

The University of Michigan Regents' Communication

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Subject: Central Student Government Report

Attached are the November and December updates on the projects and activities of the Central Student Government.



Respectfully submitted,

Anushka Sarkar
President, Central Student Government

November 23, 2017



President Schlissel, members of the Board of Regents, and Executive Officers of the University, I am pleased and honored to submit the following report to you on behalf of the Central Student Government (CSG). Below is an update on CSG's ongoing projects during the months of November and December as we continue to serve the students of this University.

Ongoing CSG Projects

- Amending the Statement of Student Rights & Responsibilities
 - CSG is leading an ongoing effort to amend the Statement of Student Rights & Responsibilities during an off-cycle amendment period to include bias-motivated misconduct as a violation of University community standards, and to codify bias-motivation as an aggravating factor. This means that cases of bias-motivated misconduct pursued under the Statement will be evaluated as two separate charges – the violation itself and the bias-motivation behind the act of misconduct. This means that, for example, if a student were to bully another student because the student being targeted identified as gay, the Statement would be amended to require that the alleged offender be investigated for bullying and for bias-motivation. Should that student be found guilty on both charges, the sanctions that they would accordingly receive would be automatically heightened because of the amendment codifying bias-motivation as an aggravating factor.
- CSG Safe Travel Fund
 - Student travel plans to registered student organization (RSO) sanctioned events can involve dangerous driving hours. CSG is committed to providing students with means to promote safer logistical traveling methods, and prevent students from being on the road at unsafe hours. In response to this commitment, we commissioned the Safe Travel Fund Committee (STFC). The Safe Travel Fund's goal is to allocate funds to student organizations with an anticipated return to the University of Michigan and/or arrival at student organization location during defined unsafe travel hours (1:00-4:00 a.m.). These funds would be used strictly for travel-related expenses, or things pertaining to travel such as an extra night's stay at a hotel. In creating this fund, CSG hopes to further demonstrate our commitment to the safety of our students and fulfill an unmet student need.
- iIlUMiNATIONS Multicultural Show
 - On November 10th, to honor the end of the University Bicentennial, CSG hosted iIlUMiNATIONS, a two-part event consisting of a food fair on Ingalls Mall and a cultural showcase in the Mendelssohn Theatre. The focus of the event was creating awareness and appreciation for the diversity of cultures on campus, while also inspiring groups to continue to work together and form a larger community. The event was well-attended, with many student organizations performing and supplying and serving food.
- Campus Affordability Guide

- The Campus Affordability Guide will be launched during the first week of December. This is a visual and easy-to-digest way to learn about different ways to cut costs on campus. As we continue to broaden the conversation around campus affordability and accessibility, we hope that this guide is one tool through which students can be made more aware of resources and tips to save money.

Aside from CSG's ongoing projects, there are two other issues of which I must make note. First, the CSG Assembly voted – with 23 in favor, 17 against, and 5 abstaining – to pass A.R. 7-019, “A RESOLUTION FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN TO INVESTIGATE DIVESTMENT FROM COMPANIES THAT VIOLATE PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS.” The debate over this resolution stretched late into the night, with the meeting ending at 3:00 AM the following morning, so suffice it to say that debate and discussion over this resolution were extensive in nature. After a week's worth of deliberation over the resolution, I chose to sign the resolution **with discretion**, meaning that I signed the resolution as a symbolic gesture of elevating marginalized voices and the spirit of the resolution. However, in my lengthy statement on my reasoning behind choosing not to veto the resolution, I outlined three concerns that I hold with A.R. 7-019 – the unclear connections between the Divestment and BDS Movements, the vote to prevent Professor Victor Lieberman from speaking, and the fact that many Jewish students believe that the resolution has anti-Semitic impacts. My full statement can be viewed here: <https://umcsg.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/ar-7-019.pdf>. I do not intend to ask the Board of Regents to create a committee to investigate the companies specified in A.R. 7-019, nor do I believe that it should. **I do not believe that the committee should be specifically tasked with investigating specific companies or countries.** I believe the spirit of this resolution, and my elevation thereof to the Board of Regents, is to **create a committee to investigate any University of Michigan investments that may be tied to the violation of Palestinian human rights, without specification of scope regarding particular countries or companies.**

Finally, as the University of Michigan weighs neo-Nazi and white nationalist Richard Spencer's request to speak on campus, I ask on behalf of the student body that the decision-makers in this process bear in mind two concerns. First, the safety and security of students is and should always be the primary concern; Richard Spencer does indeed have his right to free speech, but if his advocacy for ethnic cleansing and the violence that has been demonstrated by his supporters at other universities, such as the University of Virginia (read more: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-white-nationalists-rally/index.html>) and the University of Florida (read more: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/20/us/richard-spencer-florida-speech-arrest-shooting/index.html>), threaten the safety and security of students, **then he should not be accommodated.** Second, and related to the first concern, transparency about this process is crucial and ensures that false information does not gain traction and unnecessarily spread fear and frustration throughout the University community. In the wake of a midnight-hour Board of Regents meeting the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, for whatever reason, many students were falsely made to believe that the University had announced that it will accommodate Richard Spencer. This is obviously not true, but the University community largely believes that it is. I strongly urge the Board of Regents and the administrators involved in this decision to **prioritize transparency and flow of accurate information to the University community** – CSG is your partner in doing so.

Respectfully submitted,

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Anushka Sarkar
President, Central Student Government



Fellow Wolverines,

I have spent the last week reflecting deeply on the resolution that has been brought to my desk, A.R. 7-109 “A RESOLUTION FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN TO INVESTIGATE DIVESTMENT FROM COMPANIES THAT VIOLATE PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS.” This is a pivotal moment in the history of the advocacy that underlies this resolution, as it passed the Central Student Government (CSG) Assembly for the very first time. As I have deliberated over whether to sign the resolution or veto it, I have considered the two elements of this resolution that appear to be in conflict one another: the intended spirit of this resolution, and the actual impact that it has.

I believe the intent of this resolution is to elevate a marginalized community’s voice, voices that have been muffled and diluted, year after year. I believe the students who advocate for the investigation of companies in which the University of Michigan is invested that are tied to the violation of Palestinian human rights do so because they believe in advocating for what is just. I believe the authors and advocates of this resolution do not intend to target Jewish people, and I do not believe that criticism of Israel is inherently anti-Semitic. I believe the University of Michigan should not invest in companies that endanger the lives of Palestinian people.

Understanding that the spirit of the resolution is such, I must note the actual impact of this resolution, and the lack of explicit clarity surrounding its intent. Three issues should be considered by proponents of A.R. 7-019, about which I must caution the campus community that advocates for this resolution in coming years.

First, throughout the process of debating this resolution, authors and proponents of A.R. 7-019 stated that their advocacy for divestment from the specified companies is completely distinct from the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) Movement — **I do not believe this.** The BDS Movement has a troubling history of anti-Semitism, upon which both opponents and advocates of A.R. 7-019 agree. The student organization that proposed A.R. 7-019, Students Allied for Freedom & Equality (SAFE), designates in its constitution (view here: <http://www.safeumich.com/about.html>) a “BDS Chair,” whose listed responsibilities “include leading and facilitating any of the BDS initiatives that SAFE will engage in and ensuring attempts towards progress with respect to BDS are being made.” The first version of A.R. 7-019 that was proposed to the Assembly included citations from the BDS Movement, which were finally replaced when Jewish students pointed out the discrepancy between the intent of the authors to separate this resolution from the BDS movement versus its continued and clear ties to the movement. At this point, it is unclear how directly tied A.R. 7-019 is to the BDS Movement. I strongly encourage that proponents of A.R. 7-019 explicitly distance and distinguish the divestment resolution from the BDS Movement immediately.

Second, University of Michigan Professor Victor Lieberman was blocked from speaking at the CSG Assembly meeting on Tuesday. Some Assembly representatives claimed that allowing Victor Lieberman to speak would have created a power gradient between professors and students because the many professors that do support A.R. 7-019 do not have the same privilege to speak, for fear of losing their jobs or being placed on probation. **This is not true.** Twenty University of Michigan faculty members signed SAFE’s Statement of Solidarity to Support Divestment 2017, several of whom are tenured faculty; any of these Michigan faculty members could have spoken in favor of A.R. 7-019. Furthermore, the guest speakers from the author’s side were not current students, so it did not remain a student-to-student issue, as was the stated intention of the author of the resolution when issuing the objection to Victor Lieberman speaking during the meeting. **Voting to prevent Victor Lieberman from speaking fostered uncontextualized dialogue around this issue, especially as another speaker with parallel credentials could have spoken, too.** As such, CSG will conduct a review of its guest speaker practices and regulations in advance of the next Assembly meeting.

Third, many Jewish students have voiced that this resolution is anti-Semitic. Even if the intent of A.R. 7-019 is not to target Jewish students for tying their faith to Israel, we must listen to why it is that so many Jewish students still feel the impact of modern-day anti-Semitic sentiments in the resolution. As a community, we need to discuss why it is that we feel this resolution’s critique only of Israel — and no other countries in the region that may be tied to the very same human rights violations against Palestinians — is necessary for it to accomplish its intended purpose. We need to discuss why

some people found it appropriate to hold up signs that say “Stop Silencing Me” when a student shared a personal story of how their grandparents survived the Holocaust. **Just because someone disagrees with you or shares a different narrative does not mean that they are silencing you** and exaggeration of this will not help the ultimate cause of the resolution. Unless we listen, with the desire to understand other narratives, the impact of this resolution will continue to be the silencing of one voice in an effort to elevate another. That will be the demise of this resolution’s cause if proponents and opponents alike of this resolution do not address this dynamic.

These issues must not be ignored. If the students who advocate for the elevation of Palestinian voices seek to build campus community support for the ultimate cause of A.R. 7-019, then these issues and others must be taken into account. Unless these issues are seriously considered by advocates of this resolution, it will be very difficult to garner the broad and consistent campus community support necessary for the university to even form an investigative committee to this end. With the bar for divestment as high as it is and the bar for broad and consistently demonstrated community support as high as it is, the success of this advocacy will come down to finding ways to ensure that the resolution and the advocacy that surrounds it do not vilify Jewish students for tying their faith to the one Jewish State, and instead seek to emphasize the ultimate cause of the resolution — to create a committee to investigate any investments that the University of Michigan has that may be tied to the violation of Palestinian human rights.

Ultimately, **the spirit of this resolution is to elevate the voices of students** who believe in protecting Palestinian human rights. The spirit of the resolution embodies the University of Michigan’s mission statement — to **challenge the present** — and the University’s vision statement, which specifically says that we must **dedicate ourselves to responsible stewardship of financial resources**. At its very core, calling for an investigative committee to review University investments that may be tied to the violation of Palestinian human rights is an embodiment of the University’s mission and values. It is for these reasons that **with discretion, I have signed this resolution**. The voices in favor of this resolution should be recognized as elevating legitimate outcry against ongoing human rights violations against Palestinian people in which the University of Michigan may be invested, and if I were to veto this resolution because of my concerns about its procedural shortcomings, those voices would not receive this much-needed elevation. My elevation of this resolution’s ultimate cause to the Board of Regents will be to **call for the creation of a committee to investigate University of Michigan investments that may be tied to the violation of Palestinian human rights, without specification of which companies or countries should be targeted; this ensures that the scope of investigation is not unnecessarily limited to the companies specified in A.R. 7-019, as there may be other investments tied to the ultimate cause. It also ensures that no one state or faith tied to it is unduly targeted.**

This is the first time in University of Michigan history that this resolution has passed the CSG Assembly, which means that the work to actualize it is only beginning — both for the students who support this resolution, and for those who oppose it. In order to build the community support necessary for the Board of Regents to form this committee, communities on all sides of this resolution will need to present a strong and united front that jointly advocates for divestment from companies that violate the human rights of Palestinian people. The University of Michigan should not invest in companies that may be tied to the oppression of the Palestinian people, and I find the request for the creation of an investigative committee to be reasonable. It is time for this issue to be elevated to the Board of Regents, regardless of the decision that it chooses to make on this question; in coming years, I am hopeful that the advocacy around this issue will continue to grow inclusively under the framework of community-building and finding common ground.

With discretion and caution regarding the aforementioned, I hereby sign A.R. 7-019.

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Anushka Sarkar
Student Body President