



November 1, 2016

Dear Members of the Board of Visitors:

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni has worked steadily with governing boards around the nation to advance academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas in higher education. At a time when freedom of speech is being challenged at many U.S. campuses, George Mason University has maintained a strong commitment to upholding the First Amendment rights of its students and faculty. As recently as last week, GMU's vice president for university life eloquently reminded students that they may oppose viewpoints with which they disagree in a lawful manner, but the university will likewise uphold the rights of those who visit campus to exercise their constitutionally protected rights.

I write urgently to you now, however, to draw your attention to forthcoming events on your campus that have potential to challenge George Mason's fine record of upholding the First Amendment and freedom of expression on campus.

On November 4–6, [Students for Justice in Palestine](#) (SJP) will hold its annual conference at George Mason University's campus. It is important for you to be aware that SJP is the leading arm of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel on campuses across the United States, and its activists have a troubling record of intimidating students and suppressing freedom of speech. In 2013, for example, Northeastern University leadership [suspended](#) the entire SJP chapter for intimidating students on campus—including interrupting an on-campus Holocaust remembrance event. In 2015, SJP [endorsed](#) the protest at the Dewey Lecture in the Philosophy of Law at University of Minnesota, at which demonstrators disrupted the presentation of an invited professor from the NYU School of Law and Hebrew University. These are, sad to say, not isolated events.

We do not condone any interference with the right of SJP activists to express their views as long as they remain within the realm of legally protected speech. We are alerting you so that you may stay vigilant to the possibility that SJP activists may seek to intimidate and stifle the free speech of students who don't share their viewpoint.

We understand that a counter-event is being planned by the GMU chapter of Christians United for Israel that is scheduled to occur alongside the SJP conference. We don't yet have all of the information, but will assuredly keep you apprised of the situation if of interest. We hope that, whatever happens, the BOV and the GMU administration will defend and maintain the rights of all students to speak freely, and without fear of intimidation, at GMU.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like any further information—we're at your service if we can be helpful going forward. Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Warm regards,

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Member of the Board of Directors
American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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