
Statement on Academic Boycotts

(AUGUST 2024)

The following statement was approved by the AAUP's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure in July 2024 and adopted by the Association's Council in August 2024.

The AAUP's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure has long held that academic exchange should be freely conducted without regard to political or religious viewpoint. On that basis, since its 2006 report *On Academic Boycotts*, the committee has opposed academic boycotts and encouraged faculty and academic associations to “seek alternative means, less inimical to the principle of academic freedom, to pursue their concerns.”¹ At the same time, as Committee A observed in that report, the AAUP has “recognize[d] the right of individual faculty members and groups of academics not to cooperate with other individual faculty members or academic institutions with whom or with which they disagree.” Yet, the committee continued, “when such noncooperation takes the form of a systematic academic boycott, it threatens the principles of free expression and communication on which we collectively depend.”² While we reaffirm Committee A's commitment to the free exchange of knowledge, regardless of political or religious viewpoint, we also recognize that the committee's position opposing academic boycotts has been controversial, contested, and used to compromise academic freedom. We therefore believe that this position deserves reconsideration and clarification.

Academic freedom and productive debate may not always be appropriately secured by a categorical position that disregards nuance and is inattentive to context. As Committee A's 2006 report observed, the Association's own history is “complex” and “includes

support for campus strikes, support for divestiture during the anti-apartheid campaigns in South Africa, and a questioning of the requirement of institutional neutrality during the Vietnam War.”³ The report also quoted comments made by Nelson Mandela to the African National Congress: “In some cases . . . it might be correct to boycott, and in others it might be unwise and dangerous. In still other cases another weapon of political struggle might be preferred. A demonstration, a protest march, a strike, or civil disobedience might be resorted to, all depending on the actual conditions at the given time.”⁴

Committee A recognizes that when faculty members choose to support academic boycotts, they can legitimately seek to protect and advance the academic freedom and fundamental rights of colleagues and students who are living and working under circumstances that violate that freedom and one or more of those rights. In such contexts, academic boycotts are not in themselves violations of academic freedom; rather, they can be considered legitimate tactical responses to conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with the mission of higher education. The freedom to produce and exchange knowledge depends upon the guarantee of other basic freedoms, including the rights to life, liberty, security of person, and freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention; the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; the right to hold opinions without interference; the right to freedom of expression; the right to participate in public affairs;

1. “On Academic Boycotts,” *Academe* 92, no. 5 (September–October 2006): 42.

2. “On Academic Boycotts,” 42.

3. “On Academic Boycotts,” 40.

4. Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (Heinemann Educational, 1990), 63, quoted in “On Academic Boycotts,” 42.

the right to equal protection and effective protection against discrimination; the right to freedom of association; the right to peaceful assembly; the right to work; the right to participate in cultural life; the right to education; and the rights to liberty of movement and freedom to choose one's residence. Not all of our academic colleagues and students in the United States and around the world are afforded these fundamental rights.

Committee A therefore holds that individual faculty members and students should be free to weigh, assess, and debate the specific circumstances giving rise to calls for systematic academic boycotts and to make their own choices regarding their participation in them. To do otherwise contravenes academic freedom. Faculty members' choices to support or oppose academic boycotts should not themselves be the basis of formal reprisal.⁵ While such choices may be criticized and debated, faculty members and students should not face institutional or governmental censorship or discipline for participating in academic boycotts, for declining to do so, or for criticizing and debating the choices of those with whom they disagree. The decision to participate in an academic boycott should be situationally sensitive and consider the full range of alternative tactics available to achieve the desired goals. We reiterate that academic boycotts should neither involve any political or religious litmus tests nor target individual scholars and teachers engaged in ordinary academic practices, such as publishing scholarship, delivering lectures and conference presentations, or participating in research collaborations. Academic boycotts should target only institutions of higher education that themselves violate academic freedom or the fundamental rights upon which academic freedom depends. ■

5. See also "Committee A Statement on Extramural Utterances," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 11th ed. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 31.