

Jewish Academic Alliance of BC

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Hostility at British Columbia Universities

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Submitted to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights

Submitted by the Jewish Academic Alliance Society of British Columbia (JAABC)

What is JAABC?

The Jewish Academic Alliance Society of British Columbia (JAABC), founded in 2024, is a membership organization advocating for Jewish issues in higher education in British Columbia. JAABC promotes the inclusion of Jews in all aspects of academic life. Our membership reflects a broad cross-section of Jewish faculty and staff working at BC universities and colleges.

Why are we writing this brief?

Jewish faculty and staff at BC universities face a hostile work environment. Jewish academics in British Columbia face targeted intimidation and harassment that directly threaten their ability to teach, conduct research, and participate fully in campus life.

The primary goal of this brief is to outline some of the incidents that make for a hostile and at times dysfunctional work environment for Jewish faculty and staff at BC universities and draw lessons for how to combat antisemitism at universities.

Incidents illustrating the hostile environment for Jewish faculty

Previous briefs to the House Justice Committee have documented some of the relevant events at UBC, SFU, and Emily Carr up until Spring 2024. See briefs by [JAABC](#), [JMABC](#), [Prof. David Freeman](#), Emily Carr students [Iara Barylko](#) and [Eden Luna Godlet](#), SFU student [Yael Toyber](#), and UBC student [Charlie Cleugh](#) and testimony from Dr. Ted Rosenberg (UBC).

We highlight a non-exhaustive list of incidents to illustrate the hostile environment for Jewish faculty on BC campuses.

- A [workshop](#) on medieval Christianity at UBC was targeted with anti-Israel graffiti and vandalism, moved, and then disrupted by protesters because of its inclusion of scholars from Israeli universities. The conference organizer was subsequently doxxed by an anti-Israel student group that had support from UBC faculty. On the advice of campus security and the RCMP, a security officer had to be present at the conference organizer's classroom and office hours for the remainder of the school year.
- Professional security has been recommended or required at other Jewish-related events (at our expense) and even at some courses on Jewish Studies at UBC. For example, UBC's Campus Security recommended on-site security for a speaker simply because of his Israeli name and citizenship, although his topic was uncontroversial and had no bearing on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Although the event proceeded without incident, a need for security can be both costly and intimidating for speakers and hosts — and illustrates the climate faced by Jewish, Israeli, and affiliated scholars.
- At UBC, there have been public and ongoing attempts to intimidate an Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies faculty member, including by [protesting](#) at his office building. Other tactics included pressuring the faculty member's colleagues and department as a whole to terminate his teaching and research projects.

- There is an ongoing [campaign](#) to cancel a UBC course that involves an archaeological dig in the State of Israel, threatening the instructor's ability to conduct their research and teaching.
- The UBC-Okanagan Senate issued an [anti-Israel resolution](#), and 18 UBC-Vancouver Senators submitted a [motion](#) seeking the "cutting or suspending [of] academic ties with Israeli government entities (including public universities)". Such activities create a chilling effect on discussion of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and potentially dissuade prospective students and faculty members with opposing views from applying to UBC. The motion was allowed to go up for a vote in the Senate. Had it passed, the motion would have impeded the ability of faculty members to engage in teaching and research projects with Israeli institutions.
- Motions were brought forward by members of the UVic Faculty Association that called upon UVic to "cut or suspend institutional ties with Israeli universities" and in support of a student encampment in violation of numerous university policies.
- Anti-Israel protesters occupied the UBC [MacInnes Field](#) for over two months. These [protesters stole](#) items from construction sites, damaged university property, and prohibited individuals that they determined were "Zionists" from entering the grounds. Their signage referenced murder and violence approvingly. These actions all represented violations of UBC policies. Faculty members from UBC, as well as at least 20 faculty from SFU's Faculty for Palestine groups, attended this protest camp, alongside Charlotte Kates of the organization Samidoun, which the government of Canada has listed as a [terrorist entity](#).
- In violation of UVic policies, anti-Israel protestors occupied the central quad at UVic for 83 days, disrupting campus access and activities and causing significant damage to the property.
- Convocation ceremonies at UBC, SFU, and UVic have been disrupted by students displaying unapproved additions to their regalia, specifically pro-Palestinian symbols such as keffiyehs, Palestinian flags, and watermelon paraphernalia. The lack of response from officials in charge of ceremonies has left the impression that university administrators condone these actions.
- [SFU Students for Justice in Palestine](#) occupied the SFU [Belzberg Library](#) (named for Jewish donors), blocked off its name, and renamed it after a leader of the PFLP (a listed terrorist group that participated alongside Hamas in the October 7 massacre). They then prohibited so-called "Zionists" from entering, thus targeting the majority of Jews and limiting their freedom to work on campus (a violation of SFU policy).
- At UVic, anti-Israel protesters disrupted a Board of Governor's meeting. For several months afterwards, extra security was stationed at entrances to the administration building as a precaution.
- At SFU, bringing in speakers with backgrounds in Jewish studies has been difficult. For example, colleagues from UBC were invited to speak at SFU but declined after being warned by an SFU colleague that they would likely face protests and possible security threats. Campus security vetoed a third proposed Zionist speaker. In fact, no mainstream Jewish, Israeli, or Zionist voices have been featured in events on Israel/Palestine at SFU since October 7, 2023.

- Contrary to some claims, anti-Israel and pro-Palestine perspectives are not suppressed; they are, in fact, routinely hosted at BC universities. Since October 7, 2023, SFU has hosted over 50 formal events on Israel/Palestine featuring only anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian voices (which, to our knowledge, have occurred without incident). Various UBC units, such as the Climate Justice Centre and the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice, as well as SFU's Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies, have directed substantial portions of their programming around anti-Zionist and anti-Israel themes. They rarely, if ever, include voices that diverge from this line of politics. This pattern produces programming that does not reflect the range of legitimate scholarly or political debate on the issue. Moreover, the onslaught of anti-Israel and anti-Zionist activity, especially when combined with a dearth or absence of activity featuring alternative perspectives, has worked to make many Jews feel unwelcome on their campuses.
- In August 2025, a head librarian at SFU encouraged faculty members to pressure the SFU administration to shut down an exhibit on ancient Israel, threatening the academic freedom of the exhibit organizer. The sign for the exhibit was stolen and posters were ripped down.
- Numerous UBC, SFU, and UVic departments and groups have made statements condemning Israel's actions in the current Israel-Hamas war, chilling expressions of dissent among current members of the units and discouraging prospective members with dissenting viewpoints, including mainstream Jewish viewpoints, from applying.
- As Jewish faculty members, many of us are supporting students who are experiencing antisemitism on our campuses. This emotional labour takes place in the context of our knowledge that our universities provide little support to these affected students. Jewish students are especially unlikely to report antisemitism because, as a tiny minority on BC campuses, they are readily identifiable as the complainants, and they fear retaliation.

These incidents offer only a small vignette into our experiences as Jewish people working in higher education institutions in BC. We routinely pass anti-Israel posters in and around our workspaces that use demonizing words and imagery. Those of us who have not been directly targeted may still face an environment that has become uncollegial or even combative.

Universities' repeated claim to support equity, diversity, and inclusion gaslights Jewish faculty who feel targeted, unwelcome, and at times unsafe on campus.

JAABC's Response and Institutional Responses

JAABC and individual JAABC members have sent numerous letters to university presidents. Yet institutional responses remain vague and weak. To our knowledge, rule breakers have not faced any academic discipline or legal sanctions. Nor, to our knowledge, have universities such as UBC, SFU, and UVic made any concrete changes to address the aforementioned issues or to prevent them from recurring.

A group from JAABC worked with UBC's Equity and Inclusion Office to develop material on antisemitism. In spite of considerable effort by JAABC members, we have serious concerns with

the resulting materials, which fail to accurately reflect modern Jewish identity and antisemitism as it currently manifests in BC. In particular, these materials:

- Fail to acknowledge the ways in which Zionism – the movement supporting self-determination of the Jewish people in their ancestral home – is being deliberately and openly misrepresented and demonized on our campuses.
- Underplay how the land of Israel (*eretz yisrael*) is tied to Judaism and the history of the Jewish people, as understood by the vast majority of Jews in Canada and around the world.
- Fail to acknowledge how historic oppression and systemic violence not just in Europe but throughout the Arab world and elsewhere was mitigated by the establishment of the modern state of Israel, which provided the only available refuge to millions of displaced and persecuted persons. More broadly, they fail to provide a fair historical grounding of the Zionist movement and modern Israel.
- Allocate substantial attention to anti-Zionist perspectives, which are held by only a small minority of Canadian Jews.
- Fail to acknowledge the reality of the physical dangers that Jewish community members continue to experience in Canada and to recognize Jewish community members' historically grounded sense of vulnerability.

The failure of UBC's materials to acknowledge these issues significantly misrepresents both Jewish identity and modern antisemitism and hurts our efforts to promote inclusion for Jewish and Israeli faculty, staff, and allies at UBC and more broadly.

For JAABC members, our good-faith efforts to engage with institutions that claim to value principles like equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) have led to little improvement and considerable wasted energy.

Analysis

Jewish identity is multifaceted, and there are different ways of identifying as a Jew. Nonetheless, Jewish identity differs qualitatively from many other identities because it is based on a concept of nationhood or peoplehood that pre-dates and intersects with contemporary conceptions of race.

Recent [research](#) shows that Canadian university EDI policy documents typically do not acknowledge Jewish identity or antisemitism. Even when EDI documents do mention Jewish identity, it is categorized as a religious identity, thereby furthering misconceptions of Jewish identity. These facts correspond to our lived experience as Jews at BC universities: our Jewish identities are commonly misunderstood by our colleagues and administrators, and EDI offices have been ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. When the October 7 attacks happened, EDI offices were positioned to fail us because they deeply misunderstood Jewish identity in the first place. We believe that our frustrating and unproductive experience trying to constructively engage these offices at UBC (and elsewhere) indicates far deeper problems in

how EDI is conceptualized and operationalized at universities, problems that prevent EDI offices from effectively representing and promoting inclusion for Jewish community members.

One could reasonably take our experiences documented above as further evidence of the [nexus documented elsewhere](#) between anti-Israel activism and contemporary antisemitism. At the same time, any argument about whether and when to classify anti-Israel activism as antisemitic distracts from how much of this activity directly targets the ability of Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist faculty to do our jobs – teaching, research, and service.

At best, much of the anti-Israel activity documented above creates a hostile environment for Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist faculty, staff, students, and our allies. The exclusionist anti-Israel actions and violent rhetoric on campuses is legitimizing anti-Jewish hostility more broadly. In our experience, our universities would consider this hostile environment unacceptable if it applied to any other group. We decry this double standard. Whether or not university administrations are fully aware of the extent and impact of this environment, or feel unable to change it, the result is the same: Jewish members of the community are left without the kinds of meaningful protections that our universities commit to providing to other historically and persistently marginalized minorities.

Lessons and Recommendations

Based on our experiences, we summarize below the problems we face on our campuses.

1. The main form of hostility and exclusion facing Jewish faculty at our universities comes from the aggressive activities of contemporary anti-Israel movements.
2. A critical mass of people with extreme anti-Israel views are willing to break rules to shut down any Israel-affiliated academic activity and events that include Israeli academics or their supporters, even on topics that have no direct bearing on modern issues involving Israel/Palestine.
3. Faculty members and students host many events featuring one-sided anti-Israel perspectives – demonstrating that censorship of anti-Israel views is not a significant problem in academia. In contrast, pro-Israel views are often effectively censored due to security issues. As a result, our university campuses are consistently promoting a one-sided public-facing discourse on Israel/Palestine.
4. Equity, diversity, and inclusion-related offices have not only been ineffective but also counterproductive in dealing with the current wave of antisemitism.
5. Managing the fallout from antisemitism on campus creates an extra burden on Jewish and allied faculty and staff on top of our regular duties.

From these lessons, we make the following recommendations.

1. We call upon universities to protect the academic freedom of all scholars. This duty includes safeguarding the right of Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist faculty members to teach and conduct research. Moreover, this commitment should be clear and permanent.
2. We call upon universities to consistently and firmly enforce content-neutral rules around protests and events in order to prioritize the universities' basic functions: teaching and research. Such enforcement requires robust campus security and should involve consequences for rule-breakers. University-funded security should be made available for events featuring Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist speakers.
3. Universities should not adopt stances on Israel/Palestine. SFU [has taken this commendable step](#), signalling that academic freedom and diverse views – including those of Jews and Israelis – are valued on their campuses.
4. Education or training on Jewish identity and antisemitism offered through centralized offices (e.g. as part of EDI) should reflect how contemporary mainstream Jewish identities relate to Israel and Zionism.