



CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Katherine Bergeron
President

March 28, 2016

Dear Members of the Connecticut College Community,

In the past few weeks, I have been troubled to receive a number of emails and calls from alumni and parents about recent allegations of anti-Semitism on our campus. I find the charges entirely unfounded and I wanted to take a moment to set the record straight.

The allegations, which have appeared in various places on the web, trace back to events that took place at Conn a year ago arising out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Much of what has been written turns out to be incomplete, misinformed, and ultimately misleading. Because the posts continue to circulate, I feel compelled to speak out, not just to object, but to offer my own observations about what is actually happening at this College.

Let me begin by stating unequivocally that anti-Semitism has no place on our campus, or anywhere else. Connecticut College is committed to fostering a learning environment of tolerance and respect that enables all students, faculty, and staff — no matter their identity or background — to reach their full potential and to contribute to the flourishing of others. As an institution devoted to the highest ideals of academic freedom and shared governance, the College also upholds the right of all its members to express their views freely and openly in a manner that does not interfere with others achieving their educational or professional goals.

In recent months, as you know, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a topic of contentious debate at many colleges across the country, with passionately held views on all sides of the issue. No one will deny that debate on our own campus last spring was at times heated and difficult, even painful. It contributed in part to the personal decision by a faculty member to ask for a leave and a subsequent sabbatical. As I commented publicly at the time, such moments, if they are to count for anything, must be transformed into opportunities for deeper understanding — and that is precisely what I have witnessed at Conn in the past months. What emerged from that conflict has been an important year of dialogue, in which students, faculty, and staff have engaged the issues with utmost seriousness.

I am not aware of another college or university that has produced more events, or a more balanced series of interlocutors, than what we have seen in the past year — from the visit of former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon to presentations by historian Richard Landes (Boston University), Palestinian filmmaker Fida Qishta, scholar of religion Yehudah Mirsky (Brandeis), social psychologist Phillip Hammack (University of California, Santa Cruz), among many others. Just recently, three of our students, Simon



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Luxemburg '18, Connor Wolfe '17, and Daniel Kramer '18, competed for and won a [grant from the Jewish World Congress](#) to advance the dialogue further. They are planning an event on March 30 on the topic of building economic pathways to peace. An [interview with Luxemburg](#) about the prize, published just last week in the Connecticut Jewish Ledger, aptly reflects the thoughtfulness and introspection that has characterized so much of the discourse on campus this year.

We are living in unusually fractious times. I worry that the tenor and tone of the current political campaign may sometimes inflect the way we speak to each other as students and scholars, particularly when it comes to contentious issues and deeply held convictions. As a community, we should seek to foster a culture where such encounters are the rare exception to our day-to-day experience of each other, not simply for the sake of comity, but because the genuine exchange of insights and ideas — and the intellectual growth that results — is best achieved in an environment where disagreement is undergirded by forms of mutual respect.

Let me end by noting that when Rabbi Aaron Rosenberg retired last spring, after 33 years of service to the College, he wrote a short piece about his career and the growth of the Jewish community at Conn. He ended by reflecting on the events on campus during his final semester, saying: "Sadly, some off-campus media have portrayed Connecticut College as anti-Zionist and even anti-Semitic. I can assure you this is not the case. If these reporters had visited our campus ... they would have found a college where Jewish life is flourishing."

To ensure that life in our College continues to flourish in these and many other ways, we need to advance the kind of work that we have undertaken this year in promoting reasoned and informed debate about the most complex issues of our time. This is the only way we will be able to fulfill our mission of educating students to put the liberal arts into action.

Yours,

Katherine Bergeron