

Concerning Recent Events on Our Campus

We, the non-management faculty and staff of the History Department at Stony Brook University (SUNY), condemn the disproportionate police force used against Stony Brook students, recent alumni, and faculty on our campus; their arrest, the seizure of their phones, laptops, and other personal property; and the suspensions of students and closure of dormitories, cafeterias, and other campus services to them.

We call on the university to take measures to restore the right to nonviolent protest and the practice of faculty governance that this administration has eroded.

We are troubled that several units were called to campus – University Police, New York State Police, and Suffolk County Police – and that the University President claims that the police acted “professionally and with restraint.” We have seen evidence to the contrary—video recordings of the arrests of Stony Brook students and of colleagues who assembled with the students to bear witness to their protest. They were subsequently held in handcuffs for seven and half hours.

Faculty observers note that student demonstrations were nonviolent. As to university claims that some students have been directly harassed, targeted, and threatened by protesters, we call on the university to present evidence of such criminal acts and guideline violations, if it is to be used as a basis for amassing police and arresting protesters. We forcefully condemn harassment, targeting, and threats; we also remind the administration that the First Amendment protects freedom of speech, even distasteful speech, and that anonymous allegations do not meet a standard of proof, and collective punishment does not constitute due process.

The members of our department are not always unanimous on complex matters, but we cherish the spirit of debate and dialogue that is essential in higher learning and in a democratic and open society. As historians, we agree upon the need for evidence, the rejection of conspiracy theories and scapegoating, and dehumanization of those with whom we do not agree. We seek answers from our administration and reaffirm our commitment to protecting our students and colleagues who exercise their rights to free speech, freedom of assembly, and nonviolent protest.

These rights are critical to the mission of a public university such as Stony Brook and should be cherished and defended.

We question the university’s reliance on Enterprise Risk Management (ERM), an organization created under this present administration with the stated aim to provide surveillance, intelligence-gathering, and security to the university with little to no input from faculty, students, and staff outside the very top levels of administration. ERM bills itself as a [“national model,”](#) but we are extremely alarmed about the lack of transparency and accountability surrounding ERM. We ask the administration to de-escalate and work towards the following objectives in this tense and divisive political moment.

We call for transparency about the fate of arrested or otherwise targeted students and faculty; dropping all charges against them and expunging police and academic records; allowing students to return to campus; restoring their phones and other personal property to them; and ensuring adequate documentation and community oversight of the university's disciplinary responses to student protests.

Submitted May 5, 2024