

Letter of Resignation, May 21, 2017

Dear Dean Jimenez-Sandoval:

I am writing to let you know that I will not be returning to complete the remainder of my FERP term at California State University, Fresno. I have decided to resign in objection to the unethical and discriminatory cancellation of the Edward Said Professorship search by AVP Rudy Sanchez after all aspects of the search had been completed by the search committee. Although he cited a procedural justification for the cancellation, the evidence indicates that this was merely a pretext, and in fact the search was cancelled based on animus towards the national origin, racial and ethnic background of the four finalists. By closing the search, the Administration carried out the vicious and discriminatory attacks launched by Israel advocacy groups against the search committee and the four finalists who were of Middle Eastern and Palestinian ethnicity.

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, the interdisciplinary search for the Edward Said Professorship was abruptly canceled by Rudy Sanchez, AVP for Academic Affairs, stating that several “concerns” about the search were brought to his attention, including an alleged violation of APM 301 regarding the election of the search committee. It was not clear what other “concerns” had been brought forth and who had brought forth these “concerns.” The cancellation came at the end of the process, after the search committee had ranked the finalists and forwarded the list with nominations to the Dean, and after the Anthropology Department had unanimously voted to house the prospective hire, at the request of the Dean of Arts and Humanities. The search was closed despite your efforts and over the objections of the search committee.

Letters and emails of protest to this unjustified cancellation by search committee members and myself, as director of the Middle East Studies program, remained unanswered (see attachments). It was puzzling why suddenly strict compliance with APM 301 could result in closure of the search, considering that the search was in process for over a year, and the search committee had begun its work in September 2016, with the full knowledge and approval of the department chair, the dean, and the AVP for Academic Affairs. Compliance with APM 301 had never before been raised. If it had been raised, there would have been opportunities to adjust to comply.

To understand what really happened, we have to look at the facts. There was no expression of “concern” about the search and APM 301 until the names of the four finalists for campus interviews were announced and colleagues were invited to attend their lectures. These finalists were, appropriately, Middle Eastern Americans and their research focused on the region, in particular Palestine. As I have explained in an earlier letter, it was then that a documented campaign of harassment and intimidation of search committee members began by Israel advocacy groups to influence and derail the outcome of the search and, if possible, prevent it from moving forward.

The first inappropriate comment was made to a search committee member by a colleague who questioned the selection of the finalists. When invited to attend the lectures to find out more about the finalists, he responded “Why should I come to listen to a talk about Palestine

and Lebanon?” The same individual questioned the naming of the position after Edward Said and criticized the four candidates’ areas of scholarship. The next expression was a note to one of the search committee members stating: “I wonder if you know how concerned the Jewish community is on campus and outside about the finalists for the Middle East search. Could you share with me the deliberations of the search committee.” Another member of the search committee was pressured and harassed repeatedly by a retired faculty member who criticized the ideological orientation of some of the finalists and apparently referenced the Canary Mission Website, which is a McCarthyite blacklisting website that profiles students and faculty who have been vocal supporters of Palestinian rights, with the express intention of ruining their careers. I am sure the administration, especially the Deans and the Provost, received additional communications against the candidates and the search.

Such comments and interferences are attacks on academic freedom, integrity of the search process, and the principles of non-discriminatory practice that we uphold in the academy. These were reported to the administration, but instead of addressing the discriminatory nature of these attacks, the administration carried out the request of the attackers and decided to close the search. By doing so the administration chose to implement the discriminatory demands of the Israel advocacy groups and individuals.

As Professor Joe Parks, the Equal Employment Opportunity representative on the Search Committee, wrote in response to the final cancellation of the search on May 11, 2017:

“As a young man during the 1960s, I am an old Civil Rights fighter and recognize racism when I see it in front of me. I believe the administration ‘caved’ to racism because the four finalists were of Middle Eastern ethnicity.... I believe the administration violated the integrity of the academic search and the Academic Freedom of Higher Education in the United States of America. It is shameful that we are still fighting racism, bigotry and hatred during this new 21st century.”

For those of us who were instrumental in the development of the interdisciplinary Middle East Studies program such attacks are not new. The history of these types of discriminatory harassment and intimidation goes back over fifteen years to the post 9/11 era, when some of us from the Middle East, or with expertise about the Middle East, planned courses, lectures and outreach programs to educate the campus and the broader community about the Middle East. However, the big taboo has always been and remains Israel. Any critical discussion of Israeli policies or Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine would be met with a campaign of harassment and intimidation, even letters of protest to the Chancellor of CSU, coming all the way from Israel. Later on when we developed the MES program through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education and held major conferences on the Middle East, special interest groups such as Campus Watch and “FresnoZionism.org” continued to harass faculty and expert scholars. So, it is not surprising that this is continuing today, when we are at the point of hiring a faculty member for a named Edward Said Professorship in Middle East Studies.

What has changed is that the previous administration stood by the principles and legal obligations of Academic Freedom, the First Amendment rights, and Title VI of the Civil

Rights Act to protect faculty and students. With speakers like Professors Ilan Pappé, Hagit Borer, and William Ayers, when special interest groups rallied to prevent their talks, the Administration stood up to protect Academic Freedom. I am sad to see that today, with this unjustified closure of the search of the Edward Said Professorship, the current administration is enabling those who lead these discriminatory campaigns of obstruction, intimidation, and harassment.

Again, it is ironic, but not surprising, that a position named after the late Edward Said, whose academic legacy is rooted in anti-colonial intellectual pursuit, is attacked and derailed by individuals and forces that defend the last settler-colonial regime of our times. What is surprising is that AVP Rudy Sanchez facilitated the implementation of this discriminatory effort.

After spending many years and many fights for what is right at this institution, I have no choice but to leave, with great sorrow, in protest to this unethical and discriminatory closure of the search, violation of Title VI, and the shameful injustice inflicted on our superb finalists because of their Middle Eastern and Palestinian ethnicity.

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