

May 16, 2025

Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6100

Re: May 7, 2025 Hearing, “Beyond the Ivy League: Stopping the Spread of Antisemitism on American Campuses”

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce,

Thank you for the time and effort you have spent investigating and discussing the scourge of antisemitism that currently plagues campuses throughout our country. I am a Jewish student at California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), one of the universities whose president was called to testify on the May 7, 2025 hearing, “Beyond the Ivy League: Stopping the Spread of Antisemitism on American Campuses.”

I am active in Jewish life at Cal Poly, currently serving in leadership roles as the Vice President of Hillel and the Vice President of Mustangs United for Israel. I also have firsthand knowledge of several antisemitic incidents on my campus, one of which the Committee Chairman mentioned in his opening remarks. It was a difficult decision to write this letter, knowing that doing so may make me a target for retaliation by fellow students, faculty, or even administrators, but given the importance of this issue, I feel compelled to address the subject of this hearing on behalf of myself and other students who believe that Cal Poly currently has an antisemitism problem—despite recent news reports that they believe they are beyond reproach.

On April 4, 2024, I attended a lecture entitled, “Heroes of the IDF: Finding Meaning Among Tragedy,” which was given by a veteran of the IDF to discuss incredible rescue missions Israel has undertaken in countries such as Turkey. This event was cosponsored by Mustangs United for Israel and Hillel. Prior to the start of the lecture, a group of masked individuals gathered outside, apparently led by a Cal Poly faculty member. During the next two hours, this group chanted calls for violence against Israelis and Jews like me, including “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free” and “There is only one solution, Intifada Revolution.”

As I stood in the lobby of the Warren J. Baker Center for Science and Mathematics prior to the start of the lecture, the Cal Poly professor leading the group of protesters entered the building, approached me and my Jewish friends, and said, “You are Zionist, you are part of the KKK.” In reaction to this comment, I heard my friend respond in shock to the professor’s words, “Me? A student at Cal Poly?!” He then proceeded to wave a Palestinian flag in our faces. The

confrontation was especially shocking and felt threatening to me in light of both the mask the professor was wearing at the time, his close proximity to us, the fact that I saw him shove a Palestinian flag in other attendees' faces, and the fact that he was a middle-aged man wearing a sweatshirt with his Cal Poly department name on it – signaling his role as a faculty member – targeting freshman girls with such hostile verbal attacks and harassment.

I had never met the professor before this incident, nor had I ever discussed my political views with him, but the professor somehow identified me as a Zionist and targeted me with this invective. I am proudly and openly Jewish and consider Zionism an integral part of my Jewish ethnic and national origin identity. However, the professor's conduct is unlawful harassment if that is the reason he targeted me. For the first time in my life, I had been harassed because of my Jewish identity, not by an unidentifiable stranger, but rather a visibly-identifiable Cal Poly faculty member.

I've since learned that this professor has a history of troubling public statements that give context to this conduct, including saying shortly before the April 4 incident that he "support(s) the resistance," and that "resistance is justified." In those statements, he seemed to defend violence against Israelis committed by a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, Hamas, and deny the legitimacy of Israel's existence, referring to it as an occupation of 75 years:

[R]esistance is always a pride when you have to kick out your enemy off of your land; it is your duty, and it is your right to do that. And Hamas has been doing that... Maybe they committed mistakes. Mistakes happen everywhere, and I'm not really defending Hamas here, but when you have occupation that's been going on for 75 years...

I do not feel safe on a campus where such a professor is allowed to harass Jewish students with apparent impunity, where even a credible complaint of antisemitic harassment with incontrovertible evidence takes more than a year to "investigate"—and is still ongoing!

As my fellow Cal Poly students suggested in their letter to the Committee, Cal Poly's police officers were present when the April 4, 2024 incident happened. They were also present when the professor shoved a Palestinian flag in Jewish attendees' faces and when he said "F*** Israel!" They were present when Jewish attendees exited the classroom after the lecture and the professor targeted them by repeatedly asking, "How many children did you kill today?" They were present when a female individual, possibly another Jewish Cal Poly student, responded, "I'm not even from Israel, I'm from America, I'm from Philadelphia," and when the professor responded, "You're from Germany, that's where you should go back." The Cal Poly campus police were indeed there and witnessed it all.

The Cal Poly police captured it all on video, so the university not only had knowledge about the professor's conduct, but actual video evidence of it in its possession from Day 1. Yet more than a year later, it has still done *nothing* to sanction the professor. I understand the Committee requested the video footage captured that day by the Cal Poly police prior to the hearing, and I

hope the Committee has the opportunity to watch it to get a better sense of what happened that day and the type of antisemitic activity permitted on Cal Poly's campus.

Moreover, to my knowledge, Cal Poly has taken exactly zero action to identify any of the masked individuals who participated in the April 4, 2024 demonstration, much less to investigate their actions or hold them accountable for their actions and the antisemitic calls for violence they chanted outside a room full primarily of Jews and an Israeli guest speaker.

While I believe President Armstrong was sincere in his testimony that "calling for the death of any group or harassing or discriminating would be subject to discipline," this claim is sadly belied by my own personal experiences. How can such discipline be applied when Cal Poly will not even identify perpetrators or initiate disciplinary processes against them?

As for the professor, to my knowledge, he has yet to face any form of disciplinary consequences for his actions that day. In fact, during the time in which he has been under investigation for antisemitic harassment, he assumed the role of faculty advisor for the Cal Poly chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine. This is directly contrary to President Armstrong's statement that when "alleged antisemitism or harassment occurs, we investigate and impose immediate university discipline." It has been over a year and I am still waiting for such discipline, immediate or otherwise. I put it to the committee that in situations like these, where Jewish students witness the university's inaction for over a year, justice delayed is justice denied. Sadly, none of the new initiatives announced at the May 7th hearing by President Armstrong even begin to address this issue.

I cannot share further details about the university's investigation into this incident because it is still ongoing, but it is my impression that the university has been doing everything it can to shield the professor and protect him from accountability. This includes an outright refusal to release the Cal Poly Police Department's bodycam recording in response to several public records requests, thereby depriving me of key evidence and opportunities to identify potential witnesses for the investigation process. Ironically, Cal Poly used the very existence of this dragged-out investigation as a reason for its denial of these requests, along with some dubious privacy concerns. It is not clear to me what privacy expectation exists which might justify this refusal for the release of police body camera footage of antisemitic comments made during a public protest by an employee of a public university at an event open to the public, and this lack of transparency is yet another issue impeding any real efforts to combat Cal Poly's antisemitism problem.

Finally, I have no reason to doubt the experience of my fellow student who wrote that this professor "initiated a five minute long verbal confrontation" with him "and shoved a Palestinian flag up to his face, violating his personal space" outside the Baker building, or his assessment that the campus police acted properly in that situation. I do wonder, however, why Cal Poly's administration allows its professors to conduct themselves in such a manner toward anyone, much less toward students, without consequence. Nevertheless, the experience recounted by my

fellow Jewish student does not negate what happened afterwards to me, my Jewish friends, and other attendees of the lecture.

While I am glad to hear that these two fellow students who wrote to the Committee feel that there is no systemic antisemitism at Cal Poly in their personal experience, I respectfully disagree. One need look no further than a recent article in the campus newspaper quoting students' reactions to the hearing to find that Cal Poly is the type of place where students apparently feel no compunction about attributing their names to statements like, "All I can hope for is that [President Armstrong] does not embarrass us and actually be a Zionist on a national stage."¹

President Armstrong, in response to questions from Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, acknowledged that anti-Zionism could constitute national origin discrimination. Yet when I raised concerns that the Cal Poly History Department chose to invite two speakers who openly espouse that view and inquired about inviting a speaker to present an alternative perspective, I was told that the department was not required to do so in the same way that they would not provide an alternative viewpoint on topics such as the Holocaust or racist housing policies. I understood this to mean that a belief that the Jewish state has a right to exist was morally reprehensible and therefore unworthy of academic consideration. I understand that President Armstrong was made aware of this incident due to an article I wrote about the incident,² but I have not seen any corrective measures taken.

The new initiatives announced by President Armstrong are a welcome step in the right direction, but what we need now is more than lip service or more "training sessions" to provide "awareness about antisemitism" (though that is needed too). What we need is for Cal Poly to finally take concrete action to enforce its own rules and to sanction antisemitic harassment. I believe the Committee's spotlight on our campus is exactly what we need for this to happen and I wholeheartedly thank the Committee for shining it in our direction.

Sincerely,
Adira Fogelman, '27

¹ <https://mustangnews.net/president-armstrong-is-going-to-congress-heres-what-his-students-think/>

² <https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/380224/ideology-over-inquiry-anti-israel-bias-at-cal-poly-slo/>