

**Statement for Minnesota Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety**  
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Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota. GWSS currently has five faculty; we are one of the College of Liberal Arts's smallest departments. Despite our small size, we have a thriving undergraduate major in Gender Women and Sexuality Studies, and a Feminist Studies PhD with alumni in some of the most prestigious gender and ethnic studies departments in the nation: Dartmouth University, University of Washington, U.C. Davis, University of North Carolina, University of Toronto, and the University of Maryland, among others.

As a faculty, we traditionally speak publicly on political issues to which we can lend our expertise. GWSS teaches about gender and sexuality, but as we write on our website, we cannot do this without also researching how race, immigration, war, violence, and other social phenomena influence knowledge about gender. As part of this, we prioritize research on international matters and regions outside North America. We have faculty experts on Middle Eastern politics and gender and sexuality; women's participation in political processes in South Asia and Indonesia; and immigration caused by war and conflict. Thus, GWSS faculty have ample grounds to comment publicly and in scholarly forums on Israel and Palestine.

Since publishing the statement, GWSS faculty have been accused of antisemitism. Indeed, this hearing frames antisemitism as the main concern. Faculty in GWSS do not take accusations of antisemitism lightly. In particular, we take our students' concerns very seriously: because we teach many minority students, we want the department to be a space where students can voice their concerns and ideas to faculty and hear a response.

Since October 7, very few GWSS students have brought complaints to me about feeling unsafe to talk about Palestine in their classes. Our faculty and graduate instructors resolved discomfort by acknowledging the intense feelings these events have provoked, and asking students to make space for disagreement and debate, and to recognize the in the shared intensity of their feelings a way of speaking across conflict. The majority of undergraduate students graduating as GWSS majors held up Free Gaza banners and Palestinian flags as they walked across the graduation stage in May. This was a surprise to me. GWSS faculty do not "indoctrinate" students; instead, we follow the lead of the majority of students at UMN, who are hearing a moral call to protest what they see as an unjust and devastating war.

We must also define antisemitism accurately. This strengthens our ability to see real antisemitism when it happens. It IS antisemitic to hold all Jewish people accountable for Israel's actions, or to use Jewish stereotypes when criticizing Israel's actions. Yet the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism explicitly lists the following actions as *not* antisemitic: "evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state", calls for boycotts of Israeli products based on Israel's actions, and criticisms of Zionism as an ideology. The faculty of GWSS support Jewish students, faculty, and staff. And protests, and statements in support of Palestine or against U.S. involvement in the war are not antisemitic.

The use of antisemitism accusations to brand pro-Palestine political speech and protest as illegal, discriminatory, or uncivilized threatens the basic principles of academic freedom and the spirit of open dialogue about all political issues. In the words of Irene Mulvey, President of the American Association of University Professors, these senate committee hearings, like the United States House Committee on Education and the Workforce hearings in April and May, this hearing conveys a message that ["politicians have the right to control what is or is not taught in a college classroom and the authority to dictate what can or cannot happen on a college campus."](#) As Mulvey states, such hearings are repressive and completely unacceptable in a free society.

Finally, I question why the Department of Gender Women and Sexuality Studies has been singled out in multiple complaints when other departments across the University of Minnesota have made similar statements. It is easy to bully a small department with few resources. Nationally, antisemitism accusations are being weaponized as part of defunding Diversity Equity and Inclusion initiatives and banning ethnic and gender studies courses. After witnessing President Ettinger rescind Raz Segal's hire on the basis of conflicting definitions of genocide, I foresee a future where search candidates' research expertise or political views on other issues such as Black history, transgender health, reproductive rights, and other issues become targets of outside pressure to rescind faculty appointments. It is essential that the University of Minnesota maintains a space for faculty to express their views and pursue the research they wish to and for students to protest without being arrested or penalized. As the death count of Palestinians reaches over 45,000 and Gaza is razed, we must be able to continue to criticize our nation's participation in unjust, violent wars.