

Examples of Ongoing Anti-Semitism at UIUC

Over the past five years, the Jewish and pro-Israel students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (“UIUC”) have been subjected to a hostile environment of anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitism comes from both ends of the political spectrum: Jewish and pro-Israel students are peppered with swastikas by white supremacists on the extreme right while being labeled white supremacists by the extreme left. The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that in December 2019, the UIUC student body president circulated a university-wide email condemning the “epidemic of antisemitism on this campus.”

Since March 2020, we have been providing the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, on a continuing basis, extensive materials concerning the deleterious situation on UIUC’s campus. Below, we provide examples of the sorts of incidents that our materials have highlighted:

- April 2015, August 2015, February 2016, October 2017: On four separate occasions in two years, the UIUC Chabad Center for Jewish Life menorah was vandalized.
- March 2017: A UIUC Vice Chancellor removed a Jewish student from the UIUC Campus Student Elections Commission during a referendum campaign to determine whether UIUC should divest from Israeli companies. The Vice Chancellor later justified her decision by saying that the student is “Jewish, I had to remove her because she’s biased.”
- September 2017: In the wake of the well-known August 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Students for Justice in Palestine at UIUC (“SJP”) organized a rally on UIUC’s campus entitled “Smashing Fascism: Radical Resistance Against White Supremacy.” SJP promoted the rally by insisting that “[t]here is no room for fascists, white supremacists, or Zionists at UIUC.” SJP later argued on its Facebook page that there exists an “unholy union of American fascists, white supremacists, and Zionists,” and encouraged “violent resistance”—including, if necessary, “full-scale armed conflict”—in response. During the rally itself, SJP’s president led the crowd in a chant of, “No Zionists! No KKK! Resisting fascists all the way!”
- Fall 2018: A swastika was painted on a wall of a school building that faced a Jewish sorority, and a swastika was drawn on the dormitory room door of a Jewish UIUC freshman. Later, a swastika was drawn inside a men’s restroom on campus, as well as in a basement tunnel located east of the Main Quad.
- September 2019: A Jewish UIUC student returned to her dorm room to discover that her mezuzah was missing. This followed earlier incidents, where a student had a mezuzah ripped off of his door by another resident of his dormitory. And during the 2018-2019 academic year, his mezuzah was ripped off from the door of his apartment.
- September 25, 2019: During a mandatory diversity training session, a UIUC Multicultural Advocate gave a presentation titled “Palestine & Great Return March: Palestinian Resistance to 70 Years of Israeli Terror.” The presentation glorified violence against Jews: it depicted Leila Khaled, a prominent member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (“PFLP”), as a positive symbol of Palestinian resistance. (The U.S. State Department has designated PFLP a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (“OFAC”) has designated PFLP a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity). The presentation also contained a slide titled “martyrdom,” which was defined as “[s]acrificing of the heroes who are killed in the battles of the enemy,” and “[d]eath which is desired by a warrior.”

- October 7, 10, and 11, 2019: Individuals reported finding multiple swastikas drawn in various locations across UIUC’s campus.
- January 30, 2020: A rock was thrown through a window of a Jewish fraternity on UIUC’s campus. In February, a different UIUC Jewish fraternity’s window was shattered by a concrete block.
- February 28-29, 2020: A student reported that someone had drawn swastikas and male genitalia in Wardall Hall. The drawings first appeared on Friday, February 28 and were erased; then they were redrawn on Saturday, February 29.
- September 21, 2020: The ISG Committee on Diversity and Inclusion held a meeting to discuss a resolution calling for UIUC to divest from certain companies that do business with Israel. During this meeting, an ISG Senator proposed an amendment that would add a Jewish cultural center—such as Hillel or Chabad—to the list of student groups represented on the resolution’s task force. According to a meeting attendee, one of the resolution’s authors responded, “I would absolutely include a Jewish student on the committee, *but they could not be affiliated with Jewish student orgs on campus that I know of, like Chabad or Hillel.*” A UIUC faculty advisor was present at this meeting—and heard the author’s statements—yet said nothing.
- October 14, 2020: A Jewish and pro-Israel ISG Senator resigned from the ISG Senate, as a direct result of persistent harassment she received from her fellow ISG Senators on the basis of her Jewish and Zionist identity. In her resignation letter to the ISG Senate—on which she cc’d UIUC’s Chancellor—the Senator declared that the “sole focus” of the “majority of students” on ISG has become to “make sure that Jewish and Pro-Israel students on campus”—like her—“do not feel safe and welcome.” She continued:

I knew from my first time coming to an ISG meeting that there is a lot of hate here. There are a lot of members who are here to make sure that they have a forum to spew anti-Israel anti-Semitic hate speech, directly in the face of Jews. I thought that you, being my peers on this campus, at such a difficult period of time in our nation would be a forum of people interested in bettering the common good for those of us on campus. I decided to join you to try and bring to you a voice from a person who believes in so many of the same causes you purport to be trying to tackle. But I have come to understand that this is not a place where any of you really care about human rights, fairness, no hate having a home here, because none of you are willing to take a chance and listen to what I have to say because you are jaded by your hate of Jews and Israel. Unfortunately, it is clouding your ability to represent all students on campus

I hereby resign my position as a Senator.