

March 1, 2024

To: Fernando Delgado, President, Lehman College  
Jorge Silva-Puras, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Success, Lehman College  
Richard Relkin, Assistant Vice President for Communications and Marketing, Lehman College  
Bridget Barbera, Executive Counsel to the President and Labor Designee, Lehman College  
Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor, City University of New York

Dear President Delgado:

Thank you for your letter of February 28. You write: “While the Lehman administration supports the outcome, the College had no role in the decision-making process.” While we would welcome further information from the Lehman administration, since there has been little or no transparency regarding the cancellation of this panel or the postponement of the conference, your statement belies published reports and stretches credibility given the information that we have received about the situation.

On February 5, the *New York Post* began [an article](#) reporting on the cancellation of this panel by stating: “Embattled CUNY was set to host a panel titled ‘Globalizing the Intifada!’ [sic]—before higher-ups got wise and canceled the event as outcry spread Monday.” The article goes on to state: “When details about the panel surfaced Monday and critics came out swinging—blasting the event as a ‘how to guide for junior terrorists’—the college nixed it.” The *Post* article features a prominent quote from a former CUNY trustee and from Representative Ritchie Torres, and official statements regarding the cancellation by Ms. Kehoe-Higgins and Mr. Relkin, with Mr. Relkin’s statement described as “the school’s position” (we note that Mr. Relkin, an Assistant Vice President, is part of the college administration). If it is indeed the case that “the College had no role in the decision-making process,” then clearly some sort of public statement correcting these reported claims, as well as full transparency about exactly what did transpire, is in order here. Otherwise, you allow for the perception that the College was directly responsible—a perception that in itself threatens to chill free expression at Lehman College.

Further, it is our understanding that the initial development in the cancellation of this panel was a complaint from a student regarding the title of the panel, which was then amplified via social media (an initial [tweet](#) on February 4, which incorrectly claimed that this was in fact “a class being offered by CUNY,” received more than 420,000 views and was retweeted hundreds of times). It is almost impossible for Lehman College administration *not* to have been involved in the subsequent events, given that a student complaint was the initial impetus for what followed. Further, it begs credibility that a program director and the school’s official spokesperson would be allowed to make public statements that had not been closely vetted by upper administration.

This cancellation is part of a larger pattern of the repression of academic freedom and political expression by CUNY management since October 2023. As the PSC noted in its public [letter](#) to

Chancellor Matos Rodríguez on October 25, “Even in times of great anguish and upheaval, CUNY must maintain a commitment to the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly for students, faculty, and staff.” The hundreds of PSC members who co-signed the letter called upon the Chancellor “to affirm the fundamental freedoms of expression and assembly at CUNY,” and noted: “Your failure to do so has sent a chilling message.” As of yet, there has been no response, and no affirmation of these fundamental rights, nor of our contractual right to academic freedom.

The cancellation of a panel that was part of an academic conference, solely due to its content and following outside political pressure (including from elected officials), is a textbook example of an academic freedom violation. President Delgado, if indeed you “share [our] commitment to academic freedom,” we suggest that you make a public statement supporting this panel in the name of academic freedom, and urge the College to make certain that it is included, in its original form, when this conference takes place next fall. We look forward to your affirmative response and are happy to work with you to make sure this happens.

Sincerely,

Anthony Alessandrini, Chair

On behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee

CC: Jane Kehoe-Higgins, Director, Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College

Teresita Levy, Interim Dean, School of Arts and Humanities, Lehman College

James Mahon, Dean, School of Arts and Humanities (Sabbatical)

PSC-CUNY Principal Officers and Executive Committee Members

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

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