# Pro-Palestinian Student Encampment Sparks Campus Controversy Across US



On April 23, 2024, pro-Palestinian student protestors set up approximately 20 tents on Parrish Beach by Clothier Hall at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. The encampment ended on May 24, marking the longest campus protest over the Gaza conflict in the Philadelphia area. About three dozen student activists dismantled the encampment voluntarily.

The protest focused on urging Swarthmore College to divest from companies profiting from the Gaza war, which has resulted in over 35,000 deaths since October 7, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Due to the encampment's prolonged presence on Parrish Lawn, the college moved its commencement ceremony off-campus to Fairmount Park's Mann Center, a first in its history since 1864.

Tensions heightened following an incident on May 17, where counter-protesters launched fireworks at the encampment and issued threats, and on May 22, when 25 student activists received disciplinary notices for their participation in various pro-Palestinian demonstrations throughout the academic year. Negotiations between student organizers and the college administration ended in deadlock, with the administration refusing to endorse full divestment or issue a statement condemning the destruction of Gaza’s education system.

In a related event, UCLA police arrested Edan On, 18, on a felony charge following a violent attack on a Gaza solidarity encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles. On was identified through videos shared by media outlets and was reported to have assaulted demonstrators with a wooden pole. The attack drew widespread criticism of UCLA's handling of the incident, prompting further protests and counter-protests on campus.

At Harvard University, graduating student Shruthi Kumar deviated from her planned speech to denounce the university's decision to bar 13 students from graduating due to their involvement in pro-Palestinian protests. Kumar’s remarks received widespread applause and sparked a walkout by over 1,000 students. Nobel laureate Maria Ressa also addressed the issue during her commencement speech, emphasizing the importance of not silencing protest voices.

These events illustrate a broader trend of campus protests and administrative responses across the United States, as universities grapple with the complexities of free speech and civil disobedience in the context of the Gaza conflict.