

December 20, 2023

S. David Wu, President, Baruch College
Linda Essig, Provost, Baruch College
Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor of the City University of New York

Dear President Wu, Provost Essig, and Chancellor Matos Rodríguez:

I am writing on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee. Our charge is to defend academic freedom as a professional and contractual right of all CUNY professional staff. Academic freedom is grounded in the faculty or staff member's qualifications for the position as reviewed by his/her peers. It consists of the freedom to teach, research, write, and to speak in our capacity as citizens without restraint by the administration.

We note with great concern reports that the Baruch College administration acted to cancel a faculty-organized event, which is a clear violation of academic freedom and free expression. A faculty teach-in, titled "The Gaza Crisis" and organized by members of the Baruch College History Department, was scheduled to be held on December 4, 2023. The event, which had been approved by the administration in advance and advertised via Eventbrite, was to have featured three Baruch faculty speakers.

However, on the day before the event was to be held, the faculty organizers were informed by the Provost's office that the event had been canceled by the Baruch administration. It is our understanding that the organizers had expressed some concerns regarding the claiming of tickets via the Eventbrite page: although tickets were supposed to be reserved only by those who registered with Baruch email addresses, a number of tickets were bought in blocks of 10 by people without Baruch email addresses. While this might have caused a potential security concern, it is our understanding that Provost Essig subsequently informed the chair of the History Department several additional reasons for the cancellation of the event: that the title suggested it was an advocacy rather than an educational event; that the framing created an alleged security concern; and that the title of the event—"The Gaza Crisis: Teach In"—was apparently deemed to echo the language of advocacy organizations inside and outside of campus.

To be absolutely clear: none of the above objections in any way justify the canceling of this event, nor do any of them mitigate the fact that this cancellation represents an obvious violation of the academic freedom of those who organized the event and were supposed to have taken part in it. While the reserving of tickets by those who might not have been Baruch ID holders might have been a concern, this fact on its own hardly justifies the complete cancellation of the event. This unilateral decision by the administration prevented members of the Baruch community—students, staff, and faculty alike—from having an opportunity to discuss the sorts of important issues that are the essence of a public university's work. Finally, the arbitrary cancellation of a faculty-organized event by management contributes to the chilling of academic freedom and free expression on campus more generally. Like other recent events by CUNY management at other campuses—including the cancellation of a film screening at Hunter College last month—this act

by Baruch management strikes us as extremely disturbing because it is contrary to the principles of academic freedom at our university.

We urge the Baruch administration to allow the event to be rescheduled as it was originally intended, and to refrain from other violations of academic freedom and free expression going forward. We echo the words of PSC-CUNY President James Davis in a [recent statement](#) on freedom of speech and assembly at CUNY: “Students, faculty, and staff have a right, indeed an obligation, to speak up on issues about which they feel strongly.” And we remind you of the principle put forth by the American Association of University Professors: “Free speech is not simply an aspect of the educational enterprise to be weighed against other desirable ends. It is the very precondition of the academic enterprise itself.”

We await your timely response and I am ready to provide further information or answer any questions you might have. On behalf of the committee, I look forward to your immediate attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

Anthony Alessandrini, Chair

On behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee

CC: PSC-CUNY Principal Officers and Executive Committee

Professor Stuart Davis, Chair, Baruch College PSC-CUNY Chapter

Professor Douglas Medina, Chair, University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Committee