

Subject: Resolution of OCR Complaints
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From: President of Pomona College
To: Student Information Mailing List
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President G. Gabrielle Starr

Dear Pomona College Community,

As we wind down the fall semester and prepare to begin a new calendar year, I'm reflecting on the liberal-arts tradition at Pomona College. I'm especially proud of how we make space for the challenges, wonder, rigor and conversations that help shape how we see each other and the world—even and especially when these conversations are hard.

The past two years have been intensely painful for the world and for our campus community. Indeed, the tragic loss of life in both Israel and Palestine has affected everyone—but for students, staff and faculty who have personal, rooted connections to the region and its citizens, the pain has been particularly intense. It is more important than ever that we, a liberal-arts community, find ways to engage around our political differences without hurting one another.

As many of you will recall, in April of last year, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) received a complaint against Pomona, which alleged violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The complaint was filed by The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (Brandeis Center) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on behalf of Jewish students who alleged experiences of antisemitism on Pomona's campus. When we receive such complaints, we're responsible for listening carefully, especially to our students, and ensuring we do everything we can to create an environment conducive to learning, growth and well-being. The complainants indicated a willingness to resolve these claims through a mediated negotiation, and Pomona agreed.

Following a voluntary mediation process supported by a neutral observer from OCR—and involving months of dialogue and information gathering—I'm pleased to announce that Pomona has reached a voluntary [Resolution Agreement](#) with the Brandeis Center, Hillel International, and ADL. The Resolution Agreement acts on our longstanding goal of ensuring every individual at Pomona feels they have full and equal access to collaborate,

study, teach and create within our vibrant and diverse academic community, while also reaffirming our deeply held values of free speech (including the right to peaceful protest), academic freedom and open inquiry.

The College undertook a number of significant proactive measures even before the complaint was filed. Those steps, most of which are now formalized as part of the voluntary Resolution Agreement, include:

- adding [shared ancestry as a category in the College's harassment policies](#).
- updating [time, place, and manner](#) policies to be consistent with Pomona's educational mission.
- developing College-sponsored programming to promote dialogue across difference, as well as a better understanding of the history, challenges and experiences of those who trace their ancestry to the Middle East.
- publicly [advocating](#) for deeper engagement with Israeli educational institutions, and when we are able, with Palestinian educational institutions as well.

For many Jewish students, faculty and staff, a connection to Israel—often based on cultural, historical, religious or family bonds—is central to their identity. It's important that we clearly reject discrimination and harassment motivated by antisemitism, including the targeted harassment of these members of our community because of their Zionism. Many Jewish students experience anti-Zionism as an attack on their Jewish identity, ethnicity, religion and/or ancestry, which means these students experience anti-Zionism as antisemitism. It is my hope that the steps we are committing to will also enhance our ability to effectively identify and address other kinds of shared ancestry discrimination. Hatred takes many forms, and understanding its complexities is key to confronting it.

In line with our two overriding objectives—safeguarding our academic mission and providing a welcoming environment to all—there are several additional actions Pomona is now taking, including:

- appointing or engaging an individual (a Civil Rights and/or Title VI Coordinator) who will coordinate all aspects of Title VI campus harassment or discrimination, including antisemitism and Islamophobia based on shared ancestry, ethnicity or national origin.
- amending and updating [current ID policy](#) provisions relevant to masking/concealment to clarify compliance requirements.
- similar to our Title IX training, mandating annual Title VI training for all students, faculty and staff to include antisemitic and Islamophobia-based discrimination.
- considering the contemporary examples under the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's \(IHRA\) Definition of Antisemitism](#) to the extent that any examples may be useful as evidence of discriminatory intent when investigating complaints.
- amending the [Poster and Banner Approval Policy](#)—which stipulates that posters, table tents and other physical flyers/advertising related to events, activities or

initiatives of unreasonable duration may not be approved—to include further details regarding:

- what the College considers an ‘unreasonable duration,’ and;
- specific circumstances that may lead to a request being denied.
- expert-facilitated training for the Bias Report/Response Team and civil rights staff on Title VI investigation and response obligations.
- re-engaging as a full participant in Hillel International’s Campus Climate Initiative (CCI).
- establishing a Task Force, Committee or Advisory Council on Jewish Life and Antisemitism.

We understand that many of you will have questions and comments about the agreement we are announcing today. A [new web page](#), available as of this afternoon, centralizes all of the information currently available, and we invite you to share questions through the provided form. Rather than responding individually, we will post updated information based on the questions received to ensure everyone’s equal access to information.

Antisemitism has persisted for thousands of years, and this settlement is not a one-size-fits-all toolkit. It’ll be up to our community to put it in place—and to live it. We will work with the Executive Committee of the Faculty, Staff Council and ASPC to navigate the complexities and challenges together. I am grateful to their leadership in these times.

As an institution of higher education, we respect disagreement and promote conversation, especially when it’s difficult. Our community is at its strongest when the multitude of perspectives, backgrounds and personalities we comprise can face polarizing issues with constructive dialogue. Every one of us plays an important role in making that happen.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important process and to our entire community for its careful review of the details we are sharing today.

Sincerely,

Gabi

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