



**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



4 November 2024

Harriet Nembhard
President, Harvey Mudd College
hbnembhard@hmc.edu

Amy Marcus-Newhall
President, Scripps College
amarcusn@scrippscollege.edu

G. Gabrielle Starr
President, Pomona College
Gabrielle.starr@pomona.edu

Tom Donnelly
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, Harvey
Mudd College
donnelly@hmc.edu

Mary Hatcher-Skeers
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, Scripps College
mhatcher@scrippscollege.edu

Yuqing Melanie Wu
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College, Pomona
College
melanie.wu@pomona.edu

Sha Bradley
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Scripps College
sbradley@scrippscollege.edu

Avis Hinkson
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Pomona College
avis.hinkson@pomona.edu

Cindy Martinez
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Harvey Mudd
College
cimartinez@hmc.edu

Stig Lanesskog
Chief Executive Officer, The Claremont College Services
stig.lanesskog@claremont.edu



Re: Claremont Colleges

4 November 2024

Page 2

Dear Presidents Nembhard, Marcus-Newhall, and Starr; Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs Donnelly, Hatcher-Skeers, and Wu; Vice Presidents for Student Affairs Bradley, Hinkson, and Martinez; and CEO Lanesskog:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our extreme concern about the general atmosphere of repression on your campuses as well as specific instances of repression (detailed below) at Harvey Mudd College, Pomona College, and Scripps College. The leaderships of the Claremont Colleges and of these specific colleges have failed to uphold the principles of academic freedom and the right to freedom of speech and assembly of students and faculty at the Claremont Colleges community.

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 25 September 2024 students at [Harvey Mudd](#) College (HMC) protested a career fair that included multiple defense and defense-affiliated companies, calling for HMC to cut ties with the military industry and advocating for Palestinian liberation. An unusual number of Campus Safety officers along with multiple private security officers were present at the career fair. One of the Campus Safety carts had a Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) device mounted on it. The [ACLU](#) has referred to LRAD devices, developed for the U.S. military, as “acoustic weapons.” Over the course of the protest, officers used the LRAD device multiple times to broadcast warning messages and in one instance to aim a deterrent tone (siren) directly toward protestors.

On 7 October 2024 students from multiple Claremont Colleges [entered](#) Carnegie Hall, a building on the Pomona College campus, to call on Pomona to divest from corporations supporting the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Pomona characterised this as an occupation of the building, but the protesting students explicitly stated that it was not an occupation, that they were turning Carnegie Hall into a “people’s university,” and that they would leave the premises by 4 p.m. During that time, most students in the building participated in multiple teach-ins on Palestine and divestment. When the building was eventually vacated, it was revealed that some

student(s) had graffitied several walls and damaged computers and other equipment.

On 11 October 2024 [Pomona](#) College issued interim suspensions to 12 Pomona students. The students appealed those suspensions and two were overturned. The remaining 10 suspensions were converted into full suspensions for the 2024-25 academic year without any hearings at which students could contest the allegations against them. The letters informing students of this suspension asserted that individuals could be held responsible for group actions and that their “conduct was negligent” even if they had not participated in the vandalism. Pomona has now also issued interim suspensions to additional students. In addition, Pomona College has, to date, [banned](#) at least 36 students from Scripps and Pitzer Colleges from Pomona’s campus, which has disrupted these students’ ability to attend their classes, use Claremont-wide facilities housed at Pomona and, in some cases, access their campus employment sites. Disciplinary hearings always take place on a student’s home campus, but thus far Pomona has not provided Scripps or Pitzer information about any charges levied against their students.

During the 7 October 2024 events, various members of multiple student media organizations entered and exited Carnegie Hall at different points to report on what was going on there. Some of these student reporters were nonetheless subsequently banned from Pomona’s campus, though some of those bans were overturned; other student reporters never received such bans in the first place. One press outlet, Undercurrents, remains under investigation as a “club,” whereas others were never targeted. Pomona College has also issued a “Statement of Alleged Policy Violations” that has triggered a disciplinary hearing for the Claremont Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a recognized student club. Claremont SJP is accused of co-posting social media announcements about the 7 October 2024 protest; based on this accusation, Pomona College is pursuing disciplinary charges against it for allegedly playing a role in what took place in Carnegie Hall. No evidence regarding these bans on student reporters or the investigations of student clubs has thus far been provided to individuals or to college administrators; they seem instead to be based on an incident report created by Claremont Campus Safety with input from the Pomona administration, an incident report that, to our knowledge, the administrations of the other impacted Colleges have not yet seen.

Pomona President Starr overrode the established disciplinary process by invoking a clause in the [student code of conduct](#) handbook allowing her to exercise the “Extraordinary Authority of the President” in extreme situations. President Starr used this abrogation of the normal process to suspend students and disrupt their education without providing any

evidence or fair assessment of the facts regarding their alleged participation in the events of 7 October 2024. We note too that the suspension and eviction from campus of students without fair and transparent investigative and disciplinary processes, in conformity with commonly accepted standards, denies these students the right to reasonable due process; it also effectively deprives them of both housing and food. President Starr's invocation of a policy clause meant for emergency situations in response to students' exercising their right to freedom of speech and assembly not only violates their rights but creates a hostile environment on campus for anyone else contemplating advocacy for a position of which the Pomona administration disapproves.

Also this fall, on 9 September 2024, Scripps College [ordered](#) The Motley coffeehouse to remove the Palestinian flag hanging inside, claiming that it "violated campus policy and conduct standards." The Motley is a student-run coffeehouse that, for the past fifty years, has had a consistent intersectional feminist and progressive political ethos and maintained walls decorated with art, posters and other materials reflecting that ethos. On 11 September 2024 Scripps informed The Motley that it could not open for the semester unless staff removed the flag; the email containing this order also said, "The flag that is currently hanging is not part of some broader display recognizing the international students at Scripps." In response, The Motley staff decorated the coffeeshop with a plethora of flags, including national flags and pride flags, and the coffeeshop opened on 13 September 2024. However, five days later the Scripps administration sent an email to Scripps students, faculty, and staff, bizarrely titled, "Commitment to Freedom of Expression and Inclusion – Motley Coffeehouse," which instructed the Motley staff to remove "unauthorized decorations." The Motley staff has repeatedly requested that Scripps identify which decorations it deemed unauthorized and explain how those decorations violated existing policy. To date they have not received this information.

Amid these efforts by the Motley staff to clarify which decorations the college wanted removed, on 6 October 2024 the Scripps administration sent an email to Scripps students, faculty and staff informing them that The Motley had been closed until further notice. The stated reasons for the closure were that "an open call for visual materials for display" had not been issued, that Motley managers had "refused to attend operational meetings with the Business Affairs team" and that the Motley staff "closed the business to the public for political purposes." We note that this closure came as [a surprise](#), given the ongoing meetings between the Motley staff and the administration and the fact that, while the Motley managers had never been invited to attend any meetings with the Business Affairs team, they had attended, or expressed willingness to attend, meetings with all Scripps administrators who had requested meetings. Motley managers had

also taken Scripps’s request to institute an “open call” for decorations to the full Motley staff, which as noted above was still awaiting clarification on what decorations existing Scripps policy allowed. Managers also publicly clarified that they had not ordered the Motley to close for political purposes but were rather responding to staffing shortages in a manner consistent with longstanding practice. We have learned that it was complaints from Scripps community members opposed to the display of the Palestinian flag that triggered this series of administrative responses. We find it unacceptable that the Scripps administration is using the discomfort of certain community members as a pretext for trying to censor, and ultimately close, a longtime space of student activism and free political expression.

In addition, on 16 October 2024, Scripps students, faculty and staff received an email informing them that “student organizations have publicized a planned ‘study-in’ at Denison Library” and that, “to protect against the escalation that has recently occurred, new entry protocols will be implemented at Denison.” These new protocols included a strict limitation on materials allowed to enter the library, no access to the library’s restrooms and the deployment of Campus Safety officers to the library. In implementing these measures to pre-empt a peaceful student study-in, Scripps College acted on the unfounded assumption that students gathering to study quietly while displaying signs supporting Palestinian rights would necessarily be disruptive or damage the building.

In light of these developments over the past several months, it seems clear that the Claremont Colleges have adopted a “punish first, ask questions later” approach to their students. Moreover, communications from the Harvey Mudd, Pomona, and Scripps College administrations have suggested that students protesting genocide pose a threat to the community. The environment has been even further threatened by the use of a military-grade acoustic weapon against student protesters by Claremont consortium Campus Safety officers and by the securitization of many of its campuses this fall, as evidenced by the extraordinary presence of Campus Safety and private security firm officers across the colleges as well as new restrictions on building access at both Scripps and Pomona Colleges.

This approach, and the actions and statements of the College administrations, not only abrogate students’ rights to fair treatment, but have also had a deeply chilling effect on academic freedom and the right to political expression on campus.

This country’s institutions of higher education should be places in which all members of the campus community can express their views and seek knowledge freely. In these fraught times university leaders have a



Re: Claremont Colleges

4 November 2024

Page 6

heightened responsibility to protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom of all members of the campus community. This is all the more important now, when violence is raging in the Middle East, our own government is so deeply involved in what is happening, and various individuals and organizations with a political agenda are seeking to vilify and silence faculty and students with whom they disagree.

We therefore call on Pomona College to rescind the suspensions and bans of students accused of involvement with the 7 October 2024 protests pending a fair and transparent investigation of this incident, in conformity with reasonable disciplinary procedures and the right to due process. In all cases where there are allegations of misconduct by student protesters, it is essential that each college administration initiate an impartial and transparent investigation to ensure that responses to such instances are proportionate and do not infringe on academic freedom. It is also essential that each college administration refrain from infringing on students' free expression under the pretext of preventing actions that have not yet occurred, as well as from escalating action against students via a heavily militarized Campus Safety and police presence.

We also call on the Claremont Colleges to refrain from adopting any policy, or taking any measure, which is likely to exert a further chilling effect on teaching, learning and freedom of expression on campus, as well as to reconsider the appropriateness of Pomona College's use of an emergency measure against student protestors. We further call on the Colleges to refrain from arbitrary and draconian disciplinary measures against students, faculty and staff exercising their right to freedom of speech and assembly, and their academic freedom, including by expressing their support for Palestinian rights and calls for divestment. Finally, we urge the Claremont Colleges to publicly and forcefully reaffirm their commitment to protecting the free speech rights and academic freedom, as well as the safety and well-being, of all members of the 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



Re: Claremont Colleges

4 November 2024

Page 7

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Mohamed Abousalem

President, Keck Graduate Institute

Mohamed.Abousalem@kgi.edu

Hiram Chodash

President, Claremont McKenna College

Hiram.Chodosh@claremontmckenna.edu

Tim Kirley

Interim President, Claremont Graduate University

tim.kirley@cgu.edu

Strom C. Thacker

President, Pitzer College

Strom@pitzer.edu