# Jewish student activist faces university suspension amid pro-Palestinian protest tensions



On April 29, 2024, Tess Segal, a 20-year-old sophomore at the University of Florida, was involved in a protest on campus calling for the university to divest from weapons manufacturers and boycott academic institutions in Israel. The protest took place at a prominent plaza on the university grounds, where activists, including Ms. Segal, engaged in various activities such as studying, playing cards, and later reading obituaries of Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip. As law enforcement intervened, Ms. Segal, who says she did not resist arrest, was handcuffed and detained overnight. She was charged with resisting arrest without violence, but the state subsequently dismissed the case.

Despite the dismissal, the University of Florida had already banned her from campus. The university administration had issued warnings to protesters about new, strict restrictions on protests and stated that law enforcement officers had instructed demonstrators to disperse. Ms. Segal indicated that the noise level made it impossible to hear such instructions. Consequences of her ban included being barred from taking her final exam for the semester and from participating in a university-sponsored summer programme to which she had been admitted. While a university disciplinary committee determined that she had not acted disruptively, they found her responsible for violating university policies and initially proposed a one-year suspension. However, the decision was escalated to a three-year suspension by the university’s dean of students, who claimed that her conduct disrupted university functions and impeded law enforcement. Due to university privacy laws, officials have neither confirmed nor commented on her suspension. Ms. Segal, who had been on a full scholarship, is now employed in food service and faces uncertainty about her return to college, as the university requires students absent for more than three semesters to reapply for admission.

Ms. Segal’s case has drawn attention for its complexity and irony, given her Jewish heritage. She is the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor and has ties to Jewish culture and community. Since October 7, 2023, when violent conflict escalated in Gaza, Jewish organisations and political leaders in the United States have increasingly sought to protect Jewish students on campuses by imposing strict measures against protest activities perceived as hostile to Israel. These measures include demands for suspensions and expulsions related to pro-Palestinian activism. This push has coincided with a redefinition of Jewish identity by prominent voices within the Jewish community, equating support for Israel with Jewishness itself—an idea articulated by figures such as former President Donald Trump and leaders like Jonathan Greenblatt of the Anti-Defamation League.

This redefinition has taken place amid one of the most severe crackdowns on American Jewish activism in recent memory, especially activists critical of Israeli policies. A 2021 poll by the Jewish Electoral Institute found a significant portion of younger American Jewish adults hold critical views of Israel, with some considering it an apartheid state or accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza. These attitudes have fuelled Jewish participation in protests against Israel’s actions in Gaza, with groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace organising and leading demonstrations and occupations of public and university spaces.

Jews involved in pro-Palestinian activism have faced university suspensions, probation, arrests, and in some cases, termination from academic positions. For example, several Jewish Voice for Peace chapters have been temporarily suspended, cases of Jewish students arrested and subsequently cleared have occurred, and pro-Palestinian expressions of free speech, even within religious contexts, have been met with resistance or forced removal. The Anti-Defamation League has publicly supported universities that have clamped down on these protests, citing the need to protect Jewish students, even as some of those students involved are themselves Jewish activists.

In one instance at Brown University last year, Jewish students built Gaza solidarity sukkahs—temporary booths used during the Jewish festival of Sukkot—only to face university interventions demanding their removal. Many of these students have intertwined their Jewish rituals with their political activism, demonstrating a new generation of Jewish activists integrating their cultural and religious identities with their stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite these challenges, Jewish students continue their activism. In early April 2024, Jewish students at Columbia University chained themselves to campus gates protesting the detention of Mahmoud Khalil, a former graduate student and green card holder detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Similarly, more than 130 Jewish members of the Georgetown University community protested the detention and arrest of a postdoctoral fellow accused of Hamas propaganda promotion.

This evolving scenario highlights tensions within the American Jewish establishment and its alliances with political authorities, which some critics see as marginalising dissenting Jewish voices on Israel and Palestine. The generational shift is evident in the growing number of young Jewish activists who use both political advocacy and religious expression to assert their identity and beliefs, challenging prevailing definitions of Jewishness aligned strictly with Zionism.

Peter Beinart, contributing Opinion writer at The Times and professor at the Newmark School of Journalism, has extensively covered these dynamics, noting that the current generation of Jewish student activists is notable for their integration of Jewish ritual and protest—a development resisted by some mainstream Jewish organisations and political leaders. The Salt Lake Tribune is reporting on this multifaceted issue, which continues to evolve across American university campuses and Jewish communities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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