



Statement of the Faculty Senate Council at the Board of Trustees meeting of March 22, 2007, concerning the January 23 campus visit of President Carter, presented by the Senate chair.

The Senate Council thanks Mr. Kay for the opportunity to speak to the Board about President Carter's visit, which caused great controversy beforehand and afterwards. The Council wants to outline chronology, express its concerns, point at implications for our mission, and suggest follow-up. We plan a 15 minute presentation, followed by discussion.

Some background: The Senate has 16 members, elected by the Faculty. Four of us serve as its executive Council, and I'm its Chair. The Senate, Council and I are responsible, says the Faculty Handbook, for representing the Faculty.

President Carter's visit followed "Voices of Palestine", the exhibit of drawings by adolescents from the Occupied Territories, which was closed by the administration after only days. Many faculty members objected to this decision. There were concerns about context, civility and curatorship, but also about free expression and political content.

Last autumn, I suggested to several senior university leaders that we invite a prominent and respected speaker, in an academically time-honored format, to discuss this difficult political content, and the substantive issues raised by "Voices of Palestine". These suggestions were deflected, disparaged, and dismissed, with responses that "we need to move on", and that no administration action was planned.

Undeterred, on November 14 I wrote to President Carter, asking if he would be interested in speaking at Brandeis. He initially declined. On January 3, following articles in the *Boston Globe*, I spoke to Phil Wise at the Carter Center, suggesting that President Carter clarify his intentions. On January 4, President Carter contacted the University administration and the faculty-student invitation committee, and expressed his interest in speaking.

On January 5, the committee met with President Reinharz. He informed the committee that he would not publicly participate by introducing President Carter. The administration's designated representative proposed possible dates, which were forwarded to Carter in the invitation. Five days later, Carter selected January 23. Then President Reinharz noted that he had a scheduling conflict.

Many colleagues have communicated their view that the Carter event was the greatest thing they've seen in years. A staff person remarked, "Everyone is talking about Brandeis!" Media coverage was comprehensive and international. Brandeis was lauded in major articles in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, portrayed as a university where Mideast issues can be discussed openly and with civility.

Our students distinguished Brandeis by their respect and insight. Leftist students heard what they say, often to deaf ears, spoken with authority. Conservative students knew that pointed questions were asked. President Carter received standing ovations, entering and leaving. This was university education at its most exciting, at its finest: difficult political content, expressed by a statesman who brought context.

Brandeis Professor Robin Miller wrote in the *New York Times*:

[I]t was inspiring to witness the openness and impressive civility of a group of upward of a thousand students, each of whom cares deeply about these issues and who, as Mr. Carter himself emphasized, represent the future.

Dr. Michael Berenbaum, formerly Projects Director at Washington's Holocaust Museum, told New York's *Jewish Week*:

I think everyone was surprised at how well he was received. That may be the most important part of the story. Instead of coming as partisans, they listened to Carter attentively, asked tough questions and gave him an audience. The Jewish community may have a more significant generation gap than they understand between what young people are prepared to hear and what older activists are prepared to hear.

Berenbaum's generational divide deserves the Board's consideration. Years ago, Kingman Brewster encouraged his Board to diversify Yale's student body, to better serve the nation's future leadership. A Board member said to him, "Look around this room—do you see any people like that?" Our students showed their leadership during Carter's visit. Can we follow their example?

Our faculty colleagues have wide ranging views on politics, but we agree on the university's unique role as a place for free inquiry. Brandeis Professor Jonathan Sarna said (in New York's *Jewish Week*):

The American Jewish community understands the visit by Carter to Brandeis to be reflecting a *heksher* (a stamp of approval) from the university... The faculty views it very differently, that Brandeis is a forum; that views are uttered in that forum, some of which we agree with and some of which we don't... It is that gap in perception that seems to require greater dialogue between the two entities so at least one understands the other.

How do we move the University forward? Here are some questions and suggestions.

1. How does the University capitalize on this significant success?

We need more events like this one. Events that enrich the Brandeis experience for the entire community, reflecting the many disciplines that make Brandeis a great university—Harry Truman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Leonard Bernstein, and Jimmy Carter.

Such moments of excitement, publicity, and intellectual sustenance will attract students to Brandeis. We put out a "viewbook" every year about University life, sent to thousands of high school students across the country. The Carter event belongs in that viewbook, showing prospective undergraduates that this is a politically happening place where there will be more happenings.

Undergraduates will remember the Carter visit for the rest of their lives. It encouraged allegiance from our students, and support of alumni. When we expose students to the diversity of ideas in the world, and do it well, the result is a lifetime bond with the University. But recent signals from Development aren't encouraging: Carter was "over a month ago" and "we have to move on."

The University's commitment to the *diversity of ideas* is an inevitable, welcome consequence of the *diversity of students*. A diversified investment strategy, paired with a diversified development strategy, is equally important to our well-being.

2. *The faculty would appreciate a public reaffirmation of the University's commitment to its mission statement.*

The faculty and students who organized the Carter event were profoundly motivated by the ideas of nonsectarian free inquiry. Our mission statement expresses “independence from any doctrine or government”.

The University's ambivalent or critical remarks about President Carter's visit, including the mailing of an editorial from the *Boston Jewish Advocate* excoriating Carter, do not facilitate our mission. We have a limited bandwidth to express our mission to the world. Internal and external statements from senior leadership need to be consistent.

A university is a special place for scholarship, teaching people to think for themselves and to be responsible citizens in our democratic society. Those intellectual commitments characterize the University's service to the *greater* community. “The whole point,” Justice Brandeis said of his Court opinions, “is to educate the country.”

3. *Can we learn from the Carter visit that better communication is needed between students, faculty, and senior leadership?*

We're optimistic about more face-to-face meetings between these groups—we're having a meeting like that right now. But meetings do not guarantee understanding—meetings are only a means to understanding, and we've all been to meetings where nothing is discussed, or there are no consequent results. The real challenge is to ensure that concerns can be expressed, heard, and then reflected in the actions of those who are listening.

Communication without understanding was a key problem with both “Voices of Palestine” and the Carter visit. It brought a loss of trust and respect that we need to repair. We need to develop healthier institutional instincts, ones that are more receptive, even to political messages with which we disagree, with a confidence that we provide room for differing views.

To ensure that we further this critical and intellectual inquiry that is crucial at our nonsectarian University, the Board, administration, students, and faculty need to listen to and help each other.

Students need to be heard. We counted on them during the Carter event, and they showed that they could be trusted. We need to communicate better with them, and create more occasions where their maturity can be counted on, and enhanced.

Faculty need to be heard. There needs to be respect for what they think and do, and their commitments must be underlined publicly by the senior leadership in defining and carrying out the mission of the University.

In conclusion, what we express today is a significant, though incomplete, description of what faculty think. This begs the reply, “Thank you for sharing your thoughts.” But we're asking for something else: for transitions, for careful, significant changes, leading Brandeis to commitments in the institution's long-term interests. “We have to move on” is necessary. We're ready to help figure out how to move forward.

Thank you for listening, and we'd be pleased to answer your questions.

STEPHEN CECCHETTI, *International Business School*

SETH FRADEN, *Physics*

HARRY MAIRSON (CHAIR), *Computer Science*

DAVID RAKOWSKI, *Music*