



Letter to the ACSA Board - Architects United Against Antisemitism

2 messages

Wed, Mar 5, 2025 at 3:57 PM

To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted]
Bcc: [Redacted]

To the ACSA Board,

I am writing to you as a representative of a broad coalition of architects, designers, and connected professionals called '*Architects United Against Antisemitism*'.

We want to start off by thanking you for doing the right thing and cancelling the proposed Fall 2025 issue of the Journal of Architectural Education. While we respect that there are a wide range of sincerely held perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that it is important to engage in dialogue even with viewpoints that we do not agree with in order to understand (and find empathy with) other perspectives, this call for papers far exceeds any conceivable bounds of good-faith discourse.

Had it proceeded, it would have abused a respected forum for scholarship to explicitly endorse violence and terrorism while verging into antisemitic rhetoric and blood libels. At a time when many Jewish architecture students and faculty are already experiencing shocking incidents of antisemitism on campus, the call for papers seems deliberately aimed at further stoking the fire and creating an intellectualized justification for such discrimination. The framing of the issue was one-sided and wholly absent in serious scholarship, rigor, fact-based argument, and intellectual honesty. It was an effort to politicize and weaponize our field, which should be about being constructive and building solutions to benefit all humanity, not about demonizing and isolating one group.

Each of the guest editors of the paper each have a history of antisemitic activism, with one even being specifically called out by a member of the US congress for "injecting the bigotry and antisemitic conspiracy theories into the discourse on the conflict".

While academic freedom is a value we share and will fight to protect, when this discourse verges into antisemitism and incitement to terror and violence, there is a moral obligation to speak up and act against it. Attached to this email is a letter signed by 700+ professionals, academics, and concerned citizens. We did not have a chance to deliver it before the journal topic was cancelled, but I think it is important for you to understand the objections we had to the framing in this call for papers, and the wide reach of the disgust of many students and members of the profession. The bulk of the signatories were collected in just one week alone and no doubt the numbers would have grown if you did not preemptively take action to switch the topic.

But just because the issue was cancelled does not mean our growing coalition is satisfied. We still **demand from the ACSA full transparency and accountability** as to:

- **How the matter was allowed to get this far.** The call for papers was a misinformed and unsubstantiated work of propaganda posing as scholarship. It was a complete and utter embarrassment for the ACSA to put forth this call for papers with this prompt and these guest editors. What failed in your judgement or processes to not properly vet the way the topic was presented or those entrusted to curate it?
- **What safeguards will be put in place to prevent it from happening again.** This was an assault on our academic and professional values of evidence based-research, inclusion, and safeguarding safety, health, and well-being. What starts with tolerance of discrimination against one group often turns into tolerance of discrimination in general. This proposed issue of the JAE demonstrated that academics in ivory towers can become very detached from both reality on the ground and the impact their words can have. We demand to know what will be done to ensure better judgement in the future.
- **What ACSA will do to roll back the damage already done.** By allowing the libelous charges in the call for papers to be put out unchallenged, and by allowing the JAE editors to portray this recent change of topic as a matter of censorship, the ACSA is continuing to allow the issue to be further exploited for propaganda purposes. ACSA needs to make an unqualified retraction of the Fall 2025 JAE as proposed and make clear the very real and very legitimate concerns raised about it.

I hope that I receive a satisfactory response to the attached letter and those requests. One way or another, it will **not** be the last that you will hear from us as we intend to pursue all possible courses of action to push back at this attempt at intellectualized hate with partners within our field and beyond.

One last note. In contrast to the completely ahistorical and unscholarly approach this in call for papers, any true student of history would understand what this is tantamount to. One century ago, the world saw the widespread abuse of academia in Germany to normalize antisemitic perspectives. After witnessing how the intellectualized dehumanization of a minority group was allowed to metastasize into the horrors of the mass-extirminations that followed, the world said: 'Never Again'. Now is the time to show that we actually mean it. I suggest each and every board member of the ACSA read the classical textbook '*Hitler's Professors*' by Professor Max Weinreich to understand how close their actions were to abetting a very similar demonization of Jews to take place today under the guise of academic discourse. We need to do better and make sure our valued institutions are not being hijacked for nefarious purposes..

Thank you for your attention to this issue and we eagerly await a response.

[Redacted] AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C, CPHD
[Redacted]

 **Journal for Architectural Education Letter.pdf**
262K

Sun, Mar 9, 2025 at 6:26 PM

To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted]
Bcc: [Redacted]

Dear ACSA Board,

I wanted to follow up on my previous email after listening in to the board meeting last Wednesday as an observer.

Firstly, I do understand the feeling that many expressed at the meeting of feeling 'under attack' by the new administration. As an educator and professional specializing in environmentally responsive design, I find the assaults on the science of climate and efforts to mitigate it are extremely troubling. Friends and colleagues that I have worked with at the GSA, DOE, and NIST find themselves suddenly out of a job or having to change the language in their work. There may be many issues on which we would be allies if it was not for the troubling position that the ACSA has staked out, promoting what is basically an antisemitic screed posing as scholarship.

What the ACSA board failed to appreciate was that many Jewish students, academics, and practitioners have felt 'under attack' for quite some time. We have experienced incidents in our schools where students have been singled out or sabotaged by professors solely on the basis of their Israeli and/or Jewish identity. There are a lot more professors and staff that have been intimidated and threatened into silence.

The 'Palestine' issue was itself a suppression of our voices in favor of promoting a specific agenda or point of view that completely negated ours. We would have had zero problems with an issue that examined all sides of this matter. But they took sides and that, in and of itself, was problematic. Furthermore, as we noted previously in our letter, the way that they took that position with libelous claims and endorsement of terror and violence was even more problematic. It's a complete fallacy to now transfer blame to the current administration for supposedly suppressing certain topics. There is a big difference between having a belief and antagonizing/harassing others because their beliefs differ from yours. It is very troubling that you on the board cannot see the difference and appear to tacitly support this behavior.

The information and timeline that you presented on Wednesday is also concerning for some additional reasons:

- Your general council advised that the call for papers meets the IRHA definition of antisemitism, yet you allowed it to proceed. You can't say that you didn't know.
- That in September, ACSA Executive Director sent the JAE editorial board a series of questions and concerns about the issue that were not addressed, and again the issue was allowed to proceed unaltered. You can't say this escaped your attention.

- That it took the ACSA board feeling threatened by legal action against themselves individually to decide to cancel the issue, not because it was anti semitic, one-sided, or glorifying violence and terrorism. You can't say your actions were moral or principled.
- Despite the acknowledgement that the call for papers meets the definition of antisemitism the ACSA has 'invited JAE editorial board members individually and as a collective to meet to discuss paths toward a working relationship and opportunities for external collaborations to publish the issue'. Rest assured, we **will continue to hold you** responsible if this is published in another forum with your help.

I also find it extremely problematic that in your presentation of this matter that you apologized for the hurt you caused to the people behind this antisemitic propaganda piece, not to the people that you have hurt by allowing the call for papers to be issued, and for not clearly stating the trouble with the language but rather trying to pass off the cancellation as a matter of censorship.

The conversation Wednesday was quite tone deaf and a sign that academics in ivory towers can provide such a filter bubble that they really lose touch with reality and the impact of their words and actions on wider society. One commenter laughingly called the issue 'punching up'. There are less than 16 million Jews in the entire world (still under the population pre-Holocaust), 8 million of those live in Israel. Inciting anger and delegitimization of their very existence could not be a more extreme case of punching down. And as for the commenter that defended against very valid questions about the impartiality of the peer review process by saying she was unapologetically 'liberal', there can be no more illiberal position than actively working to deny one group the same rights and consideration that you portray yourself to champion for others... that is simply hypocrisy and an indication of an irrational hatred toward that group.

In the board meeting, you offered to have a follow up conversation with those concerned about the cancellation of the issue. I hope that you will include **all** perspectives in that follow up conversation and are not intending to have that meeting be a sanctimonious echo chamber of supporters of the call for papers.

I also hope to receive a response from any of you to my last email with our group's three requests, and a response to the additional matters I raised here. Cathi said in the board meeting that she will respond to each email, and I hope that does not only mean the ones on the other side of this debate.

We will continue to work with our growing coalition and external partners to bring light to this issue and demand full accountability from this board.

[REDACTED] AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C, CPHD
[REDACTED]

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