

Statement of B'nai B'rith International
House Education and Workforce Committee Hearing
March 7, 2024

B'nai B'rith International, America's oldest and best-known Jewish organization, is tracking the eruption of anti-Semitic activity on college campuses over the past five months with great concern. In weighing the question of whether Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs have succeeded in their stated purpose of creating an environment on university campuses free of bullying, harassment, and discrimination, the recent history of attacks on Jewish students is deeply troubling.

Anti-Semitism took center stage last week at the University of California, Berkeley, where a pro-Palestinian mob surrounded a campus auditorium, broke a window, and harassed Jewish students trying to enter the building. And what was the response of the University's DEI apparatus? The Chancellor and Provost issued a bland statement upholding the school's "time, place, and manner" rules but failing to mention anti-Semitism. It was only after four days of an intense backlash that the university's administration promised a criminal investigation.

UC Berkeley is one of many universities that have triggered reports from Jewish students indicating they've been harassed, threatened, intimidated, and even physically assaulted. But DEI structures have shown themselves to be woefully unprepared to deal with the current anti-Semitic onslaught.

Jewish students are feeling more alienated on university campuses than ever before in recent memory, as their classmates have rallied to support the massacre and hostage-taking of Israelis by Hamas on October 7. Professors have announced their glee at the spilling of Israeli blood, while university administrators have in many cases issued at best nuanced statements in response to the worst anti-Semitic pogrom since the Holocaust.

The explosion of anti-Semitism we have witnessed over the past five months has been an opportunity for campus DEI personnel to show they can respond to the needs and fears of the Jewish community in a time of crisis. Instead, these bureaucracies have demonstrated they have no interest in recognizing Jews as potential victims, even after the barbaric slaughter of Israeli Jews on October 7 and the anti-Semitic backlash that has resulted on American campuses since then.

Part of the problem is the oppressor-versus-oppressed dynamic embedded in the DEI ideology. As long as DEI offices don't regard Jews as a minority, then the reality of Jewish vulnerability or victimhood will elude DEI personnel. This suggests the need for a much greater understanding of both anti-Semitism and Jewish identity.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)'s working definition of anti-Semitism has now been adopted by more than one thousand entities across the globe as a non-binding educational tool to determine when anti-Semitism has taken place. University officials are obligated, under the terms of the 2019 White House Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism, to use the IHRA working definition for such a purpose.

Beyond the lack of knowledge of anti-Semitism, many of the campus groups who most closely associated with DEI have either ignored the October 7 terrorist attack in Israel or openly endorsed it,

such as the Hamas-supportive Students for Justice in Palestine. Moreover, a 2021 Heritage Foundation study of the Twitter feeds of nearly 750 DEI officials at 65 U.S. universities found that 96 percent of their tweets about Israel were critical of the country or anti-Semitic.

DEI programs must be held accountable for their failure to adequately address anti-Semitism on campuses over the past five months. Where those structures are proven to be unreformable, they should be eliminated. Where DEI officials are found to be either oblivious or indifferent to concerns about anti-Semitism, they should be replaced. But the facade of DEI programs standing watch against a bigotry that they are unable or unwilling to confront cannot continue.