

California State University Fresno President Joseph Castro
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June 12, 2017

Dear President Castro,

We are asking you to complete Fresno State's search for the Edward Said Chair professorship with the current finalists. Fresno State's Middle East Studies Program, directed by Vida Samiian, has been an invaluable source of information for Fresno State students, faculty, staff, and the community. The university cannot afford to stall and scuttle the hiring of new faculty to continue the program. This can happen only by immediately resuming the hiring process in place – to do anything less would result in a lost opportunity to choose from the excellent candidates who have been interviewed and are eager to come to Fresno State. Further, the university must persuade Dr. Samiian to withdraw her resignation so that she can assist and mentor the Edward Said Chair during the three years remaining in her contract.

An understanding of the history, politics, and dynamics of the Middle East is needed by all Americans because for the past several decades our government has fought, funded and perpetuated war in the region. The Middle East Studies Program designed and led by Vida Samiian has been a credit to Fresno State. It has been multidisciplinary in breadth including the culture, languages, history, and politics of the region. Naming the Middle East Studies Program director "Edward Said Chair" lends prestige to the position and the university. Scholars and leaders with international reputations have spoken on campus and because of Dr. Samiian's commitment to extending the reach of the university to the community, these events have been well attended by Fresno area residents.

Unfortunately, events that have focused on the conflict between Israel and Palestine have not set well with those members of the community who support anti-Palestinian and Zionist policies of the Israeli government. These individuals have been very vocal in their opposition to any criticism of the policies of the state of Israel, portraying such criticism as anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish. They have pressured the Fresno State administration for over a decade to silence any criticism of Israel. Voices critical of the Middle East Studies program are not only local but are associated with national organizations sharing this view and working to stifle curriculum, events, and activities at colleges and universities nationwide. With the support of previous Fresno State administrations, Dr. Samiian has been able to depend on the principles and legal obligations of academic freedom, the First Amendment, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to protect faculty and students. Despite the stress created by these outside forces Dr. Samiian has persevered in creating a program that is a credit to Fresno State making it worthy of its designation as a university.

As members of the local peace and justice community committed to Fresno State we ask you to proceed with the hiring of the Edward Said Chair professorship with the current finalists and to arrange a meeting with us within a week to discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,

Peace Fresno, Dan Yaseen, danyaseen@comcast.net, 251-3361
Fresno Center for Nonviolence, Angela Price, angela.price41@comcast.net, 435-6383
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Fresno Chapter, Patty Bennett,
bennettpatriciajean@gmail.com, 225-9591 and Teresa Castillo, taca_03@ymail.com, 360-8054
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