



## **AAUP-Ohio State Strongly Condemns Police Repression of Student Protest**

April 27, 2024

AAUP-Ohio State strongly condemns the use of force at the Ohio State University to tamp down Palestinian and pro-Palestinian speech. We affirm that the use of police force to suppress peaceful, nonviolent student protest – as seen on April 23, 2024 and then more dramatically on April 25, 2024 – goes against basic principles of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. It also goes against the value of the free exchange of ideas to which we are dedicated in our classrooms.

Students—especially students at a public university—have the right to gather and protest without being charged with “criminal trespassing.” A university administration that touts its defense of students’ safety at every opportunity is being utterly hypocritical when it clamps down—as has repeatedly happened in the last several months—on speech it does not like, in violent and unnecessary ways.

The ground for the repressive police actions of the past few days was already prepared by Ohio State earlier this week through its public statements. Ohio State’s April 20, 2024 [tweet](#) and a subsequent [campus-wide email](#) by Ohio State President Ted Carter characterized pro-Palestine speech as a public disturbance and—worse—as “harassment,” dangerous, and biased. We condemn this characterization as itself dangerous and find it unworthy of an institution committed to clear thought, mutual respect, and the safety of all of its community members.

On April 23, 2024, campus police arrested two students engaged in peaceful protest, who were sent to Jackson Pike jail, as all are who get arrested at Ohio State. What was their great crime? As the *Lantern* [reported](#), the protestors were accused of “being too loud and disrupting events happening inside the building.” We find these arrests chilling. They are in violation of even the most basic democratic principles of free assembly and free speech.

About the arrest of the two protestors, who were speaking on behalf of Palestinians, Ohio State spokesperson Ben Johnson issued this statement: “Ohio State has an unwavering commitment to freedom of speech and took this action in alignment with our space use rules to provide for the orderly conduct of university business.” We find this statement illogical, and we are alarmed by the shifting goal posts of what counts as a proper space in which to speak at Ohio State, and what

does not. This is an attempt to set new boundaries that will curtail the open, peaceful exchange of ideas and knowledge.

On the night of April 25, 2024, we witnessed even more heinous violations of students' rights. Hundreds of students were peacefully chanting on the South Oval lawn, surrounding a group of praying and chanting Palestinian students who had formed an encampment. As several people (including one of us) witnessed firsthand, the lawn was ultimately surrounded by vans and a carefully constructed police perimeter and lit up by flood lights. [The support circle was then forcibly broken up by at least 70 police officers and state troopers arresting students, one by one.](#)

As was highlighted in our chapter's recent participation in AAUP's [National Day of Action](#), democratic principles are currently under severe threat on college campuses around the country. On April 24, [the national AAUP](#) itself condemned "the crackdown on peaceful dissent occurring this week at Columbia, NYU, and other universities nationwide."

Moreover, as both the national AAUP and our chapter have emphasized over the past few months, many of these threats particularly circulate around [pro-Palestinian speech](#). Students uttering this speech have been demonized. This is all the more horrendous given the racism and hatred often directed at Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims themselves. [Last year, 2023, saw "the highest number of complaints CAIR \[Council on American-Islamic Relations\] has ever recorded in its 30-year history," especially in the final months of the year.](#) Ohio State's rhetoric has exacerbated this hostility and put Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab students at even greater risk.

These latest arrests have been part of an emerging pattern at Ohio State. In another egregious recent development on campus, in March 2024, [Ohio State administrators suddenly put a stop to an authorized University Student Government vote on a BDS initiative](#), twelve hours after the vote had already begun. Like national AAUP leaders, we in AAUP-Ohio State fear that these judgment calls reveal the influence of donors and legislators who do not have colleges' and universities' best interests in mind. Such judgment calls defy values that should be foundational at Ohio State: academic freedom, free speech, and mutual respect.

We call on the university to reinvest in rights and the strength of our students' voices and our own voices. We also call on the university to drop all charges against the members of Ohio State's community who have been arrested for exercising their right to free speech.