

UT Austin, Dallas anti-genocide student protesters face academic discipline

Eddie Haywood
17 June 2024

On Tuesday, June 11, the University of Texas at Austin administration issued a letter to students declaring its intention to discipline those who participated in two protests against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza on its campus on April 24 and 29. In addition to sanctions, 60 students were arrested in police assaults on the two demonstrations.

Additionally, the University of Texas at Dallas has declared it will discipline students for the May 1 demonstration on its campus, in which 21 students were arrested.

UT Austin senior Stanley Davis, who was arrested at the April 24 demonstration, told the *Austin American-Statesman* that he received an 11-page letter from the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Office.

Davis stated, “It’s clear that whatever they’re doing now is a scare tactic. We’re still going to stand up.”

Attempting to characterize the behavior of the protesters in Austin during the two days in April as inordinately extreme, the university proclaimed, “The University has made clear that we enforce institutional rules, and the conduct notices sent to students who violated our rules during protests on April 24th and 29th reflect that commitment. The actions and stated intentions of those participating in these protests stand in stark contrast to no fewer than 13 previous pro-Palestinian free speech events on our campus since October, which took place largely without incident.”

The protests at UT Austin are part of a wave of anti-genocide demonstrations by students and workers around the world in opposition to Israel’s criminal mass murder in Gaza. Many protests have come under violent police repression coordinated at the highest levels of the state. In tandem with the brutal police reaction is the foul atmosphere whipped by the media and political establishment with the promotion of the

filthy lie that those who oppose Israel’s genocide are antisemitic.

While stating that it is prohibited by federal law to comment on specific aspects of its disciplinary procedures against individual students, the university presented to media a summary of possible actions.

All students that the university judges to have committed conduct violations can have “financial holds” lodged against them, which includes withholding their transcripts, preventing a student from registering for the next semester. Furthermore, the university can withhold awarding graduating students their diplomas. This essentially leaves students in limbo.

In addition to academic sanctions, many students who participated in the demonstrations were arrested and currently face criminal charges.

At UT Dallas, computer science major Mousa Najjar was one of 21 students arrested during the May 1 protest and charged with criminal trespassing. Speaking to the *Dallas Morning News*, Najjar stated that he had not received his degree or transcripts, and, in spite of that, expressed defiantly, “We made sacrifices for the Palestinian cause, regardless.”

Illustrating the completely reactionary and antidemocratic character of the university’s decision, Najjar has been barred from campus for protesting. During the graduation ceremony held on May 15, after his name was called to receive his degree, Najjar stood on the stage before the audience and raised a Palestinian flag with the words “divest from death” inscribed on it.

Najjar was swiftly escorted off the stage by campus police, who told him he was in violation of his bond conditions, and was ordered to leave the campus. Over a month later, he has not received his degree.

“I am paralyzed with my options,” Najjar said, and expressed his desire to apply to graduate school and that he felt uncertain regarding his legal and academic situation.

The April protests were organized by the UT Austin student advocacy group Palestine Solidarity Committee. On April 24, after posting on social media with a call for a walkout and march toward the South Lawn, a common area on campus and frequent site for previous anti-genocide demonstrations. The student group stated as its key demand that the university “divest, and withdraw its investments from Israel.”

The Texas University system maintains millions of dollars in holdings that benefit Israel, including in Raytheon, Northrup Grumman and Boeing, the key weapons manufacturers which provide armaments to Israel. In addition, the university system has investments in Israeli software firm Check Point, Tel Aviv-based pharmaceutical company Teva, and in Israeli government bonds denominated in shekels.

Shortly after the students arrived at the South Lawn, the administration summoned the police, who arrived in full riot gear, and broke up the protest, arresting several students.

Over the course of several months, the media have dishonestly portrayed UT Austin student protesters as violent and responsible for creating safety issues for other students and faculty. In fact, the violence that occurred came after the police arrived at the behest of the administration, outfitted in military gear, spraying tear gas over the crowd and striking and tackling protesters.

Contrary to the assertions of university officials and the police, the student protests are lawful, and protected by the US Constitution, which provide the right to assemble and protest. The move by the university administration to punish students for protesting, together with the brutal police response, constitute an unlawful attack on the student’s democratic rights.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality strongly condemns the criminal charges lodged against students and demands the rescinding of all sanctions and the dismissal of criminal charges against all student protesters.

The hysterical and brutal response unleashed against the massive opposition to the US-Israeli genocide

speaks not to the strength of the ruling class, but of its terror.

The ruling class fears that the masses of students and workers who have mobilized in the millions across the world against the genocide of Gaza, correctly identifying the source of the imperialist barbarism that underlines the genocide, will develop into an independent political movement of the working class against the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact