

Question from Chairwoman Foxx

Question 1. There is a culture at your institution that fosters antisemitism because you have faculty and students who hate Jews, hate Israel, and are comfortable apologizing for terror. How did your campus get this way? What is it about the way that you hire faculty and approve curriculum that's allowing your campus to be infected by this intellectual and moral rot?

The University of Pennsylvania welcomes the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to combat antisemitism and all forms of hate. Penn is distinguished by our long history of being an especially welcoming place for Jewish people. The vibrant engagement of Jewish faculty, students, staff, and alumni has long been, and will continue to be, an integral part of Penn. We are proud of our history and the prominent role our Jewish community plays in Penn's campus life and academic excellence. Therefore, the University of Pennsylvania respectfully disagrees with the premise of the question and rejects the allegation that the University has fostered a culture of hate on campus.

Antisemitism—a pernicious, viral evil—has been rising in our society, and global events have dramatically accelerated the surge. No place is immune, and many campuses across the country, including ours, have recently experienced unacceptable antisemitic incidents. The University stands clearly and strongly against antisemitism in all its odious forms. We will never shrink from our moral responsibility to combat antisemitism and educate others to recognize and reject hate.

We have acted decisively to ensure safety throughout and near campus.

- We have expanded the presence of Penn Public Safety and Allied Security at our religious life centers including Penn Hillel, the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, and the Lubavitch House. And we have enhanced security at every event, rally, protest, and vigil on campus.
- We are also working closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement to promptly report and investigate antisemitic acts against any member of the Penn community.
- Where we have identified individuals who committed these acts in violation of University policy, we have initiated disciplinary proceedings, and we have referred matters to law enforcement where appropriate.

Penn is committed to a whole-University approach, anchored in the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism,¹ to combat antisemitism now and in the future and to ensure that our campus culture will not tolerate antisemitism.

The history of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania spans more than two centuries and has involved some of the most illustrious names to have graced the University's roster. And we are continuing to build on and strengthen Penn's leading scholarship and teaching on the history of antisemitism and Jewish studies including by investing in Penn's

¹ See *The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*, The White House (May 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>.

Jewish Studies Program, the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, and the University's Middle East Center.

The University of Pennsylvania encourages freedom of inquiry, discourse, teaching, research, and publication, and we protect our faculty from influences, from within or outside the University, that would restrict the exercise of these freedoms in faculty members' areas of scholarly interest. Accordingly, the University's faculty are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. The University's policies also make clear that faculty have special obligations that include showing respect for the opinions of others and avoiding the harassment of any member of the University community.

While faculty independently set the curriculum for their class, Penn's administration and leadership teams work every day to make sure that Penn, as an institution of higher education, creates the conditions where all our students and faculty, and the free exchange of ideas, can thrive.

Questions from Representative Allen

Question 1. Like so many others, I have been extremely troubled by the antisemitic activities on your campus. I would like to go through three examples of blatant antisemitism by your distinguished faculty members who were entrusted to educate our future leaders. First, on October 23, Dr. Robert Vitalis showed solidarity with Gaza not by calling for a return of hostages and peace but by posting a patch of the military wing of Hamas. Second, Dr. Eve Trout Powell agreed with a known antisemite, Noura Erakat, that condemning the violence on October 7th must begin with the condemnation of Israeli segregation, colonialism, and occupation. This was posted 24 hours after the greatest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. Lastly, three days later, Dr. Powell reposted a statement that said, “I hope once the shock of what the ‘Palestinian resistance’ (not terrorists ... the resistance) did has passed, the good people in the West will return to having moral clarity and speak out about the intent to genocide by Israeli leaders and the fact they are carrying this out with western government approval.”

Question 1.A. Are Professors Vitalis and Powell currently still teaching classes at the University of Pennsylvania?

Question 1.B. Have Professors Vitalis and Powell’s department heads demanded explanations for their activities?

Question 1.C. Has an investigation been launched to determine whether or not their views have led to discrimination or harassment of Jewish students in their classes?

The University of Pennsylvania has a long and proud history of being an especially welcoming place for Jewish people. The vibrant engagement of Jewish faculty, students, staff, and alumni has long been, and will continue to be, an integral part of Penn. We condemn any statements that foster a culture of hate on campus or that threaten our Jewish students, faculty, or staff.

Professor Vitalis is not scheduled to teach a course during the University’s Spring 2024 Semester. Professor Powell is teaching a graduate-level seminar for Penn History Ph.D. candidates during the University’s Spring 2024 Semester. As a general matter, if a member of Penn’s faculty engages in harassment, creates a hostile classroom environment, or otherwise violates local, state, or federal law or our policies, we will review that conduct and take appropriate action. Penn is committed to investigating complaints of harassment or discrimination in the classroom when we learn of them. The University may also initiate a disciplinary proceeding in the event that a faculty member violates the standards, rules, or mission of the University. Penn’s policies govern when and how a faculty member may be sanctioned and outline the procedures the University follows to ensure that such matters are handled fairly. Consistent with these policies, disciplinary proceedings are confidential, and members of the University community are prohibited from making public statements about disciplinary investigations, charges, or proceedings until the proceedings have been completed. Accordingly, while the University of Pennsylvania is not able to provide information regarding the disciplinary status of individual faculty members, we assure the Committee that we are committed to responding to complaints of antisemitism and taking appropriate action.