

**Censorship at the State University of New York at New Paltz.
UPR (Universal Periodic Review) for submission to United Nations.**

Problem

On May 1, 2024 State University of New York at New Paltz (SUNYNP) students organized a peaceful solidarity encampment protesting US government support of Israel's military attack on Gaza following October 7, 2023. After only 2 days, the school broke up the encampment using police violence, disregarding the students' legal right to peacefully protest.

Per a social media post, New Paltz Students for Palestine asked the college administration to disclose what companies they invest in, and "end all financial relationships with companies responsible for genocide in Palestine." They also asked New Paltz administration to "drop all academic sanctions placed on students as a result of their participation in the encampment." The school president visited the encampment in Parker Quad to listen to students' demands. Later, the school offered to further discuss student demands if they closed the camp. The students initially had said no. But by 9pm on May 2, protestors voluntarily dismantled their tents and structures although they remained protesting peacefully. They didn't impede other's use of the campus or access to buildings and services. Each time the members of the encampment met the demands of the administration, the administration escalated its demands – from taking down the tents to leaving the premises.

At the behest of SUNYNP President, approximately 150 armed officers donning riot gear and sidearms from SUNY, local, county and state police broke up the encampment of about 250 students, faculty and community members only 36 hours after it started, in spite of students complying to remove their structures. Several hundred other people had gathered outside of the encampment to watch or express support. A helicopter and drones patrolled overhead, and dogs were utilized as well, adding to the intimidation. Police arrested about 130 people for trespassing. Protesters alleged they suffered physical injuries and were prevented from retrieving valuable property — including laptops, cell phones, books, clothes, medicines and other materials — when the encampment site was shuttered. The area was bulldozed. The school admitted it had disposed of personal property it confiscated and was not willing to reimburse students for their loss. The loss of laptops caused disruption to students' education.¹

¹ Local/regional news media coverage of encampment and arrests -> [SUNYNP student newspaper](#), [The Times Union of Albany, NY](#), [Times Herald-Record](#), [Hudson Valley Post](#)

In April, prior to the NP encampment the SUNY Chancellor reiterated the public university system's support for Israel and its opposition to boycotting Israeli universities and divesting school funds from Israel, which were key demands of the encampments.² Also in April, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul wrote a letter to college and university presidents across the state, urging them to "aggressively guard against antisemitism and all forms of hateful or discriminatory rhetoric." The Governor, who has reiterated her pro-Israel, anti-BDS position voiced her support for clearing the encampments.

As a public university system SUNY is legally obliged to observe the right of students to peacefully protest and assemble even if the administration disagrees with the message of the protest, like opposition to Israel's genocidal treatment of Palestinians and divestment from its profiteers. The definition of anti-Semitism is elastic, especially if interpreted according to the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition, which conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Many members of the encampments were Jewish.

A class action lawsuit was filed against the SUNYNP school president, county sheriff and other police officials and officers on behalf of the encampment participants. The suit alleges violation of Constitutional rights, false arrest, denial of medical treatment and that police officers exercised excessive force on peaceful demonstrators, wielding batons, chasing and pinning students to the ground while dragging others, causing pain and injury.³

It's questionable why authorities arrested peaceful participants for "trespassing" even though SUNYNP is a public institution. Community members and especially enrolled students are permitted to be on the campus. Under New York Penal Law 140.10, third-degree (least harmful) trespass occurs when a person knowingly enters or remains unlawfully on property enclosed or fenced to keep out intruders.⁴ The encampment was set-up in Parker Quad, an un-fenced, open area where many campus activities are held. The District Attorney dismissed all charges against those arrested for trespassing and emphasized none had engaged in violence.

Pro-Palestine protests erupted at other SUNY campuses, including Binghamton, the Fashion Institute of Technology, Stony Brook University, and Buffalo. They were all shutdown quickly around the same time, so it seems the decision to do so likely came

² [SUNY Chancellor supports Israel](#)

³ [Class action lawsuit document](#).

⁴ [NY State law regarding trespass in public spaces](#).

from officials above the school presidents.

SUNY Purchase students and faculty also opened an encampment at 5pm, Thu. May 2 protesting genocide in Gaza, around the same time as SUNYNP. The School president set a 10pm deadline on Friday, May 3 for protesters to disperse, claiming “quiet hours” in effect as final exams neared. Protesters decided to remain there peacefully until police in riot gear moved in to break-up the encampment around 10:15pm. A helicopter swirled overhead. Police arrested 70 students and faculty for trespass. Students described arrests as “violent”, with no care for student safety. Police allegedly body-slammed students, one requiring hospitalization. Faculty sent a letter to the school president condemning the “violent and disproportionate actions” against students and faculty and called on all charges against those arrested to be dropped. The letter added “This represents a catastrophic failure by the administration to uphold the fundamental pillars of justice, academic freedom, and the democratic principles our institution is supposed to embody and impart.” Similar to New Paltz, peaceful participants in the Purchase encampment were quickly and violently removed with little consideration for their demands, and charged with trespassing on their own campus.⁵

Stony Brook University served SUNY BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanction) - whose goal is to pressure every school in the SUNY system to divest from Israel - with a cease and desist order. The school alleged “copyright infringement of SUNY”, a law-fare tactic to stifle free speech. A faculty member spoke at an SB campus rally on behalf of her graduate students because they were concerned with the starvation of Palestinians but were afraid to speak-out for fear of their future at the school.⁶

SUNY administration, in ideological agreement with the state governor and federal policy in supporting Israel, appeared motivated to crush dissent using police force even if it caused physical and emotional harm. Soon after violently closing the Purchase encampment, a State University of New York statement ironically quipped : “Student safety on our campuses is paramount...”.

The destruction of solidarity encampments on universities across the country, clampdown on campus protests, and arrest of students, faculty and community supporters paints a pattern of systematic censorship in the United States. Now in 2025, the US President seems even more determined to crush dissent, arresting visa students and others he says support terrorism or promote antisemitism, and threatening to

⁵ [SUNY Purchase encampment](#)

⁶ [SUNY Stony Brook demonstration](#) and [Binghamton](#), where students voluntarily ended their peaceful encampment after school administration promised to listen to them.

deport them without evidence or due process. The President is also threatening to withhold critical funding from schools unless they meet his political ideological standards, like promoting a pro-Israel view in Middle Eastern Studies. Schools will be turned into institutions of indoctrination rather than free inquiry.

Students and other supporters of justice for all people in Israel-Palestine no longer feel protected by laws that provide their freedoms - to the contrary, they fear expulsion from school, being denied job opportunities, imprisonment, and deportation. Dissent is a right that must be guaranteed - it's the lifeblood of democracy, and the antidote to dictatorship.

Evidence

Evidence of the facts presented in this report were derived from various sources :

1. Student and local newspaper articles and television outlets, containing video and photographs of events, statements from school officials and participants who suffered or witnessed brutality, arrest, loss of personal property and academic repercussion. See footnotes.
2. Documentation of the lawsuit by students and community members against the school and law enforcement alleging violation of US constitutional rights, physical harm, mental distress and sexual harassment (groping) by the police. The document chronicles details of events by participants. See footnotes.
3. Interview we did in 2025 as writers of this report with a faculty member who participated in encampment. Witness saw students locking arms when police approached them to peacefully resist avoid being hauled-away. Police shoved batons into their bodies. Witness saw an 18 year-old lose consciousness - attempted to provide aid but not allowed. Saw older community members with bruises. S(he) asked officials for medical help but was threatened with arrest for getting closer. Witness said that when rumors circulated campus that police were assembled and ready to make arrests, and were using drones and a helicopter, about 500 more students came out to protect other students. (S)he said police "made us feel more threatened." (Police tactics seemed to escalate the threat to safety rather than reduce it.) Only one student was charged for violent behavior, presumably an onlooker accused of throwing a plastic Gatorade bottle at a police officer. Witness confirmed there were placards at the encampment condemning Zionism and genocide, with slogan calling to free Palestine "from the river to the sea." The school construed these as examples of anti-semitism, but none of the protesters felt this way, many of whom were Jewish. When faculty - some of whom didn't support the encampment - later saw students in class with bruises inflicted by police, they expressed outrage to the administration. Some students were put on academic probation and under surveillance but charges were dropped. The

President of the school never expressed remorse or regret for the way he or police handled the situation, instead putting the blame on the students.

4. Interview we did in 2025 with a Palestinian community member who was arrested at the encampment : The police were fitted in riot gear. They banged their batons on their gear in a show of force as a prelude. Drones constantly buzzed overhead. As police approached, the protestors locked arms and legs with each other and sang as a show of unity and non-violence. (The police were generating fear while protestors sought to reduce it.) The police jammed their batons between the joined limbs of the protesters, twisting in order to break their bond. The police pulled the protesters' hands behind their backs and fitted them in plastic hand-cuffs, then shuttled them in vans to be arraigned. Protesters had bruises on their arms and hands. Sitting in the vans while handcuffed from behind created painful stress on the shoulders. As the interviewee said, someone cannot understand the pain without experiencing it for themselves. He never saw any threatening behavior coming from the protestors, nor heard any hateful rhetoric. Those arrested had to make multiple court appearances because of adjournments and postponements before the District Attorney finally dropped all of the trespassing charges.

Recommendations

1. Law enforcement agencies should be engaged only for legitimate law enforcement purposes, like for a violent situation or threat of safety, not when students and faculty are expressing their First Amendment rights. Peaceful protest should not be targeted by school administrations simply because administrators don't agree with their message. Their response should be proportional to the situation.
2. The New Paltz and Purchase encampments lasted less than 2 days before the administration decided to shut them down. Faculty members called for the NYS Attorney General to investigate who is responsible for the shutdowns of pro-Palestinian encampments across SUNY campuses, but this never happened. The public should be allowed to know on what basis the decision was made to call in police and who authorized the decision to use violent force.
3. School administration and government officials should engage in good-faith negotiation with students & faculty to resolve grievances rather than a hasty shutdown of peaceful protest resulting in unnecessary arrest, injury and loss of property.
4. Government and school administration should respect the US Constitution 1st Amendment rights to free speech and freedom to peaceably assemble. This should be reflected in school policies and actions. Expelled students should be re-instated. Students accused of violating school policies should get fair hearings.
5. Federal and state government as well as schools should ensure freedom of speech and peaceful assembly are respected according to international standards such as

Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both ratified by the United States; and Article 5 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (not ratified).

Local organizations sponsoring this report :

Middle East Crisis Response

New Paltz Women in Black