

Central European University and Bard College

**Upholding Rights and Ensuring Safety: An Advisory Brief on University Responses to
Pro-Palestinian Encampments at Columbia University and FU Berlin**

Capstone Project by

Elena Esser

Dual MA in International Relations and Global Studies

Word Count: 5172

New York City, USA

May 1, 2025

Copyright © Elena Esser, 2025. Upholding Rights and Ensuring Safety: An Advisory Brief on University Responses to Pro-Palestinian Encampments at Columbia University and FU Berlin - This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives \(CC BY-NC-ND\) 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

For bibliographic and reference purposes this thesis should be referred to as: Esser, Elena. 2025. "Upholding Rights and Ensuring Safety: An Advisory Brief on University Responses to Pro-Palestinian Encampments at Columbia University and FU Berlin." MA thesis, International Relations, Central European University, Vienna

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Elena Esser, candidate for the MA degree in International Relations declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Upholding Rights and Ensuring Safety: An Advisory Brief on University Responses to Pro-Palestinian Encampments at Columbia University and FU Berlin” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree, except as part of the co-tutelle agreement between Central European University Private University and Bard College.

Vienna, 05 June 2025

Elena Esser

1. Introduction

In the response to Israel's military incursion in Gaza, students all over the world engaged in the biggest student protests since 1968 criticizing Israel's apartheid regime in Palestine and its military operations in Gaza that have legally met the levels of a genocide (Listek 2024). Aside from large-scale protests, students globally set up encampments, walkouts, divestment referenda, and demonstrations calling out their institutions' ties to Israel and subsequent support to the military. While the protests mostly remained non-violent the crackdown on them has been disproportionately violent, especially using police violence and public defamation of the movement and its protesters. Two case studies of student encampments embedded in the global movement for solidarity with the Palestinian people were Columbia University in New York City and Freie Universität (FU) in Berlin. While both encampments were broken up under police force, there are notable differences in the way the encampments were handled.

This advisory brief compares the two case studies, tracing the similarities and differences before recommending alternative approaches to university administrations when handling students' protests. The background section following this introduction provides a timeline of the two encampments, the means by which they were broken up, and the public response to them. In the case of the Columbia University encampment, the university newspaper *The Spectator* properly documented the encampment, the events leading to it, and the reactions of students and faculty members. In addition, primary sources such as the university administration's letter to the NYPD calling for an eviction of the camp suggest that the university administration did not initiate the dialogue with the activists that it claimed it pursued. On the student side, this brief monitors the ongoing suspensions of students who participated in the protests highlighting the disproportionate crackdown on the pro-Palestine movement at Columbia University further.

Turning to the encampment at FU Berlin, the events were far less documented. Attempts for an objective perspective akin to the various sources on the Columbia encampment, especially those in support of the protesters, can barely be found. Therefore, media articles and press release such as the statement of the Berlin police justifying their violent crackdown on the protest are the two sources utilized in this paper. In addition, interviews with protesters (wishing to remain anonymous) who were on-site during the encampment gives further perspective on the actual unfolding of events.

Having established the facts above about the two cases, the similarities and differences between the two case studies are traced out in the analysis part of the background section. This forms the basis for a first assessment of what type of an alternative strategy both institutions could have employed when confronting the protests. Thus, at the core of this advisory brief lies a catalogue of recommendations for alternative measures tailored to higher education institutions. Here, it is important to note that the focus of this brief is forward looking, pointing towards possible ways of handling similar situations in the future. Considering the fact that both Germany and the US recently underwent government changes, the recommendations focus on the old governments: the Biden administration and Germany under chancellor Olaf Scholz. This brief provides a roadmap that sustains the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the academic independence of universities proposing a strategy that keeps their students safe while allowing for their constitutional rights to protest. Simultaneously reinforcing the status of universities as places of discourse and freedom of expression.

The final section of this paper summarizes the key advice and implementation recommendations for both university administrations on the best ways to react to such occasions ensuring a mutually inclusive dialogue between students and faculty. There will be a short section mentioning both the Trump government in the US and Germany's coalition

between the Christian Democrat Party (CDU) and the Social Democrat Party (SPD) and how their government will potentially impact the pro-Palestinian protest culture in their respective countries closing the brief. In the case of Germany, the new government proves increasingly hostile to the pro-Palestinian movement, however with a proper strategy implemented by the opposition, it is still possible to reach the aspects proposed in this brief. However, the current US government is rapidly descending into a political state that makes a positive turn in its handling of student protests increasingly unlikely.

2. Background

2.1 The Columbia Encampment – the “Gaza Solidarity Encampment”

At 4 am the morning of April 17, 2024, students set up several tents on the West Lawn of the Morningside campus of Columbia University. Under the premise of “a safety concern and a violation of university policies”, the Barnard College administration, a college part of Columbia University, informed its students at 12 pm about possible academic sanctions (Banerjee 2024). They also remarked that anyone who leaves by 9 pm would be forgiven. The following day, on April 18 Columbia’s president Minouche Shafik authorized the New York Police Department (NYPD) to break down the encampment. A little over a hundred students were arrested in the course of these actions which made it “Columbia’s largest mass arrest on campus since 1968” (Banerjee 2024). According to an NYPD official, the students were peaceful and cooperative (Banerjee 2024). In response to the encampment, Barnard College which is part of Columbia University but with a separate president and board of trustees

suspended three students who were involved with the encampment. By the time the first encampment was broken up, students flooded the South Lawn and set up a new camp.

On April 19, the encampment invited various speakers to hold speeches and lectures. During the day, all protesters who had been arrested the day before were released from custody. Simultaneously, various students were notified that they were suspended from the University for “disruptive behavior, violation of law, violation of University policy, failure to comply, vandalism or damage to property, and unauthorized access or egress” (Banerjee 2024). The following day, April 20, marked the beginning of the admitted students’ weekend. The activists in the encampment organized various counter-events such as alternative campus tours and involvement fairs. By April 21, the activists re-erected their tents in the encampment. Rabbi Elie Buechler, the director of the Orthodox Jewish Learning Initiative, declared that the safety of Jewish students was under threat by the encampment. Buechler referred to antisemitic incidents as individuals referred to the Israeli flags as Nazi flags, calling out on Israelis as colonizers and asked them to “go back to Europe” (Massel 2024).

In response to the increased presence of the activists on campus, Shafik shifted classes online on April 22. The same morning Shai Davidai, an assistant professor at Columbia Business School, was denied access to campus. Davidai is currently under investigation by the Columbia administration for harassing students in the context of the encampment and more than 50 complaints filed against him (Maruf 2024). That day also marked two walkouts, one by student workers who demanded the reinstatement of all suspended students and one by faculty that requested amnesty to all student protesters. In addition, a Columbia-internal divestment referendum presented a majority in favor of closing the dual degree program with Tel Aviv University, the Tel Aviv Global Center, and divestment from Israel. On April 23, the encampment opened the People’s Library of Liberated Learning and invited various speakers to its opening ceremony. Simultaneously, Jewish activists who were arrested in solidarity with

the camp shared their experience in a press conference. Shafik declared a deadline until which the encampment had to be cleared or otherwise, she underlined, other methods would be enforced. The deadline passed and Shafik did not take any action to clear the lawn.

On April 24, various politicians, including Mike Johnson and Jared Moskowitz visited the campus, all demanding Shafik to resign, which was met with resistance by Columbia's board of trustees in support of Shafik. Simultaneously, the encampment organizers declared their unwillingness to engage in negotiations with the university unless it issues a written commitment declaring that the NYPD or the National Guard would not be alerted to clear the camp. The following day, a counterprotest "United for Israel" took place. Several instances of harassment from participants of the counterprotest towards the activists of the encampment or those in solidarity with them were registered. Particularly individuals inside Columbia gates who held banners reading "NY Jews for the Fall of Zionism" and "NYC to Palestine for Liberation" were targeted, "with one man at the 'United for Israel March' repeatedly yelling, 'You want to get raped; you want to get murdered' at the group" (Cleary et al. 2024). A pro-Palestinian protester wearing a kippah was repeatedly insulted by pro-Israel protesters shouting, "Go join ISIS, I heard they like Jews", "You're a fucking Nazi," and "You would get killed in Gaza, they hate you" (Cleary et al. 2024). Furthermore, the university administration announced that the NYPD would not clear the campus at night, which was reaffirmed on April 26 saying that the NYPD would not return to campus at all.

On April 27, Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) announced that the university administration had been threatening a complete campus lockdown which the administration denied. Two days later, on April 29 Shafik announced that Columbia wouldn't divest from Israel and that there was no agreement reached with the protesters. She underlined the offer to "make investments in health and education in Gaza, and to start conversation 'on access and financial barriers to academic programs and global centers'" (Banerjee 2024).

Following her announcement, pamphlets announcing the university's call to terminate the encampment were distributed in the encampment. The activists within the encampment voted to stay even though some were already being suspended by the university. On the final day of the encampment, April 30, the activists occupied Hamilton Hall, renaming it Hind's Hall. The name was a tribute to Hind Rajab, a six-year-old child who was murdered by the Israeli military in Gaza. In response to the occupation, Columbia announced indefinite access restrictions to the Morningside campus. To break up the encampment, despite the promises that they would not, the NYPD entered the campus and arrested 109 protesters before the encampment was entirely broken up.

2.2 The FU encampment

As a response to widespread repression and criminalization of Pro-Palestinian protests, Berlin students rapidly established the Student Coalition Berlin (SCB), a city-wide solidarity network composed of activist groups from most of Berlin's higher education institutions. Already on December 19, 2023, students at FU occupied a lecture hall. During that first occupation, they transformed the lecture hall into a community center organizing lectures and workshops to provide tools for fact-based and critical intervention. The occupying students demanded their university to call for a ceasefire, reject the IHRA definition of antisemitism that equates any critique of the state of Israel with antisemitism, and for the university to protect its "Arab, Muslim, and Jewish students" (KlasseGegenKlasse 2024). Within a few hours, the Berlin police violently evicted the protesters with more than a hundred police officers. Critics of this violent eviction point to the freedom of expression that supposedly characterizes institutions of higher education.

The second encampment at FU took place on May 7, 2024. This time, at around dawn, around 100 activists blocked a lawn on the FU campus in Berlin-Dahlem. As soon as the university administration became aware of the encampment, around 9 am, they called the

police to evacuate the campus by 11 am. According to an activist, already 30 minutes after the announced deadline several police vehicles showed up and 45 minutes later several police busses approached the campus (Malloy 2025). Another activist remarked that this first batch of police officers mainly came with cameras to obtain footage of the activists on campus (Anonymous 2025). In the beginning, the officers were outnumbered by the activists. Thus, they focused on preventing further activists from entering the encampment while simultaneously isolating those in the encampment creating a buffer zone (Malloy 2025).

As the activists did not comply with the evacuation notice underlining their dedication to stay on campus, the administration and the police set a new deadline for 2 pm by which everyone who left would be granted amnesty. When the deadline passed, the police forcefully removed protesters from campus. According to the activists, the police proceeded to take individuals from the human chains formed on the lawn one by one while simultaneously kettling the activists inside the university buildings. One activist described how he realized that resisting arrest would only cause injuries and thus complied with the arrest but still experienced police violence and mockery (Malloy 2025). Inside the building several activists who were - “neither a German citizen nor have a strong passport” - seeking shelter as there was no other place they could escape the police from (Anonymous 2025). Outside the campus, the police halted a member of the independent press from entering the building. In response, the activists from inside the building pushed toward the outside. The activist recollecting the scene from the inside got arrested stating that: “They don’t hit your face because there are many cameras. Instead, they kick you and hit you with low punches which can’t be captured by the journalist. They kicked my leg and hit my torso” (Anonymous 2025).

Of the 100 activists present at the encampment, 79 were arrested by 5:45 pm. In addition to this, several activists who participated in the supporting protest outside the university were arrested as well. The charges included “trespassing, resistance and suspicion

of incitement” as well as “participation in an unregistered assembly”, in addition to allegedly damaging property (Scholars at Risk 2024). Various protesters were injured, some even severely. Due to the high amount of police brutality, various activists got their charges dropped as there was body-cam footage of the police deliberately harming them. One of the activists recalls receiving openly racist remarks by police officers. The officer arresting them denied them their constitutional right to have their rights told to them in English, specifying that the officer told them “If we don't speak German we don't have right to defend ourselves” (Anonymous 2024). Various activists describe similar situations as well as deliberate aggressions against them from the police.

2.3 Analysis

Examining both the Columbia encampment and the encampment at FU Berlin, the cases exhibit various similarities and differences that are worth analyzing. The most striking difference between the reactions to the two encampments is the difference in power exertion from the side of the university administration. While FU mainly resorted to physical violence through police officers, Columbia university certainly also had instances of physical violence by police officers, but Columbia mainly targeted protesters through administrative consequences. Various students have been expelled both from Columbia University and Barnard College for their involvement in the protests (Offenhartz 2025). Furthermore, already during the encampment, Columbia announced further academic consequences against protesters (Banerjee 2024). In contrast to this, there are no cases known to the public in which FU suspended any of the students who participated in the encampment. However, the number of students reporting injuries after the police violently dissolved the encampment is far higher than that in Columbia as well as the percentage of students arrested and charged with various allegations. In the aftermath of the encampment at FU, in addition to already existing criminal charges, FU filed additional criminal complaints against protesters claiming property damage

and fire alarms being wrongfully set off or destroyed while even public police sources confirm that the fire alarm was triggered by the pepper spray the police used against the activists inside the university premises (Hogger and Aicher 2024).

A core consideration here is the legal framework in the US versus that in Germany. While the US holds the freedom of speech secured in the First Amendment, one of the most fundamental laws, Germany's legal framework is different and thus allows for a harder crackdown at the pro-Palestine movement. While also Germany anchors freedom of speech in its constitution, it also adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism and interpreted it in its own version: "Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews that can be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Anti-Semitism is directed in word or deed against Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property as well as against Jewish community institutions or religious institutions" (Antisemitismusbeauftragter, n.d.). In addition to this, "also the state of Israel, that is to be understood as a Jewish collective, can be target of such crimes" (Antisemitismusbeauftragter, n.d.). The original IHRA definition of antisemitism is tailored to prevent Holocaust denial and resulting antisemitism as a working definition (IHRA, n.d.). Germany re-interpreted said definition and added a section denouncing any criticism of the state of Israel as antisemitism (Antisemitismusbeauftragter, n.d.). This gave the opponents of the encampment a wider array of legal tools permitting a more severe crackdown on the protests.

A possible reason why the students at FU faced less administrative consequences than protesters at Columbia is the strong influence and presence of student unions in Germany, also called AStA. These are official, university approved groups that engage in direct exchange with the university administration and its decisions. After the FU encampment, the AStA FU clearly advocated for the protesters demanding FU not to press administrative charges against the protesters while also supporting them legally (AStA FU 2024). In its statement, AStA

highlights these two aspects as their key focus. It and additionally calls for more spaces for open discourse, and more protection of students and faculty members (AStA FU 2024). While the AStA did not yet succeed in implementing the latter aspects, it successfully vetoed any administrative charges against FU students in connection to the encampment.

An aspect uniting both encampments is that both were the second attempted occupation of campus premises after an earlier form of it had been dissolved very early on. In the case of FU, the activists occupied a lecture hall. This protest was broken down by the police after a few hours. In the aftermath, FU faced a lot of criticism and backlash that it permitted the students to occupy said lecture hall for several hours (Hogger and Aicher 2024). This public criticism presumably caused FU's rapid response to the encampment in May and its lack of advocacy in favor of its students. In a subsequent press statement on the encampment, the FU administration claimed that the activists rejected any form of dialogue and exhibited clear antisemitic tendencies. SCB rejected these claims stating that the university called the police before addressing the activists in the first place. This latter statement was then found to be true as an official FU document states that "immediately after becoming aware of the protest activities, Freie Universität Berlin notified the police and ordered an evacuation of the camp around 11:00 am" (Freie Universität Berlin 2024). At Columbia, as previously mentioned, the police broke down an initial encampment. However, the students immediately occupied a different part on campus which became the encampment that lasted for nearly two weeks. A further overlap between the encampments is the legal status of the university premises. Both the FU and Columbia campus count as private property. Thus, it is up to the university administration to grant the police access to it. In both the US and Germany, universities have legal backing allowing them to keep police forces away from campus. In Germany, this is the Bundesgesetzbuch (BGB) that denotes private property rights and the Hochschulrahmengesetz which seeks to maintain academic

independence from the state and extends the property rights laid out in the BGB (Bundesministerium der Justiz 1976; 1896). Taking these two laws together, the police is only allowed to enter university grounds without the permission of university administrations if there is a specific threat such as terrorist suspicions on campus. In the US, private property rights are laid out in the Fourth Amendment of the US constitution outlining the protection “against unreasonable searches and seizures” without proper warrants unless there is a serious security concern (Madison 1789). Thus, in both cases, the university administration has legal wiggle room and the chance to present a proper argumentation against police invasions of their campuses. The fact that there was no such effort from the university administration seriously harmed the trusting relationship between students and the university administration while simultaneously radicalizing the protest movement further. What needs to be noted though is, in both cases, that the police backed by local politicians has the last word in this debate. If they convincingly make a case that there is an immediate danger to students on campus, that there is a crime being committed, or that the movement supports terrorist ideology, the university administrations cannot intervene much.

Certainly, public pressure and the influence of board members and donors played a role, but the final say as to who has the right to enter is with the university administration. Interestingly, despite the hard crackdown on both encampments, both heads of the university were called to resign. Not because of their rigid responses but because of their ‘soft’ response and lack of repercussions. However, a factor that needs to be noted is the influence of the board of trustees with regard to Columbia and Barnard. In the US, particularly that board holds governing power with the university president merely being its extended arm. In the case of FU, there certainly is outside interference but the last word remains with the university president.

Tracing the overall reaction to each encampment and researching the exact timelines, what stands out is that the Columbia encampment is more reported on than that at FU. While there is an entire spectrum of both positive and negative accounts of the Columbia encampment, the reaction of most German-speaking media condemns the FU encampment. Furthermore, Columbia's student-led newspaper extensively reported on the encampment while similar sources could not be found in the case of FU. In both cases, it was hard to find students who participated in the encampments to give their accounts of the events as they were fearing severe legal repercussions both from the university and from the police.

3. Recommendations For Alternative Actions

The fact that the hard crackdown on pro-Palestine protests neither harmed the activist movement in Germany nor in the US as well as it did not prevent subsequent occupations, protests, and encampments shows the resilience of this movement and that this cannot be broken down by hard crackdowns from the sides of university administrations and police forces. Thus, the following points are cornerstones for an alternative strategy that is centered around a more sustainable response to global activist movements.

3.1 Creating a safe campus environment free of police interference

Sustaining a mutually productive discourse environment means from the side of the university administration to provide safety to its students. Both Columbia during the first, brief encampment and FU during all its encampments allowed the police to enter campus almost immediately. Both universities' tendency to involve the police early on into the encampments mirrors the tendencies universities exhibited during the protests against the

Vietnam War between 1969 and 1970. Fortunately, among the pro-Palestine protesters there are no casualties from the protesters contrary to the case in which the Ohio National Guard killed four student protesters and wounded nine others on May 4, 1980, after a four-day protest encampment (Wallenfeldt, n.d.). But like the procedure during the Vietnam War, also Columbia's and FU's way of handling the encampments sparked further protests and ended up strengthening the protest movement.

Instead, there needs to be a clear action plan noting when it is legitimate to involve executive forces against students on campus. The case of an encampment at Berlin's Alice Salomon Hochschule (ASH) is a positive example that police interference is not necessary, and, in fact, it harms discourse creation on campus. At ASH, Dean Bettina Völter explicitly denied the Berlin police access to the university and even asked them to leave the sidewalk around the building saying "we perceive you as dangerous that you are in front of our doors" adding "I did not call you. I do not need you" (DPA 2025). Instead, she approved of the encampment as a room for exchange of knowledge and critical discussion and ended it in cooperation with the activists after several hours.

This shows that preventing police forces from entering campus does not compromise public safety. In fact, initiating a dialogue with the protesters leads to more sustainable solutions and mutual agreements between the student body and the university administration.

3.2 An action plan for negotiations between the university administration and activists

Both FU and Columbia pride themselves of their ability to initiate "open dialogue and debate" enabling "different positions of view to be heard" (Freie Universität Berlin 2024). This stands in harsh contrast to their intense crackdown on the pro-Palestine movement. Following the encampment and subsequent protests, on March 12, 2025, Columbia also issued further policies against doxxing and for more student safety. These policies are the culmination of various anti-doxxing taskforces and prior efforts since the fall semester of

2023. This specific Columbia policy is supposed to foster “rigorous discourse and uphold University values depends on maintaining a community built on mutual respect and accountability” (Columbia University 2025). This indicates that at least Columbia recognizes that it fell short of its responsibility to protect its students. However, Columbia’s new policies do not apply retrospectively which does not grant the already suspended or arrested students any protection.

Also here, it is valuable to look at ASH’s approach to its students’ activism. In fact, many politicians and activist groups criticized Völter’s handling on the encampment while the association of Jewish and Israeli students at ASH approved of it. The community positively highlights Völter’s approach to actively include them, giving them a voice in fighting antisemitism on campus while simultaneously also preventing anti-Muslim racism (Jewish and German-Israeli Students at ASH Berlin 2025). Furthermore, the university administration had deescalating talks with activists and successfully called for the removal of banners that read prohibited slogans while still upholding the encampment. Thus, despite the fact that various different parties “crossed demarcation lines of discrimination, antisemitism, and anti-Muslim racism” the university did not apply these incidents on the activist movement as a whole and still granted its student their right to protest (University Administration ASH Berlin 2025)

Following the encampment, ASH’s faculty published open letter declaring solidarity with Völter’s strategy that “responded to the encampment in the Audimax of ASH Berlin on January 6, 2025 without police force” (Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin 2025). According to them, this particularly highlights the university’s “*Bildungsauftrag*”, meaning, its duty. Simultaneously, they approved that the administration recognized that “some members of the university felt their boundaries to be pushed or felt discriminated against” and that they will investigate these claims (Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin 2025).

Comparing this to both Columbia and FU, ASH actively ensures the “imperative that freedom of opinion and academic freedom can be guaranteed” that FU has in its policies (Freie Universität Berlin 2024). By violently countering student activism, Columbia will not succeed in fostering “rigorous discourse and uphold University values depends on maintaining a community built on mutual respect and accountability” (Columbia University 2025). In fact, it violates its own policy “to treat fairly Students, Active Alums, Student Groups, and other members of the Columbia community who are accused of engaging in Prohibited Conduct” (Columbia University 2024). Thus, even if the encampment was ruled as discriminatory, Columbia denied its students a proper trial as various expulsions and revoked degrees show.

3.3 Instead of dividing Israeli and Palestinian activists further by silencing one side, the administration should initiate further discourse and mutual exchange

Considering the risk that fronts between different parties involved harden, it is necessary to complement activism with knowledge formation. Both the Columbia and the FU encampment organized various guest lectures and therefore took on the educational responsibility their universities failed to deliver. A strategy that needs to be positively recognized is that of ASH which developed a semester-long lecture series on “Civic Engagement in Israel/Palestine – Voices Against Hopelessness” inviting speakers from various backgrounds to voice their opinion (Jewish and German-Israeli Students at ASH Berlin 2025). Such events provide a controlled space fostering mutual dialogue and might even make more radical actions such as encampments superfluous (Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin 2025).

Summary

This section clearly traces out where the shortcomings of both university reactions are that already stood out in the analysis part of the previous section. The threefold action plan laid

out focuses on the safety and security responsibility universities have towards their students while simultaneously providing spaces for knowledge creation and discourse. Learning from ASH's positive example and the grave consequences of the protests in the context of the Vietnam War, the strategy provides a controlled discourse environment that might make more radical forms of activism less necessary in the first place as they were the culmination of ongoing neglect of the university administration towards its students' activism. An essential point to keep in mind are the differences in power and leverage in students as compared to the university administration and executive forces. By centering the students with their personal freedoms and safety, this strategy fosters mutual trust and accountability.

4. Conclusion

What the Columbia and FU encampments show is that students, no matter the legal or administrative consequences, will make use of their right to protest. It is the task of higher education institutions, especially those that pride themselves claiming they provide fruitful discourse environments, to create spaces for mutual discourse without categorically discarding one side entirely. In the political sphere in which the protests happened, the strategy derived in the previous section would be more than feasible. Additionally, having a specific strategy for similar occasions might even prevent the students from feeling unheard and neglected. No movement chooses to organize an encampment without prior neglect of their position as it evidently bears a multitude of potential consequences both academically, administratively, and legally.

It is the political transition both Germany and the US underwent that marks a significant shift towards populism and authoritarianism that puts strategies like the one discussed in this paper to question. Particularly the abduction of Mahmoud Khalil and various other aspiring academics by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Trump's ultimatum towards Columbia and other universities to cut their funding endanger the university's academic independence. Similarly, also Germany is about to deport various EU citizens based on their involvement in various university encampments. This transition and tendency towards enforced conformity is a historical juncture that notes a significant authoritarian shift that needs to be resisted. This immense interference these governments seek to impose on higher education institutions needs to be recognized as a severe danger and should be a wake-up call to everyone.

Columbia and Freie Universität have increasingly leaned toward security-focused policies, thereby neglecting their fundamental role as spaces for knowledge production, critical thinking, and human development. In doing so, they have allowed government interference, transforming academic environments into extensions of state control. This shift has set a precedent where hard security measures are prioritized over dialogue and addressing the root causes of grievances.

Works Cited

- Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin. 2025. "Angehörige der ASH Berlin und weitere Wissenschaftler_innen stellen sich hinter das Präsidium." January 10, 2025. <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/presse-und-newsroom/ash-news/hochschulangehoerige-der-ash-berlin-stellen-sich-hinter-das-praesidium/>.
- Anonymous. 2025. "Recollection - Supplementary Report to the Court Case Preparation."
- Anonymous. 2024 "Recollection of an Activist in Preparation of Their Trial in Court." Berlin.
- Antisemitismusbeauftragter. n.d. "IHRA-Definition." Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für jüdisches Leben und den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus. Accessed March 22, 2025. <https://www.antisemitismusbeauftragter.de/Webs/BAS/DE/bekaempfung-antisemitismus/ihra-definition/ihra-definition-node.html>.
- AStA FU. 2024. "Ausführliche Stellungnahme des AStA FU bezüglich der polizeilichen Räumung des Protestcamps an der FU am 7.5.2024 | AStA FU Berlin." 2024. <https://astafu.de/node/603>.
- Banerjee, Isha. 2024b. "Timeline: The 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment.'" Columbia Daily Spectator. 2024. <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/05/02/timeline-the-gaza-solidarity-encampment/>.
- Columbia University. 2024. "Anti-Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment Policy and Procedures for Students | University Policies." September 23, 2024. <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/anti-discrimination-and-discriminatory-harassment-policy-and-procedures-students>.
- Columbia University. 2025. "Anti-Doxing and Online Harassment Policy | University Policies." March 12, 2025. <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/anti-doxing-and-online-harassment-policy>.
- Cleary, Claire, Sarah Huddleston, and Amira McKee. 2024. "'United for Israel March' Draws

- Hundreds, Multiple Incidents of Harassment Reported.” Columbia Daily Spectator. 2024. <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/04/26/united-for-israel-march-draws-hundreds-multiple-incidents-of-harassment-reported/>.
- DPA. 2025. “Pro-Palästina-Aktivisten besetzen Hörsaal – Hochschulpräsidentin sieht Polizei als Bedrohung - WELT.” *DIE WELT*, July 1, 2025. <https://www.welt.de/vermishtes/article255062630/Pro-Palaestina-Aktivisten-besetzen-Hoersaal-Hochschulpraesidentin-sieht-Polizei-als-Bedrohung.html>.
- Freie Universität Berlin. 2024. “Statement Issued by Freie Universität Berlin on the Campus Occupation on May 7, 2024.” May 7, 2024. https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/presse/informationen/fup/2024/fup_24-099-statement-besetzung/index.html.
- Hogger, Martin, and Anna Aicher. 2024. “Propalästinensische Proteste an der FU Berlin: Clash auf dem Campus.” *Die Zeit*, May 8, 2024. <https://www.zeit.de/campus/2024-05/palaestina-aktivisten-fu-berlin-besetzung-zelt-rafah>.
- IHRA. n.d. “What Are Holocaust Denial and Distortion?” IHRA (blog). Accessed March 22, 2025. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-holocaust-denial-distortion>.
- Jewish and German-Israeli Students at ASH Berlin. 2025. “Statement jüdisch-(deutsch) israelischer Angehöriger und ehemaliger Angehöriger der Hochschule.” January 12, 2025. <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/presse-und-newsroom/ash-news/statement-juedisch-deutsch-israelischer-angehoeriger-und-ehemaliger-angehoeriger-der-hochschule/>.
- KlasseGegenKlasse. 2024. “Open Letter on Police Brutality Against Students and Silencing of Palestine Solidarity at Freie Universität Berlin.” 2024. <https://www.klassegegenklasse.org/open-letter-on-police-brutality-against-students-and-silencing-of-palestine-solidarity-at-freie-universitaet-berlin/>.
- Listek, Barbara. 2024. “Academia in Times of Genocide: Why Are Students Across the World

Protesting?” Human Rights Careers. July 29, 2024.

<https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/academia-in-times-of-genocide-why-are-students-across-the-world-protesting/>.

Malloy, Ernesto. 2025. An activist’s recollection of the FU encampment.

Maruf, Matt Egan, Ramishah. 2024. “Three Takeaways from the Columbia University

President’s Testimony on Antisemitism | CNN Business.” CNN. April 17, 2024.

<https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/17/business/takeaways-columbia-antisemitism-hearing/index.html>.

Massel, Rebecca. 2024. “Rabbi Advises Jewish Students to ‘Return Home as Soon as

Possible’ Following Reports of ‘Extreme Antisemitism’ on and around Campus.”

Columbia Daily Spectator. 2024.

<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/04/21/rabbi-advises-jewish-students-to-return-home-as-soon-as-possible-following-reports-of-extreme-antisemitism-on-and-around-campus/>.

Offenhartz, Jake. 2025. “Columbia Expels Student Protestors Who Seized Building.” TIME.

March 14, 2025. <https://time.com/7268085/columbia-university-expels-student-protestors-gaza-palestine-israel/>.

Scholars at Risk. 2024. “2024-05-07 Free University of Berlin.” Scholars at Risk. May 7,

2024. <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2024-05-07-free-university-of-berlin/>.

University Administration ASH Berlin. 2025. “Stellungnahme der Hochschulleitung zur

Besetzung und Protestwoche im Audimax.” January 10, 2025. <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/presse-und-newsroom/ash-news/stellungnahme-der-hochschulleitung-zur-besetzung-und-protestwoche-im-audimax/>.

Wallenfeldt, Jeff. n.d. “Kent State Shooting | History, Responsibility, & Remembrance |

Britannica.” Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kent-State-shootings>.