



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

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Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and colleagues:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern at recent decisions and statements made by your office and by the leaderships and human resources teams at Brooklyn College, City Tech, John Jay College of Criminal Law and City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law. These actions, taken together, point to a pattern of ideological purging that violates the principles of academic freedom, faculty governance and due process, and therefore constitute an egregious betrayal of CUNY's avowed educational mission.

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 prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 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 outside of North America.

According to [media reports](#), three adjunct faculty members teaching in different departments at Brooklyn College were notified by Human Resources on 13 June 2025 that their appointments had not been renewed. In all three cases, not only had the college's personnel and budget committee and department chair approved these instructors' reappointment but they had been assigned courses for the fall 2025 semester in which students had already enrolled. We note as well that all three faculty members had received positive reviews through student evaluations and peer observation. Two of these faculty members who also taught in other CUNY colleges received additional letters of non-reappointment, one from City Tech and the other from John Jay College. In the latter case, the Office of the Provost informed the faculty member that a previously issued reappointment letter was no longer valid.

A fourth adjunct faculty member teaching at Brooklyn College who had been assigned courses for the summer 2025 and fall 2025 semesters received a notice of termination on 23 May 2025. In this case, too, they had received positive reviews through student evaluations and peer observations. We note that in all four cases, the notice of non-reappointment or termination was issued without any warning, suggestion that a complaint about alleged policy violation had been filed or indication that the faculty member was being investigated. The notices failed to specify the cause for non-reappointment or termination, and the faculty members were denied any reasonable due process.

As the Academic Freedom Committee of CUNY's Professional Staff Congress (PSC) noted in its 9 July 2025 [letter](#) to CUNY Chancellor Matos Rodríguez: "While the unexplained non-reappointment of teaching adjuncts is itself not unusual at CUNY, the synchronicity of these non-reappointments across BC and other CUNY colleges is deeply concerning." In an earlier [letter](#) to CUNY's Chancellor, PSC President James Davis pointed out that "what the four instructors who lost their CUNY jobs at the same time have in common is their public protest against Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights."

In addition to these terminations, according to [media reports](#) CUNY issued a one-year suspension on 2 July 2025 to a rising senior at City College of New York (CCNY) for allegedly violating the CUNY Henderson Rules and CCNY Student Demonstration Policy while participating in nonviolent protest activity. The student had since 2023 been a member of the leadership board of CCNY's Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter. The suspension of this student, a clearly disproportionate punishment, bars the student from enrolling in or entering all of CUNY's 26 colleges and prohibits them from engaging in many campus activities even after the end of the suspension, including being a member or leader of various officially recognized student organizations, among them SJP, the Muslim Student Association and the Women in Islam club. Barring an enrolled student from affiliating with student organizations is an affront to any semblance of academic freedom and free speech.

We note that CUNY implemented these arbitrary, highly irregular and unjustified terminations and punitive disciplinary measures not long before the appearance of Chancellor Matos Rodríguez before the House Committee on Education and the

Workforce, suggesting that political considerations were paramount. MESA has previously addressed the threat this committee's hearings pose to academic freedom, faculty governance, curricular diversity and institutional autonomy. We believe that universities must not appease or capitulate to the malign forces motivating these circus-like hearings; "anticipatory obedience" has only fueled the repressive agenda underpinning them.

Not surprisingly, when Chancellor Matos Rodríguez appeared before the committee on 15 July 2025, several of its members called on him to investigate and discipline CUNY's Professional Staff Congress (PSC) and individual faculty members for expressing views critical of Israeli policies, supporting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement or engaging in other constitutionally protected speech. Representative Elise Stefanik took Chancellor Matos Rodríguez to task for CUNY's hiring of Saly Abd Alla as a Chief Diversity Officer because of her prior employment at the Council on Islamic-American Relations (CAIR) in Minnesota – a civil rights organization that advocates on behalf of Muslim Americans which Stefanik slandered as a "terrorist-affiliated organization." Stefanik also demanded to know why CUNY had not taken disciplinary action against School of Law Professor Ramzi Kassem, founding director of the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) project at CUNY, for representing former Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil in his legal struggle against deportation.

In response to committee members' allegations, Chancellor Matos Rodríguez stated that any violations of university policies would be investigated. Regrettably, he failed to clearly and forcefully assert that there was no evidence that either Abd Alla or Kassem had violated any laws or university policies; nor did he denounce committee members' demands to investigate and discipline CUNY faculty and staff as a serious threat to their constitutionally protected rights and to the principles of academic freedom.

We regard Stefanik's attack on Professor Kassem, and the chancellor's failure to denounce it, to be particularly outrageous and dangerous. As the Clinical Legal Education Association and the Clinical Section of the Association of American Law Schools asserted in a statement dated 17 July 2025: "Legislative pressure to punish a law professor for their work—standing up to government overreach, defending clients targeted for exercising their free speech rights, and teaching students to do the same—attacks the integrity of legal education and the rule of law." The president and legal counsel of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) made a similar point in their 29 July 2025 letter to Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Dean Gomez-Velez: "Any discipline leveled against Professor Kassem for his representation of Mr. Khalil would violate AAUP standards on academic freedom and tenure and the terms of CUNY's faculty labor contract. Even more critically, such discipline would contravene Professor Kassem's constitutionally-protected speech and association."

This country's institutions of higher education should be places in which all members of the campus community can express their views freely. In these fraught times university leaders have a heightened responsibility to protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom of all members of the campus community. This is all



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the more important now, when the federal government, in concert with individuals and organizations pursuing their political agenda, are seeking to vilify and silence students, faculty and staff with whom they disagree.

We therefore call on the leadership of CUNY to rescind the non-reappointment of the three adjunct faculty members, the termination of the fourth adjunct faculty member and the suspension and other sanctions imposed on the student. We further call on CUNY's leadership, both central and at the individual colleges, to refrain from adopting any policies, or taking any measures, which are likely to exert a chilling effect on the right or ability of students, faculty and staff to freely express their viewpoints on matters of public concern or to advocate for whatever cause they wish. Finally, we urge you to publicly and forcefully reaffirm your commitment to respecting free speech, academic freedom, faculty governance and due process on campus, and to fully protect the safety, well-being and rights of all members of campus community.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli U. Bali'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie A. Brand'.

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