

Members of Nexus Task Force Statement In Defense of Professor Derek Penslar

January 22, 2024

As scholars devoted to examining critical issues at the intersection of Israel and anti-semitism, we applaud Harvard University's appointment of Professor Derek Penslar as co-chair of its Task Force on Campus Antisemitism. We are appalled by pernicious efforts to discredit and demonize Professor Penslar. As a leading scholar of Jewish and Israel Studies, Professor Penslar offers invaluable expertise on confronting resurgent antisemitism on campus. His nuanced criticisms of certain Israeli policies in no way negate his insights or disqualify him from this vital role.

Accusing respected thinkers of antisemitism and applying narrow litmus tests based on ideology dangerously exploits divisions rather than focusing on practical solutions. Of course, the Jewish community holds diverse views amidst the complex current reality in Israel, and when antisemitism shows up in debates about the situation in Israel and the occupied territories, it must be called out. But reasonable critiques of policy differ fundamentally from antisemitism.

We reject efforts to cynically weaponize antisemitism by inflaming divisions or undermining university initiatives to help students. Diversity of perspectives and experience helps to navigate complex issues thoughtfully and ultimately strengthens the effort to counter antisemitism. Leaders should applaud appointments like Professor Penslar's to bring insight rather than ideology to this difficult task. We must come together to help Jewish students thrive despite those seeking to divide us.

Signatories

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Members of The Nexus Task Force – formed to prevent the abuse of accusations of antisemitism as a political weapon or a tool to undermine necessary deliberation and to distract from urgent efforts to interrupt the spread of antisemitism.

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