



**Middle
East
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26 May 2020

Mary Pat McMahon
Vice Provost/Vice President for Student Affairs
Duke University
studentaffairs@duke.edu

Dear Vice Provost/Vice President McMahon:

We write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about what appears to have been the harassment by Duke University's Office of Student Conduct of Hadeel Abdelhy, who at the time was an undergraduate student, because of political opinions she had expressed on social media. We regard this behavior on the part of the university as a threat to Ms. Abdelhy's constitutionally protected right to free speech as well as to the principles of academic freedom.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic 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, between 4 December 2019 and 28 March 2020 Duke's Office of Student Contact summoned Ms. Abdelhy for questioning on three occasions about posts she had made on social media, including one which criticized Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and another protesting a campus appearance by former National Security Advisor John Bolton. Her posts cannot by any reasonable standard be construed as hate speech. While no disciplinary action was taken against Ms. Abdelhy, this kind of selective scrutiny of a student's social media posts because of the political views they express is likely to have a chilling effect on free speech and on the open exchange of ideas and opinions that should be central to your university's intellectual and educational mission.

We therefore call on you to promptly review the actions of the Office of Student Conduct with regard to Ms. Abdelhy and take such corrective action as may be warranted. We further call on you to take immediate steps to ensure that Duke University adopts and adheres to a clear policy concerning the monitoring of student speech, including social media posts, that balances the university's need to keep track of hate speech with its responsibility to protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom of all members of the university community, particularly in relation to controversial political issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Laurie Brand', with a stylized, cursive script.

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