



Arab American Studies Association
13624 Michigan Avenue
Dearborn, MI 48126
arabamericanstudies.org

Nov. 4, 2018

Dear President Schlissel and Provost Philbert.

The Arab American Studies Association recognizes that the University of Michigan has played a historic role in supporting research on and by Arab and Muslim American communities. UM students were among the first to join the Muslim Student Association and the group's first annual meeting was hosted by this chapter in association with Detroit area mosques in 1963. The Association of Arab University Graduates was launched on the Ann Arbor campus in 1967. The Dearborn campus is home to the first Center for Arab American Studies (2000) and the Ann Arbor campus to the first Arab and Muslim American Studies Program. The Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies has long been a leading Middle East area studies program in the US. Our own organization has included many UM faculty members and alumni among our founding and current leaders.

While participants in these many organizations have held a variety of views, the spaces these institutions created on and off campus have provided a welcome environment for debate about a broad range of topics including the right of Palestinians to exist in peace and security in their historic homeland and the peaceful means by which we can achieve this goal. For many of us, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement represents the most productive model.

The university administration has taken a clear political stance against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that threatens academic freedom and will have a chilling effect on free speech throughout the UM community, especially in the parts of the university mentioned above. Rather than exploring the merits of this important human rights issue and engaging the three campuses on this topic, the university has conflated criticism of Israel and Israeli leadership with anti-Semitism. We object to this conflation in the strongest terms. Not only does it wrongly equate opposition to governmental practices and policies with racism, but it runs the risk of deflecting attention from the very real forms and expressions of anti-Semitism that are on the rise in the US today. Our by-laws make clear our opposition to all forms of discrimination.

We stand in solidarity with [UM faculty](#), [students](#) and [alumni](#) who have already expressed their disagreement with the administration. We agree with our colleagues in AAA, AAUP, APSA, ASA, MESA, and other organizations who are concerned to see a faculty member disciplined for exercising protected political speech.

We call on the University of Michigan to drop its disciplinary actions against Professor John Cheney-Lippold.

We call on the University of Michigan to continue to welcome and protect the free speech of Arab American and Muslim American community members and their allies. We recognize this speech is increasingly under attack (including in the Michigan legislature) by those who wrongly equate the BDS movement and criticism of the Israeli government with anti-Semitism.

We call on the University of Michigan to uphold its traditions of academic excellence and academic freedom, which cannot exist independent of one another.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sally Howell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sally" and the last name "Howell" clearly distinguishable.

Sally Howell, President
On behalf of the Board of Directors