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CC:

Susan Poser, Hofstra University President; president@hofstra.edu

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Anthony Basile, AAUP Chapter President; anthony.basile@hofstra.edu

Dear Ms. Cunningham,

The Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) is a coalition of faculty members from across the country and across the ideological spectrum who are committed to upholding the principles of academic freedom.

We are writing to protest the investigation of Prof. Richard Himelfarb on the charge of harassment. During an online faculty meeting, Himelfarb opposed the designation by Prof. Santiago Slabodsky of two courses as “Jewish Studies.” Responding to Slabodsky’s explanation or defense of the designation, Himelfarb employed the expression “word salad.” Slabodsky filed a complaint for “unlawful national origin discrimination under Title VII.” Hofstra University’s administration, ignoring its own guarantees of free speech and academic freedom as well as its own definition of “harassment,” found “reasonable cause” that Slabodsky’s civil rights were violated. The case against Himelfarb was referred to the University Harassment Board. A hearing is scheduled for August. The AFA joins FIRE in urging Hofstra to immediately shut down this investigation. Himelfarb may be an outspoken faculty member, but all *in the service* of the administration, and certainly not deserving of its harassment.

There is no need to repeat the thorough and well-reasoned letter by FIRE (June 5, 2026). The AFA joins in the analysis and seconds the concerns set forth therein. Two points, however, merit emphasizing. There is no conceivable justification for finding “reasonable cause” to believe that harassment occurred where Himelfarb was performing his duty as a faculty member by commenting on the merits of a colleague’s proposal and where the relevant behavior involves two words on a single occasion.



The Faculty Statutes of Hofstra University guarantee “full freedom” to “teachers” not only in their “research” and the “teaching,” but also, *a fortiori*, in carrying out the work of providing counsel to and oversight of the administration, a task which the university itself has entrusted to them. In November 2025, at a regularly scheduled Zoom meeting of all faculty members of Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Science, Himelfarb and other professors objected to Slabodsky’s proposal to designate under the rubric of “JWST,” i.e., Jewish Studies, a course on Revolution and another on Conspiracy Theories. According to Slabodsky’s complaint, “A small group argued that my two new courses ‘did not have enough Jewish content.’” When he failed to respond to the criticism but begged the question by invoking his expertise in the field of Jewish Studies, unpersuaded, Himelfarb called Slabodsky’s explanation a “word salad.” Himelfarb intended what he said, namely, that his colleague’s explanation was unresponsive as well as incoherent. The notion that Himelfarb was impugning Slabodsky’s heritage is untenable.

Furthermore, even if Himelfarb’s words do not win points for kindness, they certainly do not constitute harassment. According to the *Hofstra University Harassment Policy*, “Harassment is the creation of a hostile or intimidating environment in which verbal or physical conduct based on one’s protected characteristics or beliefs, because of its severity and/or persistence is likely to significantly interfere with an individual’s work ... or enjoyment of other University opportunities” How could reasonable and reasoning administrators conclude that two words created a “hostile or intimidating environment.” In addition, how could they think that Himelfarb’s “word salad” refers to a “protected characteristic[,]” as Hofstra’s definition requires? The term obviously refers to the quality of an *argument*. Finally, how could administrators conclude that Slabodsky suffered “interference” in his work or enjoyment of some other University opportunity? His new courses go forward but merely under a different rubric.

It is lamentable that Slabodsky interpreted Himelfarb’s criticism, according to his complaint, as a “discriminatory statement based on my accent and native language.” Although no one can be held accountable for Slabodsky’s subjective experience, Himelfarb, nevertheless, offered to make a public apology—vetted by Slabodsky—expressing his regret over the unintended and unforeseen effect of his words. Himelfarb’s effort to go out of his way to demonstrate the absence of invidious intent was rebuffed. The Harassment Review Board is scheduled to proceed on August 11 to 13.

The AFA joins FIRE in urging Hofstra to cease this blatant violation of Himelfarb’s academic freedom by abandoning an investigation into harassment which has no support in the facts.