



December 16, 2013

AAUP Statement on ASA Vote to Endorse Academic Boycott of Israel

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is disappointed in the vote announced this morning by the membership of the American Studies Association (ASA) to endorse an academic boycott of Israel. While the AAUP takes no position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we have opposed all academic boycotts in principle since 2005 when we published our report [On Academic Boycotts](#). While the ASA vote was underway AAUP president Rudy Fichtenbaum and first vice-president and Committee A chair Henry Reichman issued an [Open Letter](#) to ASA members urging defeat of this boycott resolution.

We note, however, that while nearly two-thirds (827) of the 1,252 ASA members participating in the vote supported the boycott proposal, less than a third of those eligible actually voted. The ASA resolution also limited the boycott to ASA's own organizational contacts with Israeli institutions, exempting individual scholars. Since these contacts are surely limited, the resolution may have less effect than some supporters claim. This limitation may also help explain the turnout. Nevertheless, the vote represents a setback for the cause of academic freedom.

In announcing the results of the vote, the ASA also [announced](#) “plans to bring Israeli and Palestinian academics to the 2014 national convention in Los Angeles.” It is reasonable to ask, however, how the ASA will respond if the travel of those scholars is funded by any of the Israeli universities being boycotted. Will those invited be barred from receiving institutional funding? Will there be in effect a political litmus test limiting those invited to supporters of the ASA resolution and its characterizations of academic freedom and Israeli policies?

The broader impact of this vote should not be exaggerated. Since the AAUP adopted its position opposing academic boycotts over eight years ago, only two scholarly associations, the Association for Asian-American Studies and the ASA have endorsed an academic boycott of Israel. The ASA has fewer than 4,000 members and the AAAS is even smaller. No other disciplinary association, including the Modern Language Association, the American Historical Association, the American Economic Association, the American Mathematical Society, the American Political Science Association nor any other area studies association or similar professional organization, including no union of academic employees, has endorsed or even considered endorsing this boycott. Support for academic boycotts therefore remains the position of a small minority of college and university faculty.

It will be up to those members of ASA who support the principles of academic freedom to decide for themselves how to respond to this decision. But we can say that the response suggested recently by former Harvard University President Lawrence Summers, that universities deny travel support to faculty attending ASA meetings, would only compound the violation of academic freedom. For our part, AAUP will continue to oppose all academic boycotts and urge supporters of those boycotts to find other means to register their opposition to policies they find abhorrent.