Stanford Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian Communities Committee

Preliminary Recommendations

February 1, 2024
Executive Summary

Stanford’s [IDEAL initiative](#) has three stated goals: "To ensure that diversity of thought, experience, and approach is represented in all sectors of our education and research enterprise; to ensure that all members of the campus community feel they belong and are supported regardless of their background, identity, or affiliations; and to ensure that all members of the campus community have broad access to the opportunities and benefits of Stanford."

Our initial assessment of these goals with respect to the Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian (MAP) communities at Stanford is as follows:

- Palestinian identity, scholarship, and debate on Palestine is repressed and silenced on campus. Students, faculty, and staff all agree on this problem: no one feels free to speak, and the committee has documented multiple instances of suppression of speech and association through a variety of formal and informal means at all levels: leadership decisions, unit policies, and day-to-day interactions.
- There is a lack of scholarship on Arab communities and Arab Studies at Stanford that reflects the existence of anti-Arab sentiment in the USA. Arab identity—especially in the academic realm—tends to be ignored or forgotten on our campus, resulting in a dearth of intellectual leadership and expertise especially when political crises relate to the Middle East or affect Arab communities. And there has been no concerted effort to improve this.
- Islamophobia continues to be an issue in the USA broadly, and Islamophobia remains a problem at Stanford, even as its manifestations might vary depending on the broader political context. The work of the university—in student services, academic departments, or human resources—does, to some extent, mitigate the harm of Islamophobia on Stanford community members. However, more work can be done, especially in mitigating the persistence of Islamophobic tropes and stereotypes that manifest in discussion of contested political issues, including university responses to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

We have work to do if we want to meet our goals on diversity of thought, belonging, and access to the opportunities Stanford offers.
Our charge and focus is on how to meet these goals for Stanford's Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students, faculty, and staff, as well as for the many individuals who are not members of these communities but who are deeply interested and invested in issues that affect them.

These communities bring to Stanford an incredible amount of expertise and talent, and they make significant contributions to the university’s core mission. Our listening sessions and outreach over the last two months, however, confirm Stanford’s longstanding structural imbalances and institutional inequities, which acutely impact Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim communities and hinder their ability and opportunity to thrive.

This interim report combines analysis of 30 listening sessions (with 65+ students, staff, faculty, and alumni for a total of approximately 34 hours across all schools and units) conducted by MAP committee members in December 2023 and January 2024. Our analysis is also informed by committee members’ participation in campus events, alumni networks, and countless conversations each of us has had based on our positionality within Stanford. Based on this data, we offer recommendations on free speech and expression, academic programming, and support resources. Work on these can begin in Winter and Spring of 2024.

What We’ve Heard in the Listening Sessions so Far

Community members are afraid

“Now I have to worry that I might not pass a class if the professor knows I’m Palestinian” - Student

“If you say the wrong thing, even if the wrong thing is ‘stop killing Palestinians’ that can very clearly and very quickly turn into a reason for blacklisting you” – Faculty

“I was afraid to leave the house, honestly” – Staff, who wears a headscarf, after hit-and-run incident

Individuals, especially those who are visibly or identifiably members of the MAP community, are afraid of expressing their identities, thoughts, or experiences. They fear being doxxed, mistreated, fired, and physically harmed—especially after the hit-and-run on campus and other violent incidents happening across academia and the nation. This creates a feeling of
immense precarity and vulnerability: not only for their day to day lives but for their job prospects and financial/scholarship standing as students, their careers as staff members, and their futures as untenured (and tenured) faculty. To avoid being targeted in any way, they are taking measures such as suppressing their identity, refraining from advocacy, self-censoring speech, asking for remote work accommodations, and requesting that colleagues walk them to their cars when it’s dark.

Community members are exhausted and experiencing harm

“You are constantly being evaluated and you have to perform to comfort others about the oppression you’re experiencing. If you work too hard to tell them what you’re experiencing, you are penalized for experiencing it” - Faculty

“We see our houses burnt and our friends under rubble and our families get hungrier, yet we must keep composure while making the case that we are humans when talking to people advocating for our erasure” - Student

“We barely manage to put on a brave face every day at work while the slaughter of our people is taking place” - Faculty

“I can’t keep living like this. I don’t want to wait for another (hit-and-run) attack to say I don’t want to come in” – Staff

“People who look like you are getting massacred, while you sit for another biochem quiz” – Medical Student

Regardless of the degree of connection to the ongoing situation, community members overwhelmingly express a deep sense of pain right now. They are attending class while mourning the loss of friends and family in Gaza, teaching their students while processing ongoing trauma, and supporting fellow MAP community members while being spread thin. Whether they have voluntarily (or involuntarily) been made spokespeople for their respective identity groups or are suffering invisibly, many feel alone and isolated. Collectively, they are trying to navigate their roles and responsibilities at Stanford while also bearing witness to the atrocities of the moment.
Many community members and allies also express that Stanford’s approach in addressing campus climate over the last few months has not mitigated their harm. Some report being subjected to racist jokes, overtly biased statements, and microaggressions or bullying remarks by peers, managers, and colleagues. A few note being intimidated by colleagues in positions of power but feeling powerless to do anything and as a result feeling “shut down, overwhelmed, weak, and flattened.” Some discussed being sent emails (or in some cases even being asked to disseminate emails) about events they feel deny their humanity. Others are getting called out by superiors with more power when they decide to speak up, even when they do so in a respectful, measured manner. On edge, many feel they have to choose between expressing their identities or keeping the peace to avoid retribution or retaliation.

Community members are under-resourced, underrepresented, and disempowered

“We’re an educational institution, we should be about educating. We are missing the education boat altogether. This gives fertile ground for offensive speech, antagonizing, othering, dehumanizing” – Staff

“They say ‘Islamophobia’ when a quarter of their undergrads coming from Palestine are Christian” – Student

“They tell us we totally have freedom of speech… as long as it’s not outside Li Ka Shing Center [the main medical school building] or in any of the rooms” – Medical Student

“Students and alumni have noticed a dearth of scholars, faculty (both tenured and junior), and academic scholarship on Palestine and the broader Middle East. Stanford is lagging behind our peer institutions in these areas. Courses and research aren’t going to bring my family back but humanizing Palestinians is an antidote to the hatred going on right now” – Alumnus

“I am Palestinian; I traveled from Palestine to this institution. If you want to address me, call me by who I am–Palestinian. I say I am Palestinian and the university says we’ll find some other way to address you. It hurts to see my identity get overlooked while my people and places are getting erased” – Student
“I am Jewish, but [existing spaces on campus] alienate you the moment you criticize Israeli crimes” - Student

In the majority of conversations, the lack of Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian scholars and leaders across Stanford emerges as a core problem. The void is palpable: insufficient or nonexistent course offerings, a dearth of visible intellectual leaders and advocates who have high-level authority and standing, a smaller number of events being offered around MAP issues, perpetual collapsing/conflation of MAP identities (e.g. Islamophobia is not the same as anti-Palestinian sentiment), and too much pressure on too few people to educate and support the campus community. Multiple individuals also surface longstanding structural inequities, noting that disciplines such as Middle Eastern or Palestinian Studies have not been tangible university priorities.

Community members are losing – or have lost – trust in the institution

“I don’t feel like if I reported this, something would actually happen….” - Staff members

“I don’t trust institutions and one big reason why is that there’s a lot of secrecy that goes into the decision making. I won’t know down the road if the reason why a decision is made one way or the other is because of things related to my identity” - Faculty member re: decisions on reappointment, tenure, other promotions, and grant funding

“Who are you going to run to if you face discrimination?” - Staff members

“They told us they made an anti-doxxing committee, yet their first advice when I got doxxed was ‘let’s wait and do nothing’” - Student

“There have been so many town halls, so much IDEAL work, so many public statements over the years - we have seen the impact of that not really being effective” - Staff

“The administration’s greatest failure lies in its disconnect from their student body. The students involved in this protest aren’t there because they’re Muslim. Most of us are not. We are here because of our commitment to human rights and equality, the principles Stanford purports to uphold” - Student
Many interviewees explicitly shared in listening sessions that while they believe the MAP committee is well-intentioned and are grateful it exists, they are also deeply skeptical that Stanford will act upon its recommendations.

Community members do not know or understand why the university makes the decisions it does, and this results in feelings of being gaslit and harassed by Stanford. This is an initial sketch of some of the problematic areas:

- **Inconsistencies between words and actions:**
  - Messaging that there will be no political statements, followed by political statements (for example: the early December 2023 statement that rejected any calls for genocide against Jews but did not mention the calls for genocide against Palestinians).
  - Messaging that Stanford-sponsored events that use university resources must not be one-sided, followed by one-sided political events hosted by Stanford, such as the January forum with the Israeli government’s antisemitism envoy.

- **Suppression of speech on Palestine:**
  - This happens in formal and informal ways; to date, the committee has heard of troubling examples, which we are still reviewing, in the following units:
    - Stanford Medical School
    - Knight-Hennessy Scholars
    - Stanford Law School
    - School of Humanities and Sciences

- **Lack of rhetorical balance in university communication**
  - We heard over and over again about the framing of university statements and how they almost universally tend to lead with antisemitism and then only address anti-Palestinian bias or Islamophobia as secondary concerns.

Community members appreciate some aspects of Stanford

“*I’m very glad to be here at Stanford rather than Penn, Harvard, Columbia*” – *Faculty member*
“There is a significant group of Jewish students here [at the sit-in], and this is the first Jewish community in which I have felt welcomed at Stanford” - Jewish Senior Undergraduate

“My line manager reached out to me when the Muslim Ban happened during the Trump Administration; I felt like Stanford supported me as a Muslim” - Staff member

“I and other Jewish friends have faced unprecedented harassment on campus during these last few months, and each and every one of the perpetrators have been Zionists. My fellow protesters, many of whom are Arab and Muslim, have been the first ones to defend us from this harassment. My Jewishness here is not just tolerated, but celebrated. People here want to learn about Judaism, its practices, and its beautifully rich history and culture. I have felt more connected to my Jewishness in these last few months, in this space, than at any other point during my four years here” - Jewish Student at the sit-in

“When I shared fears around my physical safety, my manager bought me parking closer to campus and reduced my on-campus hours so I could leave safely when it was still light out” - Staff member

While distrust in the institution is high, the power of individuals – whether faculty members, managers, or colleagues – makes a difference in a person’s experience, and several folks were quick to point out moments where they have been supported by their peers and managers, where they have felt seen, where they have had wonderful “across the aisle” conversations, and where they felt they could bring their whole self to work. Several members of the community also point out that Stanford is doing a better job at this moment than other academic institutions that have been in the limelight, citing examples such as the formation of the MAP committee, support from the Markaz, and the sit-in being able to persist.

Our Interim Recommendations

The committee believes in the importance of Stanford as a university: a place that creates knowledge through research and teaching and that enables all of its members to lead fuller lives and contribute to the world around them.
Our recommendations on safety, resources, free speech, and academic programming seek to enable all Stanford community members to take part in the intellectual life of the university without Palestine-related restrictions.

In the last couple of decades, Stanford has developed significant Islam and Muslim-related scholarship and community support. This is a notable achievement. Our committee believes that the way to empower free speech and allow community members to flourish at our university is to do the same for Palestine-related scholarship and community and Arab Studies scholarship and community.

This report contains both initial bullet point recommendations that can be rolled out in Winter and Spring quarters 2024 and recommendations for commitments that need to be made to long-term hiring and institution-building in our areas of concern.

The committee would like to start a conversation with university leadership about how these plans are developed; how crises are managed; and how expertise, scholarship, and management interact. We have noticed repeatedly that the positive impact of any institutional support for MAP communities is often diminished by the struggle to advocate for that support. We think there may be a better mode. Our goal is to shift away from asks and toward partnership, and away from internal advocacy and toward shared conversations.

We believe the university needs to be proactive: with career services; with doxxing prevention; with mental health and training; and with permanent linkages to staff and faculty expertise to ensure that when events happen, Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities, allies, and experts are not solely reactive.

To be effectively proactive at Stanford, a large decentralized institution the size of a small city, these issues need presidential and provostial leadership. Initiatives need to be catalyzed by the president and provost rather than left to individual units, and as we've heard time and time again, it matters who “is in the room when it happens.”

I. FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION

The Committee believes that the current Faculty Senate and university conversation on free speech is critically important. Our listening sessions have surfaced multiple instances of the apparent suppression of free speech and association with regard to Palestine. Although Stanford has not made some of the more egregious decisions to
suppress speech that we have seen at other universities, such as disbanding student organizations advocating on Palestinian rights, the examples we have heard create sufficient concern that purportedly neutral rules regulating the “time, place, and manner” of speech on campus are being used to target Palestine advocacy. We also believe that the vibrancy of speech depends not only on freedom from restrictions, but also on institutional support and resources – thus, our second set of recommendations for academic programming also supports the value of fostering speech on campus.

1. Commit to protecting the speech and associational rights of students, student organizations, and others advocating on the Palestinian issue to hold events and access university support on the same terms as other students and student organizations. Avoid the inconsistent application of restrictions, particularly “time, place, and manner” restrictions.

2. Reject attempts to revise university policy in any unit to limit opportunities for speech expression in response to Palestinian advocacy. The committee is very concerned that revisions in the direction of limiting and suppressing speech are being made by Stanford units in the current political context.

3. Commit to consulting with Palestine-focused and/or Islam/Muslim-focused Stanford scholars and experts in any context that requires understanding the interpretation of Palestinian/Muslim slogans, expressions, or advocacy. This recommendation applies to all involved Stanford units, including the VPSA, Threat Assessment Commit, Dean of Students, Office of Community Standards, University Communications, and Office of General Counsel.

4. Commit to protecting the speech, associational, research, and collaboration rights of faculty, especially untenured faculty.

5. Commit to protecting the speech, associational, research, and collaboration rights of TAs and RAs in a manner consistent with their role.

6. Provide an opportunity to review any new proposed policies on hate speech/free expression on campus before their adoption, including policies to be proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee on University Speech.

7. Reject the adoption of definitions of antisemitism, Islamophobia, or other terms that purport to set norms, standards, or disciplinary policy for the university, such as the IHRA definition of antisemitism or other
definitions that conflate anti-Zionism or criticism of Israeli policy with antisemitism.

II. ACADEMIC GOALS

Stanford has been innovative and flexible in hiring in Islam-related fields, and we have learned lessons that we can put into practice when hiring in Palestine Studies and Arab Studies. Stanford knows how to build with tenured and tenure-track faculty working in and across multiple disciplines, and does not need to replicate the structures at peer institutions. Instead, it can lead the way in these fields: our Palestine and Arab Studies programs can be the reason students choose Stanford.

A. Short-Term Goals

Commit to build out expertise in these critical areas of scholarly inquiry: this is one of the most pressing issues in our global context.

1. Initiate initial hiring in Palestine Studies and Contemporary Arab Studies (multi-department searches will require 2-3 campus visits for each involved department and should combine the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sustainability).
   - Palestine Studies is a multidisciplinary field spanning sociology to literature via the environment, and a global field crossing diasporic hemispheres from Chile to Sweden via the Bay Area. Palestine Studies engages contemporary discourse on race and identity, landscape architecture and sustainability, politics and economics, literature and film, and millennia of history. The geographic space includes Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and secular modernity. Palestine in diasporas has emerged as one of the most pressing cultural and political issues of the twenty-first century.

2. Establish an endowed Palestine Studies postdoctoral position in CCSRE, building on the existing undergraduate fellowship there.

3. Offer additional support for the Middle Eastern Studies Forum that is housed in the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies:
   - a) 2 year fixed term program coordinator staff position in coordination with SGS leadership.
   - b) $45k of additional budget for Middle Eastern Studies Forum.
○ Administrative resources are critically important. They are expensive in the Bay Area context, but in our conversations it has become clear that lean units are ineffective units that lack the capacity to connect with students and empower faculty and staff expertise.

4. Empower faculty and staff who have existing expertise in these areas. Faculty and staff are currently restricted by job title, scope, and network agency, and we can leverage their expertise. This applies to:
   a) Teachers of languages
   b) Staff with expertise

B. Long-Term Goals
1. Create 10 new tenured faculty lines in Palestine Studies and Arab Studies, leading to departmentalization, undergraduate majors, and PhDs in these fields.
2. Commit to build out our expertise in Palestine Studies and Arab Studies over a decade, starting with hiring and ending in a conversation about departmentalization.
3. Aim that Palestine and Arab Studies become the reason students and faculty choose to come to Stanford.

III. RESOURCES / SUPPORT / SAFETY
Stanford has responded to student concerns with additional resources and support for safety. However, there are several gaps that need addressing, as well as many proactive measures the university can take to ensure wellness, safety, and professional opportunities while supporting communities’ free speech and expression.

A. Career Services Support
1. Convene a meeting of all university career services offices to discuss concerns related to student employment and reprisals for Palestine/Muslim advocacy. We have heard many students express fear that employers will discriminate against them if they speak out on campus or on social media about their support for Palestinian rights, or even if they identify themselves as Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim in their applications for summer or post-graduation positions.
2. Ask university career services offices (across all schools) to issue a statement to all employers participating in campus interview or career services programs, noting:
   a) that there have been disturbing reports of university students losing jobs or facing discriminatory hiring practices because of their identity or support for Palestinian rights; and
   b) reminding all participating employers of their non-discrimination obligations under federal and state law, including the circumstances in which such obligations include protection for political speech.

B. Physical and Mental Health and Safety
   1. Offer permanent funding for culturally-sensitive mental health support for students, including programs like the Muslim Mental Health Initiative (MMHI). Explore new initiatives to institutionalize such support, such as in-house clinicians at CAPS.
   2. Provide mental health services and support for anti-Zionist Jewish students, who have repeatedly indicated feeling neglected, unsafe, and unsupported on campus.
   3. Disseminate information about mental health resources to students in a timely manner once crises hit and then periodically issue reminders.
   4. Expand mental health services to include formal culturally- and spiritually-relevant support/therapy for staff and faculty (other than the Faculty/Staff Help Center).
   5. Require HR to send managers information on how to proactively address their staff's concerns about safety and well-being. Consult with relevant campus faculty and staff on this communication.
   6. Continue to provide Department of Public Safety (DPS) support for students, staff, and faculty and for events upon request. Given concerns around surveillance and policing, any security measures should be implemented after consultation and buy-in from impacted communities.

C. Doxxing
   1. Hire a designated support person on campus that community members – students, staff, and faculty – can consult when doxxed or in danger of reputational damage.
2. Provide DeleteMe (or comparable) services to Stanford students, staff, and faculty who are afraid of, at risk of, or have been doxxed, depending on the situation.

3. Initiate a process to consider revisions to the anti-doxxing policy that includes consideration of appropriate sanctions for violations.

D. Trainings

1. Institutionalize training on anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab bias and Islamophobia, as well as Muslim/Muslim-adjacent mental health training. These training sessions should be conducted by experts or in consultation with experts, for the following units:
   a) All VPSA units, especially: Dean of Students (DOS); ResX - Residence Deans (RDs), Resident Assistants (RAs), Resident Fellows (RFs), Neighborhood Program Directors (NPDs); and Office of Student Engagement (OSE).
   b) Representatives for all graduate schools, as well as faculty.
   c) Stanford Healthcare administration and employees.
   d) Other relevant units, such as University Communications and Department of Public Safety.

2. Re-evaluate IDEAL training:
   a) Improve content. Several staff have noted they do not feel seen in the training despite issues around Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian identities affecting identity and campus climate.
   b) Mandate for faculty and collaborate with faculty expertise. All university employees should undergo IDEAL training or a substantial equivalent.

February to May 2024

At the end of Spring Quarter 2024 the Committee expects to offer, in addition to further work on the issues addressed above, recommendations in areas not limited to: Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in a Learning Environment, including representation and the relevant identity categories; Protected Identity Harm Reporting and other reporting structures; COLLEGE and other teaching structures; and advance planning for potential immigration policies in a new administration targeting MAP communities, such as a new “Muslim ban.”