



CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM



President Joseph Castro

30 May 2017

California State University, Fresno [josephcastro@csufresno.edu]

Cc: Chancellor Timothy P. White [twhite@calstate.edu]

Provost Lynnette Zelezny [lynnette@csufresno.edu]

Dean Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval [sjimenez@csufresno.edu]

Dear President Castro:

On behalf of California Scholars for Academic Freedom (cs4af)*, we are writing to express our strong objection to your administration's abrupt closure of the Edward W. Said Professorship Search after all aspects of the search were completed by the search committee.

It is disturbing that the information was first brought to our attention through the resignation of a faculty member and former dean in objection to this closure. We understand that a campaign of harassment and intimidation of search committee members was conducted by pro-Israel advocacy groups and individuals after the list of the four finalists, who were of Palestinian and Middle Eastern origin, was announced.

Such campaigns are egregious violations of academic freedom and the integrity of academic processes and procedures. Even more egregious, by closing the search over the objections of the search committee, your administration implemented the discriminatory intent of the attacks launched by special interest groups. These attacks are in violation of Title VI. They have focused on the Middle Eastern and Palestinian ethnicity and national origin of the finalists.

It is important to add that this search would have culminated in California State University, Fresno, having the second Edward W. Said chair in the country, after Columbia University, a major honor for your institution. Professor Edward W. Said, the Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, was a major literary and post-colonial theorist of our times. He was a Palestinian American scholar of prodigious reputation, one of the most renowned academics and public intellectuals in the world. Having an Edward Said chair at CSU Fresno would serve to enhance the reputation of the university and of the California State University system.

Allowing special interest groups to change the course of the search process is an affront to academic freedom and the integrity of academic searches and programs, which are under the purview of the faculty.

We call on you to stand by your faculty in the search committee and protect the academic freedom and the rights of the finalists. We call on you to maintain the reputation of your fine university by reestablishing and completing the search with the original search committee.

Sincerely yours,

California Scholars for Academic Freedom

Contact persons on behalf of CS4AF:

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*CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM is a group of well over 200 academics who teach in 20 California institutions. The group formed as a response to various violations of academic freedom that were arising from both the post-9/11/2001 climate of civil rights violations and the increasing attacks on progressive educators by neo-conservatives. Many attacks have been aimed at scholars of Arab, Muslim or Middle Eastern descent or at scholars researching and teaching about the Middle East, Arab and Muslim communities. Our goal of protecting California Scholars based mainly in institutions of higher education has grown broader in scope to include threats to academic freedom across the United States, and where relevant, globally as well. We recognize that violations of academic freedom anywhere are threats to academic freedom everywhere.

Further information on CS4AF: <https://cascholars4academicfreedom.wordpress.com>