

PSC/CUNY Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York

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February 26, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor, New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor, City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Governor Hochul and Chancellor Rodríguez:

The Professional Staff Congress is committed to protecting the rights of our members and the free exchange of diverse ideas that is essential to a college education. We strongly object to your removal of a job posting for a Palestinian Studies faculty position as a violation of academic freedom at Hunter College. We oppose antisemitism and all forms of hate, but this move is counterproductive. It is an overreach of authority to rule an entire area of academic study out of bounds.

Academic freedom is “the freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach and publish findings without interference from administrators, boards of trustees, political figures, donors, or other entities” (AAUP). It is fundamental to the operation of a university and essential to quality education. Teaching is not indoctrination, it is exposure to analytical frameworks for students to make sense of the world and is the province of academic professionals.

The issue of Israel and Palestine has roiled our CUNY community for decades and has been particularly fraught and painful since the October 7, 2023 Hamas terrorist attack and the ensuing Israeli war on Gaza. While we all hope for peace, members of our union, CUNY students, and many in the communities we serve have deeply held opposing opinions about the conflict and even how to speak about it. The “divisive concepts” standard for universities is something devised in Florida that shouldn’t be exported to New York. What’s needed are inclusive ways of teaching, not canceling concepts and areas of study.

An elected official dictating what topics may be taught at a public college is a line that should not be crossed. CUNY Colleges are already seeking to limit the rights of assembly and speech on their campuses. CUNY faculty are being investigated when a student objects to a classroom topic or a choice of words. What will be next on the list of unacceptable topics?

Students, faculty, and staff have a right to feel safe, welcome and respected at CUNY, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or identity. Rigorous education means sometimes engaging uncomfortable ideas and having disagreements. One of CUNY’s great strengths is its diversity—of peoples, cultures and ideas. We are all here to be challenged and interact with people who may not share our backgrounds or opinions.



In keeping with the principle of academic freedom, I urge you to respect College governance and continue to allow the faculty-led departments at Hunter College to determine what is an appropriate academic subject matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J Davis".

James Davis

President, Professional Staff Congress

cc:

William C. Thompson Jr, Board of Trustees Chairperson, City University of New York