

UC Reaffirms Ban on Student Government Boycotts of Israel

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— Categories: Human Rights



The University of California is once again reminding student leaders that their governing bodies cannot use financial boycotts as a way to protest companies linked to specific countries, including Israel.

This week, University of California President Michael Drake sent a letter to campus chancellors clarifying that student governments must follow the same financial rules as the broader institution. Drake stressed that while free speech and academic debate are vital parts of the university's mission, any spending decisions should be based on practical business practices, such as competitive bidding, not political motivations.

“This principle also applies to student governments,” Drake wrote. “Actions by University entities to implement boycotts of companies based on their association with a particular country would not align with these sound business practices.”

The statement comes during a time of heightened tension on college campuses across the United States. Pro-Palestinian protests erupted after the violence in Gaza, including a clash at the University of California, Los Angeles, that drew national attention. Adding to the controversy, United States President Donald Trump has launched federal investigations into alleged antisemitism at several universities, including the University of California, Berkeley.

University spokesperson Rachel Zaentz said the policy reflects a long-standing position: while students are free to express their opinions, targeting companies financially is inconsistent with the institution’s commitment to academic freedom and open dialogue.

However, some student advocates and civil rights groups see the policy differently. The California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said the letter discourages people from taking a stand on human rights issues. Oussama Mokeddem, the organization’s government affairs director, argued that the decision shows financial concerns are taking priority over free expression and moral responsibility.

UC Student Association President Aditi Hariharan also expressed disappointment. She noted that student governments are one of the few places where students have any real influence on university policies. “Students already have little influence on how the university works, and student government is one of the few places where they can get involved and have their voices heard,” she said.

The UC Student Association has not yet issued an official response to the letter.

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