



November 28, 2023

Dear Members,

The AAUP-Penn Executive Committee is deeply concerned to learn that the [Penn administration has refused to allow a Jewish student organization, Penn Chavurah, to reserve a room this semester to screen *Israelism*](#), a documentary film about young Jewish Americans who have traveled to Israel and Palestine and developed critical perspectives on Israeli government policies. The administration's refusal to allow students to screen a documentary film on campus is one more expression of our university leadership's failure to uphold the principles of academic freedom—principles enshrined in Penn's policies and essential to the mission of a university. Academic freedom entails the freedom of students to learn, and to encounter and critically examine multiple interpretations of the world. Students' freedom to learn also entails their right to political speech and association, which are essential aspects of education and learning. In denying students these freedoms, the university administration violates its own policies and endangers the principles of academic freedom that are essential to the research and teaching mission of a university.

The Executive Committee commends our colleagues at the Middle East Center for reserving a room for the film screening, which as of now will take place tonight, November 28 at 6:30 p.m. in Meyerson Hall Room B1. We encourage all faculty members to attend to demonstrate their support for academic freedom. Should the screening site be moved, we will do our best to notify members.

We are also gravely concerned by reports that administrators have allegedly told the Middle East Center to cancel the screening, and have allegedly informed Penn Chavurah that [the group might lose its status or funding if tonight's screening occurs](#).

We are alarmed to learn that in response to this inappropriate pressure from administrators, the director of the Middle East Center submitted his resignation today. His resignation underlines the gravity of the crisis, and the responsibility the President and Provost have for creating and exacerbating it.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms any pressure by administrators, donors, and trustees to prevent the Middle East Center from reserving a room to screen a documentary film that falls squarely within the Center's area of expertise. It is the right of faculty members to make academic programming decisions. We are particularly concerned that the Middle East Center has already lost its federal funding because the university failed to provide adequate support for its activities. Any further threats to the Center's ability to fulfill its academic mission will only hurt our university, our faculty, and our students.

We have reported these concerns about academic freedom to the national office of the AAUP. We encourage departments, programs, and the Faculty Senate to speak out against this effort to suppress academic freedom.

-- AAUP-Penn Executive Committee

CC:

President Liz Magill

Provost John Jackson

Faculty Senate Chair Tulia Falletti

Vice Provost for University Life Karu Kozuma

Michael DeCesare, Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance, AAUP