



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

**Headquarters & Secretariat**

Georgetown University  
Center for Contemporary Arab  
Studies

3700 O St. NW, ICC STE 241  
Washington DC 20057

Phone 520-333-2577  
Fax 520-207-3166  
secretariat@mesana.org  
mesana.org



September 19, 2025

President James B. Milliken  
Office of the President  
University of California  
president@ucop.edu

Chancellor Rich Lyons  
Office of the Chancellor  
University of California, Berkeley  
chancellor@berkeley.edu

Dear President Milliken and Chancellor Lyons:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the University of California, Berkeley's decision to give the federal government the names of 160 individuals associated with allegations of antisemitism on campus. Your administration's actions in this regard, which could jeopardize the safety, employment and/or immigration status of the individuals on this list, threaten all members of the UC Berkeley community. This decision also violates longstanding university policies and procedures, and threatens both academic freedom and freedom of speech at your university.

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.

On 4 September 2025, 160 members of the UC Berkeley campus community received notice from the university that their names had been handed over to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) because of their connection to an allegation of antisemitism. We note that the purpose of the Office of Civil Rights is to determine a university's compliance with the nondiscrimination policies outlined in Title VI of the Higher Education Act; the personal identities of those associated with specific allegations on any particular campus are therefore not relevant to the fulfillment of OCR's mandate. Moreover, as far as we know, the Department of



Re: UC Berkeley  
19 September 2025  
Page 2

Education has not previously requested that UC Berkeley provide information regarding persons allegedly named in reports of other forms of discrimination on campus.

Investigation of accusations of antisemitism at UC Berkeley are the responsibility of the university's [Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination \(OPHD\)](#), which is supposed to be guided by the policies and procedures of the [UC Anti-Discrimination Policy](#). The stated objectives of this office include [“receiving reports of harassment and discrimination, providing support to those harmed, and resolving matters either formally or informally.”](#) The university's response to reports of discrimination on campus can follow several pathways; in some instances, the case is resolved without a respondent ever having been informed. Other reports prompt more formal investigations or alternate forms of resolution. Campus and systemwide policies exist so that allegations are taken seriously and investigated fairly.

In the 4 September 2025 communication, UC Berkeley's chief legal counsel, David Robinson, informed the 160 individuals that while the nature of their association with an antisemitism allegation had been reported to the federal government, the university would not provide the individuals themselves with any information regarding these allegations. These decisions deprive the individuals concerned of the protection of the university's own procedures and protections; they also run counter to the principles of democracy and of academic freedom. We note that other institutions that have been asked to turn over the names of faculty and students during OCR investigations have provided the named individuals with specific information about what information was released to the federal government.

UC Berkeley's decision to hand over the details of allegations – some of which have been dismissed or not yet investigated – to the federal government potentially threatens the safety, education, employment, and immigration status of members of the campus community. As the request for personal information falls outside the OCR's mandate and targets individuals, the request has the effect of chilling speech and quashing free expression. Those who are non-citizens or whose employment is not protected by tenure are especially vulnerable.

The historical echoes of your administration's actions ring clearly. We recall that during the Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, hundreds of professors lost their jobs, were denied tenure, or forced out of their positions. Your recent actions are particularly



Re: UC Berkeley  
19 September 2025  
Page 3

disheartening in light of UC Berkeley's rich history as a place where free speech and expression have been celebrated and protected. Your actions have prompted a wave of fear and [opposition](#) on UC Berkeley's campus as well as among the professional associations that represent faculty.

In these fraught times, when institutions of higher education are under severe pressure from the federal government, college and university leaders have a heightened responsibility to protect the freedom of speech, academic freedom and physical safety of all members of the campus community. We call your attention to the [statement](#) issued by MESA's board of directors and its Committee on Academic Freedom on 6 May 2024, which denounced actions by college and university leaders to delegitimize and repress campus advocacy opposing Israel's war on Gaza.

In yet another [statement](#), dated 13 March 2025, MESA's board called on colleges and universities to resist demands and pressures by the government and by organized efforts based outside academia to silence scholarly engagement with the question of Palestine/Israel: "In the current national climate, as institutions of higher education and their mission of critical inquiry face unprecedented attack, MESA unequivocally supports efforts to stand up for freedom of expression, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy. Rather than facilitating or acting in the interests of government repression, we must all take a collective stance to defend higher education in the United States."

We therefore call on you to inform the individuals whose information was conveyed to the Department of Education of the precise nature of the information that was provided. With respect to any further demands for information by the federal government, we urge you to respect the principles of shared governance and consult fully before complying with future demands by the agencies of the federal government. Finally, we call on you to respect the integrity of, and adhere to, UC Berkeley's own procedures for investigating and resolving cases of discrimination by maintaining the anonymity and privacy provided for in university policies.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Re: UC Berkeley  
19 September 2025  
Page 4

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aslı Ü. Bâli'.

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

Cc:

Farida Shaheed  
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education