



April 17, 2026

Peter Kilpatrick
Office of the President
Catholic University of America
620 Michigan Avenue NE
Washington, DC 20064

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail (office-of-the-president@cua.edu)

Dear President Kilpatrick:

FIRE¹ appreciates Catholic University of America's response to our March 18 letter, but we were disappointed that CUA declined to respond to our substantive arguments. CUA's continued insistence that Students Supporting Israel may not host its events unless it presents speakers representing "both sides" contravenes both CUA policy and Middle States Commission on Higher Education's accreditation standards. We again strongly urge CUA to approve SSI's event requests and assure students that the university will not condition event approval on student's willingness to arrange for and host speakers opposed to their own viewpoint.

As you may recall from our previous correspondence, SSI sought approval in January to host two events on campus this semester. The first event addressed the rise in antisemitism and the second was about the building of Israel's security fence.² CUA denied both requests, citing its Presentation Policy's "balanced presentation" provision.³ It invited SSI to resubmit the requests for the events after it added speakers to each who would present the other side of the issue.⁴

As we previously explained, SSI's freedom of speech is protected by both CUA policy⁵ and CUA's obligations as a MSCHE-accredited institution, which require CUA to demonstrate a

¹ As you may recall from our previous correspondence, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit that defends freedom of speech on and off America's college campuses.

² Felipe Avila, *Student Organization Speaker and Special Guest Request Form for Congressman Randy Fine*, THE NEST (Jan. 19, 2026, 7:50 PM) (on file with author); Felipe Avila, *Student Organization Speaker and Special Guest Request Form for Col. (Res.) Dr. Dany Tirza*, THE NEST (Jan. 19, 2026, 7:30 PM) (on file with author).

³ *Speaker Request Form for Congressman Fine*, *supra* note 2; *Speaker Request Form for Col. Tirza*, *supra* note 2.

⁴ *Speaker Request Form for Congressman Fine*, *supra* note 2 ("Consistent with our Presentations Policy we can consider approval for this topic and speaker as long as there is balanced presentation."); *Speaker Request Form for Col. Tirza*, *supra* note 2.

⁵ *Demonstrations Policy*, Policy Statement, CATHOLIC UNIV. OF AM. (reviewed Jul. 14, 2019), <https://policies.catholic.edu/safety/demonstrations.html> [<https://perma.cc/5JUB-UH7E>]; *Political*

“commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, [and] freedom of expression.”⁶ That freedom extends to SSI’s choice of speakers for its events. Forcing SSI to host another speaker’s message, even in the service of providing a greater range of views, is compelled speech and inconsistent with CUA’s promise to protect students’ free speech.⁷ Having made these free speech commitments, it is no more appropriate for CUA to require Students *Supporting* Israel to host speakers who *oppose* Israel than it would be for the federal or state government to force CUA to couple its institutional pro-Catholic messages with anti-Catholic viewpoints.

Yet, CUA has continued to insist that SSI must host speakers on “both sides” to ensure a “thoughtful conversation” before it will approve the events.⁸ But the “balanced presentation” policy that CUA cites as the authority for its decisions only requires an event to include “speakers representing both sides” when the invited speaker’s views conflict with the “clear and unambiguous official teaching” of the Roman Catholic Church.⁹ If CUA considers (1) the cause of countering antisemitism and (2) supporting Israel’s construction of a security fence to be contrary to the Church’s teaching—and thus within the bounds of the written policy—it should say so. Its continued refusal to explain why the “balanced presentation” requirement applies to SSI’s planned events, in light of its documented history of allowing other student organizations to host events focused on one view of a hotly contested political or social issue,¹⁰ strongly suggests CUA may be selectively and pretextually enforcing the requirement to improperly censor SSI’s events.¹¹

Activities Policy, Policy Statement, CATHOLIC UNIV. OF AM. (rev. Oct. 5, 2022), <https://policies.catholic.edu/governance/politicalactivities.html> [<https://perma.cc/4HZZ-7LBQ>].

⁶ *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*, Standard II: Ethics and Integrity, MIDDLE STATES COMM’N ON HIGHER ED. (14th ed.), <https://www.msche.org/standards/fourteenth-edition/>.

⁷ *Rumsfeld v. Found. for Acad. & Inst. Rts., Inc.*, 547 U.S. 47, 63 (2006); see also *Wooley v. Maynard*, 430 U.S. 705, 714 (1977) (“[T]he right of freedom of thought ... includes both the right to speak freely and right to refrain from speaking at all.”); *Hurley v. Irish-Am. Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Grp. of Bos.*, 515 U.S. 557, 573 (1995) (“‘Since all speech inherently involves choices of what to say and what to leave unsaid,’ one important manifestation of the principle of free speech is that one who chooses to speak may also decide ‘what not to say.’” (internal citations omitted)).

⁸ Sean Salai, *Free-speech group FIRE blasts Catholic University for blocking antisemitism speakers*, WASH. TIMES (Mar. 24, 2026), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/mar/24/fire-free-speech-group-blasts-catholic-university-blocking/>.

⁹ *Presentations Policy*, Policy for Presentations and Balanced Programs, CATHOLIC UNIV. OF AM. (rev. Apr. 17, 2023), <https://policies.catholic.edu/students/studentlife/organizations/presentations.html> [<https://perma.cc/7BHS-63VQ>].

¹⁰ Event Notice, *Dems Speaker Night: Amanda Riddle*, THE NEST (Feb. 10, 2026, 8:00 PM) (on file with author); Event Notice, *Dems Speaker Night: Payton Ziegler*, THE NEST (Nov. 18, 2025, 7:30 PM) (on file with author); Event Notice, *College Republicans Kick-Off Interest Meeting: ft. Special Guest American Moment CEO Nick Solheim*, THE NEST (Sept. 8, 2025, 7:00 PM) (on file with author); Flyer, *What is Genocide? Dr. Martin Shaw, Sociologist of Global Politics, War and Genocide Speaker*, THE OLIVE BRANCH (Oct. 29, 2024, 1:00 PM) (affixed with “Approved by Catholic University of America” stamp) (on file with author); Event Notice, *Dr. Monica Miller: Author, Activist, Theologian*, THE NEST (Oct. 17, 2023, 8:00 PM) (discussing pro-life activism) (on file with author); Event Notice, *College Democrats: A Conversation with Representative Maxwell Frost*, THE NEST (Oct. 19, 2023, 7:00 PM) (on file with author); Event Notice, *A Conversation with Congresswoman Kat Cammack*, THE NEST (Nov. 15, 2022, 7:00 PM) (on file with author).

¹¹ *Frederick Douglass Found., Inc. v. District of Columbia*, 82 F.4th 1122, 1150 (D.C. Cir. 2023) (“[S]elective enforcement of a neutral and facially constitutional law may run afoul of the First Amendment if the government’s prosecutorial choices turn on the content or viewpoint of speech.”); *Bus. Leaders In Christ v.*

A more recent occurrence reinforces that impression. On April 8, CUA refused SSI permission to open to the public its upcoming event on countering the “groyper” movement because “these events should not be seen as an open invitation to whoever from the outside community wants to attend.”¹² Given the consistency with which CUA has allowed student organizations to host public events in the past, the absence of any university policy restricting public events, and CUA’s failure to provide a coherent reason to reject SSI’s request, this latest refusal suggests CUA is selectively enforcing an unwritten policy to censor events held by SSI that it has not applied to other student organizations. It should be a simple matter for CUA to provide an alternate explanation, if one exists. If one does not exist, CUA must immediately correct this behavior.

CUA is currently undergoing the process of reaccreditation. Should CUA persist in its inexplicable and arbitrary restrictions on SSI’s speech, FIRE is prepared to raise our concerns regarding CUA’s continued violation of the accreditation standards directly with MSCHE. We request a substantive response to this letter no later than May 1, confirming that CUA will approve SSI’s event requests and publicly assure students that the administration will allow all student organizations to host events and speakers on topics of their choosing.

Sincerely,



Jessie Appleby
Program Counsel, Campus Rights Advocacy

Cc: Matthew C. Dolan, General Counsel

Univ. of Iowa, 991 F.3d 969, 985–86 (8th Cir. 2021) (selective enforcement of a facially neutral non-discrimination policy against a student group based on its views violates the group’s free speech rights).

¹² Email from Steve Kreider, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Student Engagement, to Felipe Avila, student (Apr. 8, 2026, 9:45 AM) (on file with author).