

APA Responds To Academic Boycott of Israel

“Free exchange of scientific ideas” moves APA to reiterate its position against boycotts and other actions targeting institutions of higher learning and scientists, academics, and researchers based on political policy.

APA has reasserted its commitment to academic freedom and free intellectual exchange in response to a recent vote by the American Studies Association (ASA) to boycott Israeli academic institutions.

According to statements by APA, “The field of psychiatry depends on the free exchange of scientific ideas and discoveries independent of any interference from politically or ideologically motivated groups or movements.” Moreover, “any attack on institutions of higher learning and individual scientists, academics, and researchers based on political policy halts academic freedoms and negatively affects the vital role research plays for our patients and profession.”

The boycott was intended as a signal of opposition to Israel’s policies toward Palestinians and as an expression of support for Palestinian scholars and students, according to the ASA. About 66 percent of the 1,252 voters who cast ballots (out of 3,853 eligible members) voted in favor of the resolution.

Actual effects of the boycott beyond the symbolic are unclear. A statement by the ASA’s National Council said the boycott would be “limited to a refusal on the part of the association in its official capacities to enter into formal collaborations with Israeli academic institutions,” or their representatives.

“The resolution does not apply to individual Israeli scholars engaged in ordinary forms of academic exchange, including conference presentations, public lectures at campuses, or collaboration on research and publication,” continued the statement.

In 2006, APA’s Assembly and then Board of Trustees voted to condemn a similar policy adopted by an organization of academics in Great Britain (*Psychiatric News*, March 16, 2007).

The American Association of University Professors, the country’s largest academic professional organization, has opposed the ASA boycott. In addition, as of late last month, 29 U.S. universities had signaled their opposition to the boycott. Included on that list are many of the country’s leading research institutions. Several universities have announced that they plan to withdraw from the ASA. ■