

FJP response to President Jameson's May 6 email "Update on Encampment and Protests" Original letter from President Jameson can be found below this letter.

To Interim President J. Larry Jameson,

On May 6, 2024, you sent out an email to Penn community grossly mischaracterizing the encampment established at our university by students who are calling for an end to Penn's investments in companies supporting Israel's ongoing genocide against Palestinians. In this letter, you rely on doublespeak to blatantly ignore the reasonable demands of the students as well as the well-documented targeted harassment of the encampment, including the [doxing of students](#), intimidation and assaults.

We, as faculty and staff, express our distress and disappointment regarding your email. The encampment is a protest against the University's failure to meet the demands expressed by our students and broader community: 1) that Penn **disclose** its holdings in companies that arm and profit from Israel's aggression against Palestinians across the world; 2) that Penn **divest** from these companies and publicly state why they are doing so; and 3) that Penn **defend** the rights of students to express support of Palestinians without retaliation from the University.

In spite of your language around de-escalation, we find this message to the broader Penn community to be an unnecessary escalation of already fraught tensions on campus. Students and their faculty supporters have worked diligently to reach a state of negotiating in good faith with you and Provost Jackson, but you seem to indicate that there is no path forward following this email communication. While these tensions on campus are felt by everyone, students and faculty remain focused on the tragedy and horrors unfolding daily in Palestine, Rafah, and Gaza. As we write, medical teams are being turned away as the border is closed and international teams are being evacuated as Israeli forces prepare their ground invasion of Rafah, the last remaining refuge for tens of thousands of Palestinians. The genocide, scholasticide, and uricide of Palestinians—which you dismissively and reductively refer to as the “loss of life in Gaza”—require coordinated divestment and condemnation from the global community. Instead of taking these concerns seriously, you have sent out a letter that ignores all the reasons why our students have set up this encampment.

The hostile tone, worsened by the passive voice used in your letter, paints the encampment as one consisting of unreasonable participants, which is just wrong. You suggest that participants' reluctance to expose their faces implies that they may not be affiliated with Penn. In fact, they wear masks because of genuine concerns about doxing that have long been a reality for students expressing support for Palestine. Further, you collapse Jewish students into a monolith, as you

state that this encampment is “causing fear for many in our large, diverse community, especially among our Jewish students.” Not only is this a tired [anti-Semitic trope](#), it ignores the numerous [anti-Zionist Jewish students](#), including Penn Chavurah, and Jewish community organizations in support of the encampment. All of them have condemned the ongoing genocide taking place in occupied Palestine. You also ignore the fact that an impressively large community of anti-zionist Jewish members held a [Passover Seder at the encampment](#).

Your selective omission of the violence and targeted harassment of the peaceful protestors speaks volumes. From the harassment they have faced on the morning and afternoon of Thursday, May 2 (framed consistently by the administration as a “counter demonstration”), to the disruptive, organized harassment of the encampment on the early morning of Sunday, May 5, and the ongoing [fundraising to hire a Mariachi band](#) to play music nonstop in front of the encampment, the University has neither attempted to protect those in the encampment or publicly condemned this coordinated harassment. A particularly egregious example of your biased assessment of the encampment can be seen through a disturbing incident on Wednesday May 1, where a person was detained by the police after entering the encampment and spraying a chemical agent on tents and food. Several students and faculty were directly harmed by this chemical attack and there was widespread fear of what the repercussions would be. Yet, there was no mention of any of these events in your communication to the broader Penn community; you thus offer a disingenuous mis-representation of the safety concerns you listed.

On Sunday May 5th, at approximately 3 am, a group of counter protestors arrived at the encampment to disturb sleeping protestors by banging objects against the barricades and shouting hateful slurs at Arabs, and Muslims, and protestors. They announced themselves as Penn students, though they covered their faces to make identification impossible. [A video on social media documents and summarizes](#) the 1.5 hour encounter with these violent men whose shouts included, “Allah wa-akbar—Fuck you,” “Come to Israel, we’ll slaughter you,” “Fuck Palestine (repeatedly),” and “Muslim Ban,” among other racist and violent threats. Most disturbingly, they expressed having support from the Penn Police and threatening to unleash a “UCLA 2.0” on the encampment, referring to the violent attacks on pro-Palestinian students at UCLA on April 30. It is unconscionable that the Penn administration has not said anything about this event. We will also note that, like your letter, these counter-protestors wish to erase the principled Jewish students, as well as others, who are part of the encampment.

Over the last two weeks, we have watched university administrations across our country (in coordination with local and state police) mete out violence on college students, staff and faculty. From arrests, to tear gas and brutal beatings, we now have several ugly precedents on how university administrations should *not* respond to peaceful protest (including encampments). We note, [as do the student-protestors](#), that nothing in your email communication suggests you plan to take a different path of negotiation and discussion. Your overt threat to prevent students from

graduating is in direct violation of the University's Open Expression Policy and certainly not in keeping with the "de-escalation" you claim to work towards.

As faculty and staff, we support the students' clear demands and willingness to negotiate with the administration. These demands include: 1) Disclosure of Penn's Individual and Active Financial Holdings Under the associated Investments fund in the spirit of transparency and shared governance, 2) Financial divestment from corporations that profit from Israel's war on Gaza and occupation in Palestine and academically from Israeli institutions, condemning the scholasticide of Palestinian scholars and universities, 3) Defend Palestinian students and their allies, granting amnesty for those involved in in pro-Palestine protest by ending University repression and biased disciplinary processes targeting these community members, beginning with the reinstatement of Penn Students against the Occupation.

Your email to the broader Penn community demonstrates a lack of good faith in these ongoing negotiations. Your mention of placing the faculty and staff who support the encampment "under review" is distressing; it gives us, as workers in the University, little faith and confidence in your leadership.

Signed,

Penn Faculty for Justice in Palestine

Letter from Interim Penn President, J. Larry Jameson, MD, PhD

Update on Encampment and Protests

May 6, 2024 @7:04am

To the Penn community,

University campuses across the country and around the world are facing protests of increasing intensity. We are all seeing these protests unfold differently – with university leadership responding differently and their communities reacting differently. Every day I hear from people with clear ideas about what we should do at Penn. They express support, surprise, or betrayal for the University's actions or inactions, depending on their perspective. As we manage the situation at Penn and its many impacts on our campus, my north star continues to be the safety of our community and the furtherance of our teaching, research, and service missions.

The encampment should end. It is in violation of our policies, it is disrupting campus operations and events, and it is causing fear for many in our large, diverse community, especially among our Jewish students. But any response to the encampment must balance possible escalation of the current situation with the need to protect the safety and rights of everyone. At Penn, this risk is more significant than at some other institutions because we have an open campus in a large city.

I have now met twice with several of the Penn student and faculty protestors to hear their views and try to find a productive path forward. We continue to propose additional meetings – this path remains open. We have asked the protestors in the encampment to disband multiple times and offered accommodation to continue their demonstration in ways that do not conflict with safety and policy. On each occasion, the protestors have refused. They have made additional demands that reflect an unwillingness to negotiate on reasonable terms to a conclusion. I believe there are alternative paths and am willing to pursue all reasonable options to avoid escalation and further disruption to our community.

Universities must give broad latitude to the open expression of ideas but must do so in ways that keep campuses physically safe and free from disruption. At Penn, we embrace civil discourse and rigorous debate. The terrorism and hostage-taking by Hamas must be addressed, and so too, the urgent and critical humanitarian crisis and loss of life in Gaza. But passion for a cause does not entitle anyone to act beyond the rules that govern and protect us. Protests that threaten or harass, that disrupt the access of others to spaces and facilities, or that make us unsafe inevitably lose support and undermine their cause.

Now is the moment for de-escalation. We are in active conversation with local public officials and law enforcement, who recommend that we continue to focus on de-escalation and dialogue before taking steps that could inflame tensions. However, we are concerned that many of the protestors occupying the encampment on College Green are seeking such a confrontation. We have heard reports of circulating documents with instructions for escalating a protest, including through building occupations and violence.

Every day the encampment exists, the campus is less safe. Some have aimed to characterize this as a peaceful protest. It is not. Two cherished Penn landmarks, the Benjamin Franklin statue and the Button, have been defaced and vandalized. There have been disturbing reports of harassing and threatening speech. On Wednesday night, protestors threatened and attempted to provoke Penn Public Safety police officers. On Friday, we were made aware of an alarming video that showed a Penn student being barred entry to the encampment and threatened. Penn Public Safety has opened an investigation and is in touch with the student to provide support. Protestors within the encampment have also described being spit on, harassed, and threatened. Penn Public Safety continues to be onsite 24/7 to ensure safety and provide support. All of these actions are unacceptable.

Protestors wear masks and refuse to produce identification, as required by our policies and stated on each Penn ID, making it difficult to distinguish those individuals who are part of the Penn community from those who are not and are trespassing. The tents create an additional risk because they provide no line of sight to those entrusted with campus safety. Penn Public Safety resources are required 24/7 to monitor the safety of the encampment, diverting them from other campus spaces and events.

To this point, we have taken a measured approach to avoid escalation and to uphold our fundamental belief in and commitment to open expression. We must, however, also enforce rules that are designed to support safety and our missions. Those in violation of our policies are making choices. We are continuing to implement student conduct procedures, which may result in the inability of some of our students to graduate or continue their education at Penn in subsequent years. The roles, responsibilities, and activities of Penn faculty and staff members in the encampment are also under review.

We will maintain an enhanced security presence to support physical safety and will adjust our response as conditions warrant. We will continue to provide safety and wellness resources, which can be found [here](#), to all members of the Penn community. I am distressed and disappointed by the actions of the protestors, which violate our rules and goals. I know this is a terribly difficult time for our community, but my confidence in our institution, our people, our traditions, and our spirit of discovery and service is unbowed.

Sincerely,

J. Larry Jameson, MD, PhD
Interim President

This information is sent to all members of the University of Pennsylvania community. The message has been approved for distribution by the University Communications Office, the Office of the Provost, or the Division of Human Resources and is of importance to the University of Pennsylvania community.

These lists are automatically generated based on an active status with the University. If you have received this message and are no longer employed by the University of Pennsylvania, please contact Human Resources from your previous appointment to request that your records be updated to reflect your current status.

Please address questions or comments about the content of this message to the contact listed within the message.

Please address questions or comments about University-wide communications to University Communications, univcomms@pobox.upenn.edu.