

Open Letter to President McShane

February 19, 2017

Dear President McShane,

We write with grave concerns over the treatment of Sapphira Lurie, a senior at Lincoln Center accused of organizing a campus protest without prior approval. As you may know, Ms. Lurie was part of a group of students who, despite repeated obstruction from the administration, won the Lincoln Center United Student Government's approval to form a Fordham chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine. Dean Keith Eldredge subsequently overturned USG's decision, effectively banning a chapter of SJP from forming on campus. On January 23, Ms. Lurie helped lead a protest of the ban. Shortly thereafter, Dean Eldredge escalated the situation by bringing her up on disciplinary charges.

As signatories to this letter, we have a range of opinions on issues related to Israel and Palestine, and on the best approach to addressing those issues. Some of us firmly oppose the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS); some of us strongly support it; some of us hold other views still. But we all agree that the administration's actions violate basic principles that are essential to the kind of university Fordham purports to be. Students' freedom of speech and freedom of association, including the freedom to advocate for a cause, are central to academic freedom. And academic freedom is a value we treasure as faculty members.

The case troubles us for many reasons:

First, the proposed disciplinary hearing falls well short of common sense notions of fairness. Ms. Lurie will be deprived of any form of support or counsel. Dean Eldredge will serve as accuser, prosecutor, judge, jury, and punisher. And the entire process will take place behind closed doors, with no transparency whatsoever. These proceedings are unbecoming of a university with aspirations to greatness.

Second, the administration's actions directly contradict the mission of the university. According to its mission statement, Fordham strives to prepare its students for "leadership in a global society." Far from fostering student leadership, however, the university has egregiously undermined it, unilaterally overturning a decision reached by the democratically elected members of the United Student Government. A university that obstructs its students' right to self-governance is not a university that can plausibly claim to foster global leadership.

Finally, at every step in this series of events, the administration has evinced a fundamental disregard for academic freedom. By obstructing the formation of a Fordham chapter of SJP, it interfered with the students' right to free association. By banning the club against the wishes of the USG, it disabled the very possibility of a free exchange of ideas. And by pursuing a disciplinary action against Ms. Lurie for protesting that ban, it has further stifled students' right to free expression.

For these reasons, we respectfully insist (1) that the disciplinary charges brought against Sapphira Lurie be dropped; (2) that a Fordham chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine be allowed to proceed, as per the wishes of the United Students Government; (3) that the

administration immediately institute a university-wide student demonstration policy consistent with the academic tradition of free inquiry and the constitutionally guaranteed right to free expression; and (4) that the university immediately review and revise the Student Conduct Disciplinary processes, which currently deny students even the most basic elements of fairness.

We conclude by noting that Ms. Lurie's actions are consistent with the educational values that we hold most dear at Fordham: fostering students who strive to be men and women for others, and who find themselves, now and in the future, deeply bothered by injustice. From our vantage as faculty members, Ms. Lurie's engagement is a sign of the success of Fordham's work in cultivating these values. Seeing a student facing a disciplinary action for engaging in exactly the principles we foster troubles us almost more than we can say.

With deep concern,

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