingsborough Community College (KCC). These faculty members have been falsely accused of anti-Semitism and subjected to what appears to be an orchestrated smear campaign as well as harassment and threats. We call on you to forcefully denounce these attacks and to vigorously defend the free speech rights and academic freedom of all KCC faculty.

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 over 2500 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.

As we understand it, members of Kingsborough's Progressive Faculty Caucus have been accused of anti-Semitic acts against Michael Goldstein, an administrator at your institution. These accusations revolve around alleged anti-Semitic incidents reported by Mr. Goldstein, which are currently under investigation. Mr. Goldstein's accusations have been circulated nationally by several media outlets, although no evidence connecting PFC faculty to the alleged incidents has been offered. Some members of PFC have also been approached by the Lawfare Project, which is representing Mr. Goldstein, with threats of potential legal action. Additionally, two KCC faculty members, Anthony Alessandrini (who is a member of MESA) and Katia Perea, found identical versions of an anonymous letter threatening their physical safety in their campus mailboxes.

The Progressive Faculty Caucus at KCC has stated that it is committed to "directly and openly addressing questions of structural oppression — including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments, and oppression along the lines of gender identity — as they affect all of us who teach, study, and work at KCC." Professor Alessandrini has supported events at KCC concerning Palestinian rights, though the Progressive Faculty Caucus was not in fact involved in organizing these events.



Re: Attacks on faculty associated with the Progressive Faculty Caucus

April 8, 2019

Page 2

However, the real issue at stake at KCC is that criticism of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians has been deliberately and tendentiously conflated with anti-Semitism by the individuals, media outlets and organizations targeting KCC faculty members. We believe that Mr. Goldstein's accusations, their widespread dissemination and the involvement of the Lawfare Project must be seen in the context of similar campaigns across the country, including on college and university campuses, to tar those who express criticism of Israel and/or advocate for Palestinian rights with the brush of anti-Semitism in order to delegitimize and stifle free and open discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such campaigns, usually conducted by organizations based outside of academia that are seeking to further their political agenda, constitute a serious threat to free speech and to academic freedom. They also threaten to undermine the integrity and independence of this country's institutions of higher education and may make the task of combating actual instances of anti-Semitism more difficult.

We therefore urge you to firmly denounce the circulation of unfounded and vicious accusations against KCC faculty members and the harassment to which they have been subjected. We further call on you to publicly reaffirm your commitment to defend the free speech rights of all members of the KCC community and to uphold the principles of academic freedom.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California