

## Minutes:

- I. Call to order
  - A. President Jack Leff called to order the Meeting of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate Meeting at 5:30pm on **October 7, 2021** on Zoom.
- II. Sign-in
  - A. Senators signed in via Google Forms.
- III. Approval of agenda
  - A. President Leff read this Meeting's agenda. The agenda was approved.
- IV. Approval of October 7, 2021 Minutes
  - A. The Minutes were approved.
- V. Housekeeping
- VI. Commission reports
- VII. Old Business
  - A. GPSS Resolution 2021-22N1
    1. President Leff read the Resolution to divest from fossil fuels and called for a vote. The vote passed.
  - B. GPSS Resolution 2021-22N2
    1. President Leff read the Resolution to divest from carceral corporations and called for a vote. The vote passed.
  - C. GPSS Resolution 2021-22N3
    1. President Leff read the Resolution to divest in compliance with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions Movement and called for a vote. The vote passed.
- VIII. New Business
  - A. GPSS Resolutions 2021-22 O-V
    1. A Senator moved to delay the first readings of these Resolutions to the next Meeting (November 4, 2021) due to time constraints. The motion carried.
  - B. New business for next week is on the [website](#).
- IX. Adjournment
  - A. President Leff adjourned the meeting.

### Vote:

N1: 51 yes, 2 no, 2 abstain  
N2: 51 yes, 2 no, 2 abstain  
N3: 32 yes, 13 no, 10 abstain

### Open Forum

**COMMENT:** Internet & Media Safety brief: <https://techworkerhandbook.org/>

**COMMENT: (Transportation Committee Discussion)** Scooters would not create quite as many problems if they had to utilize the bike lanes -- they cause the most problems on the sidewalks.

**COMMENT:** Some student areas still not offering DIY refills on coffee after covid. Can we get this back? We have known that covid is aerosol spread for awhile now.

**5:30 PRESIDENT LEFF NOTICE:** Last call for business before Robert's Rules are being enforced.

[No further matters raised]

### **Start of Business**

**MINUTES ADOPTION:** 42 yes, 2 abstain

**Director Palmersheim Travel Fund >** Instructions coming soon, here:  
<https://gpss.vt.edu/programs/TFP.html>.

**Sen. QUESTION:** Does it have to be used for travel specifically?

**Director Palmersheim RESPONSE:** No. It can be applied to any cost of presenting at a conference.

**Sen. QUESTION:** Do we have access to this if we're not a UCSO?

**President Leff RESPONSE:** Yes. It's independent of the GSBB

**Sen. QUESTION:** Do we have to present? Or is it also for attendance?

**President Leff RESPONSE:** You must be actively presenting or participating in the conference at this time.

**Sen. QUESTION:** Will we still get the money if the advisor decides to reimburse us?

**Director Palmershiem RESPONSE:** Yes. We will just pay the department back instead.

**President Leff REMINDERS:** Roberts Rules, format changes, Google Form for communicating with department, review on Senator responsibilities to communicate with their departments.

### **COMMISSION UPDATES**

#### **RESOLUTION 2021-22 N1: Divest from Fossil Fuels**

[No additional comments]

#### **RESOLUTION 2021-22 N2: Divest from Carceral Corporations**

[No additional comments]

**Chair Switch and Strict Roberts Rules:** Vice President Fox now Presiding as Chair of the GPSS. President Leff steps down as the Sponsor of the Resolution.

### **RESOLUTION 2021-22 N3: Divest in Compliance with BDS**

VP Fox presents another reminder of Robert's Rules including main motions and subsidiary motions.

New Letters Read (See below)

**Sen. POINT OF INFORMATION:** Is this the only time I get to speak? Or can I ask a question and speak later?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** We are only following the speaking time limits (3 for point / question, 5 for motion, 1 minute for President Leff), but you can return to the podium as many times as you need to respond or ask questions.

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** What happens to a grad student with an Israeli degree? How does this specifically impact graduate students at VT?

[No Senator responses]

**President Leff RESPONSE:** This is specifically focusing on the VT Foundation, which is why it is being paired with N1 and N2. It's about what the foundation funds. So, that leads into more complicated questions because the foundation does control a large percentage of the endowment that are answered on the BDS website that are in the appendix documents of the resolution. To the second one, we are a land grant institution that takes its financial, moral, ethical, educational commitment very seriously. As grad students, part of that ethical obligation is considering the global tax of the institutions we affiliate with and our role in those affiliations. So, this resolution deeply impacts student life and support for Palestinian students, who are denied entry into the US or who feel unsafe on campus, or anti-Zionist Jews like myself who feel unsafe on campus because of the strong Zionist political leanings that are suppressing speech on campus.

[Follow-up solicited, none raised]

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** Will this make it more challenging to collaborate with Israel institutions or publish to Israeli journals?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** We are focused on the VT Foundation only for this Resolution, so these impacts would be outside of the scope of this Resolution as Jack noted previously and in the explanation of the VT Foundation [see minutes from 10/7].

[Follow-up solicited, none raised]

**Grad. POINT OF INFORMATION:** I just wanted to discuss that the attention that has drawn onto this resolution has brought a huge spike in the anti-Semitism that Jewish students have been feeling. And again, it's not just being felt by one specific sub-category of Jewish students, not just people who are associated with the Hillel is a majority of students spread out. And there have been more incident reports by Jewish students of antisemitism to the campus then. Previous semesters. Just since this resolution has come into discussion, this is a response to how it affects Virginia Tech students. The question that was posed earlier, I just wanted to point that out.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** I find it striking how many of these con statements don't mention Palestinians. Almost as if they're not seen worthy of moral consideration.  
[12 Senator comments of support]

[Follow-up solicited, none raised]

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** There is extensive debate and differences in student experiences. For the culture here at VT, how would this Resolution impact it? Would it improve the culture towards Palestinian students or Jewish students? Because I am unclear what we're going to achieve.

**Grad. FOLLOW UP:** It has a negligible impact on the middle east and a major impact on Jewish students on campus. That is why they aren't mentioning Palestinians because this is not having an impact on them

[Follow-up solicited]

**Sen. RESPONSE:** This definitely impacts students on our campus.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Palestinian students on campus would beg to differ.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Palestinian led groups say they feel safer on campus with BDS.

**President Leff RESPONSE:** BDS takes its lineage from anti-apartheid movement towards South African in the 1970s and 80s. It's aiming for a very similar goal: stop human rights abuses towards Palestinians and the curtailing of academic freedom of Palestinians. Join forces with other universities to pressure Israel. These moves were made in the anti-apartheid SA movement to divest until the human rights abuses stopped. This helped to liberate black South Africans and gave them academic freedom. We are seeking solidarity with these other institutions.

**Grad. FOLLOW:** He's talking about the effectiveness of BDS and what it's doing well this quote from the New York Times is an example that BDS is counter-productive in resolving conflict because it rejects Israel's right to exist in spite of settled international law and encourages Palestinians to insist on the right to return...

**VP Fox POINT OF ORDER:** I don't mean to cut you off there, but you need to request permission if you're going to read an extended document before the Senate. And that's a motion that needs to be made by a Senator on your behalf. So, you can stop reading or request someone to motion for it to be read in the Senate.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Well you do mean to cut her off, for breaking the rules.

[Senator Motions on behalf of Grad student]

**VP Fox VOTE:** Please use green-checks if you would like the graduate student to read this document and find it necessary to this discussion or red-x if you do not think this needs to be read.

**>> MOTION to Read from the NYT Article DENIED >> 10 yes ; 14 no ; 7 abstain**

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Great, so I'll give you time to wrap up your point, but you are not allowed to read the document before the Senate. Please put the link in the chat if you would like it to be considered.

[<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/27/world/middleeast/bds-israel-boycott-antisemitic.html>]

**Grad FOLLOW:** I just do want to say like, if we can't quote facts this is just kinda like an opinion debate. So we should be talking about facts but that's just my own opinion.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** An opinion piece is not a fact [3 Senators support]

**Grad FOLLOW:** Moving on. I do want to say that like, if BDS movement ever came true, it would quickly turn into like a nightmare for the Jewish population. And a majority like Palestinian State. There are current trends that would most likely be under. Islamic leadership, such as Hamas. And it would not be like a peaceful state....

**Sen. POINT OF ORDER:** Monologue and germaneness. What does this have to do with the VT Foundation?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Quick pause, sorry. The Senate would like to know how this is relevant to the Resolution, so if you could clarify that before moving on.

**Grad FOLLOW:** We need to understand the purpose and what it would actually cause into action if it were to be successful so I think the purpose of and possibility of success and what would happen is relevant to this conversation because if it's ineffective or if it's actual solution is more harmful than good. We need to talk about this. It's not just what it's affecting here, it's like the overall outcome is BDS.

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** So, I'm going to sustain the point of order in this case because

your point is supposed to be about the content of the Resolution, not necessarily the effect. Specifically about the VT Foundation. If you have a particular line of the Resolution or area you would like to draw our attention to that you feel is not being presented factually or accurately with the evidence you have in hand, then you can direct our attention to that. And there is a line of Senators that would like to respond, so I'll give you 30 seconds to wrap up your point, but then we will move on.

**Grad FOLLOW:** I mean, I think that the actual resolution it has an effect, the fact on students effect on the world. It has an impact. So I think just looking at like the specific points and not looking at the overall meaning of BDS. It's kind of like railroading this whole conversation, like that's just not fair. You need to look at every aspect of every discussion you can't just pinpoint things that you want to talk about and not talk about the bigger picture of what it means.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** The point of the conversation is to talk about the resolution. [3 Senators support]

**Sen. RESPONSE:** I feel like some people don't understand the point or procedures of this senate. First readings and open for a are for reading out loud and responses by the public, at which point those discussions are meant to be taken out to the senators' constituents for discussion and consideration, AT WHICH POINT, the senators are expected to bring those interests of said constituents to the second reading. SECOND readings are for the expressions of those interests and for specific CONTENT discussions. And then Votes. [4 Senators support]

[Follow-up solicited, none provided]

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** Did the writers of this Resolution consider that the co-founder of BDS is still active running the movement and can be seen on video stating that antisemitism isn't an issue in the world? And two, on the list of committees on National BDS committee is an umbrella organization that contains three groups designated as terrorist organizations in the US. Did the writers consider how this meshes and how we will associate with this movement?

[Follow- up solicited, none provided]

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** I don't think the Senate can account for the mental states and knowing of individuals who are not us. So, I'm not quite sure how to comment on that effectively. But if you would like to introduce additional evidence into the chat for consideration, I'll include them in the minutes.

**Sen. MOTIONS for evidence to be submitted > seconded.** [No evidence was submitted by the initial person who spoke]

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** I had a question about 'germaneness'. Am I correct in hearing that the effect of the Resolution was not relevant to the discussion?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Yes. The discussion should be focused on the content of the Resolution. If there is a question about a line in the resolution or a phrasing that is particularly anti-semitic.

We can amend the content of the Resolution, but it needs to be specifically focused on the Resolution to make those changes. Or, you can be responding to a motion and must be specifically focused on the content of the motion itself. Does that clarify?

**Sen. FOLLOW:** I guess? I don't understand how the effect of a Resolution isn't relevant to the debate? That's where I'm confused.

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** So, the broad impact of the Resolution was primarily discussed and debated for everybody at the first reading. If someone wanted to kill the Resolution at that time, that was the time to do so. Now that we're effectively into debating the content of the Resolution, we're passed that. Now we're looking at whether or not the content of this Resolution is antisemitic or this line or this paragraph is being presented, and we can discuss and fix those specific elements. We normally try to ensure the second resolution is specifically focused on the content of the Resolution and Implementing what we're talking about here.

**Sen. FOLLOW:** It was my understanding that the two readings we were allowed adequate time to debate on the Resolution. And that the point of germane is to make sure it's focused on the Resolution itself. I don't understand how the effect of a resolution is not relevant to discussion and I understand your point of the first reading was to decide whether or not we wanted it but it doesn't make sense that only the first reading can be discussing if a Resolution should be passed, but maybe I'm confused.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** In order to germanely discuss the effect of the resolution, you must couch the discussion of the effect in terms of the resolution's language and its stated goals and commitments. The content. The language. What is said.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Yeah it's especially for this because of the number of monologues we had last time.

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** If you have a motion for something you would like specifically that's actionable or you would like to debate the way germaneness is being applied here or how the Resolution is being considered in accordance with precedent, then we can certainly put that motion to the floor for a vote. But that's what I mean by Resolution-focused, not a discussion on things that may or may not be pertinent. So, if you have a proposition for changing that or debating that right now, please motion for it.

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** If we continue this format moving forward, can we write down somewhere that the first reading should be an impact reading before moving on to discuss the resolution itself? Once we move on to the content, we are assuming that the impacts are understood by everyone in attendance.

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Do you think that we did not have sufficient time to hear the impacts in our previous meeting?

**Sen. FOLLOW:** Completely, I completely do. But procedure-wise, if we're doing this going forward a rule needs to be framed that way.

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Right, thanks. This is the point of having the meeting this way versus the first reading and why we don't normally enjoy doing the meeting this way because it is more restricted. But given the concerns on floor time and impartiality and focus on the Resolution itself, this has been enacted as a one-time-only move. If you would like to drop these rules and return to our normal format, you may motion for that at this time.

**Sen. FOLLOW:** Nope. Not if this is only for this Resolution.

[Responses solicited, none stated]

**Sen. RESPONSE:** This goes to the several points raised on germaneness and precedent. It's been noted several times that we are in a place right now where we're doing a specific, more restrictive version of Robert's Rules of Order, but overarchingly it's the framework we've already been adopting, just more restrictive in the application. The Order, unlike the rules that we use, is still the framework that we have used for every other Resolution first readings. They are for discussing the effect and the impact of the Resolution. To get an understanding of what they do and how they operate within. Ostensibly, hopefully, but the love of God, please, I hope we are taking that to our constituents to communicate that to them and asking them what their feelings and effects are. We then get that feedback. We bring those points back here for the second reading. We've voiced those, and then we vote. I thought that was the way these things were supposed to go? That's how I've been operating. And if we're doing a different thing, someone please inform me. But the fact of the matter that I was operating under is that this was just for the content, the expression of points for and against. Mark constituency, which we've already done. And motions, amendments, and content of the resolution is specific from that point forward.

That's just kind of a meta-point overall. [8 Senators Support]

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Thank you for this point. Recognized.

**Sen RESPONSE:** I just wanted to say I don't actually believe that we can talk about the content of the Resolution without discussing the impact. These are interrelated things, but what it means to be germane and to speak about the content of the resolution is to bring the impact that you are wanting to talk about to the specificity of the Resolution. We can't have a germane, specific conversation if we don't talk about what is actually in the Resolution; I say this as a [redacted], I say this as someone who is very interested in the wonderful magic of citing our sources. I love it, it makes me very excited on like a professional and personal level. It's really unhelpful though when we talk about changes. You cannot just say that talking about BDS is talking about the content of the Resolution there. Could really go through a whole bunch of things to talk about that, but It's not the conversation that we're having: talking about the content means talking about what's in the thing. It's really helpful to read the line that offends you, read the line that you think is has a dangerous impact. That is what it means to talk about the content of the



Resolution in terms of impact, we can't talk about the Resolution without the impact. Talk to the content. [6 Senators Support]

**BoV Rep Miskovic RESPONSE:** In my experience, speech itself is given more latitude. We provide for everyone's free expression by implementing time limits, but how individuals want to use their limited time to speak is up to them. Germaneness isn't generally questioned regarding an individual's comments. Germaneness comes into play with motions—whether or not a motion is relevant to the issue at hand.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** That's an interesting point, Phil! According to Robert's Rules, speech is given the same gravitas as the written word. In that sense, Robert's Rules privileges the idea of constructed speech or discussion. It's much like debate team in school. I dislike structured speech at the best of times, but Robert's Rules asks everyone to be a rhetor on the digital 'floor'. As such, Robert's Rules showcases a privileging of those who can speak in measured ways and is exclusionary to those wanting to elevate their lived experiences to the assumed 'factual' level of unstructured speech and sources

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Thank you for this point. Any other questions surrounding the initial inquiry? [No Senators Request] President Leff you have 1 minute.

**President Leff RESPONSE:** Quickly, [redacted] said it better than that, but I just want to say it in a slightly different way, which is that yes, the impact of the resolution and the campaigns discussed in the Resolution, obviously matter for the Resolution, but not according to Robert's Rules for all the reasons that [redacted] said. And I'd also remind folks that again, we take two additional. Steps in the Senate to have a robust debate. So these accusations that we haven't had enough time to debate it are absurd because we have taken two meetings. The last one we did not cut time off in any capacity to have a full-fledged debate. And also of course, as [redacted] mentioned, your model on submitting comments to your senator ahead of time. And we strongly encourage you to do so. That's all.

**>> Motion to Move On > Seconded**

**Grad. POINT OF INQUIRY:** How does this impact students who work with a lab or company situated in Israel?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** This Resolution if focused on the VT Foundation. Same with the other divest Resolutions in this package. That does not mean the entire university can no longer do anything with coal or oil. That's how the dynamics are working here. Anyone with additional information?

**President Leff RESPONSE:** VT Foundation is a 501CS separate entity that shares leadership (who is addressed by the resolution) with VT but is not VT. Read C for context and N1 / N2 for the other divestment aims.

**>>SENATOR MOTION TO END THE DEBATE >> SECONDED**

**VP Fox:** There has been a motion to end the debate. Can I have a second?

**Sen. POINT OF ORDER:** Discussion first.

**VP Fox:** Not sure if this is a debatable motion, but let's open the floor for fun. Any opposition?

**Grad POINT OF INQUIRY:** I just don't understand. We are not in the graduate school to solve, you know, policy and conflict. I do understand there are some limitations on Palestinian students. So I think this resolution is not solving their problem nor reaching the goals that you initially mentioned? That's just my point.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** This has been raised several times. The idea that this has no impact on our lives as graduate students or in general, why should we care to take stands or position.

We are raising questions about the moral status of the institution from which we get our accrediting degrees. And all of its connections. Talking about this in regards to the VT Foundation and its investment in the United States, we're talking about this in terms of a apartheid. We're talking about this in terms of genocide around the world. The case of several Resolutions that have been forwarded and discussed amongst those channels, among senators in terms of things like the genocide and the apartheid were talking about this in terms of the nature of the world in which we will all live and work once we are out of this institution in which we must live and work while we are in this institution. If you don't have a stance on that.

What are you doing? What are we doing here? Whether for or against --

And I know that many of you are actively against this --it affects your life.If it wasn't important, we wouldn't be talking about it this much. [4 Senators in support]

**Sen. RESPONSE:** The academic community is about more than just research

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Research is not the only reason we go to school [1 Senator supports]

**Grad FOLLOW:** I feel offended by what he said. Please do not judge what we think, what we believe based on our comments on this; I'm sure a lot of people are concerned with the situation. This is the Graduate Center not the US Senate. You have to depreciate where you are.

**Grad RESPONSE:** I would like to say 1 to [redacted] point, I had tried to talk about the impact of as a whole onto the world. Then what it affects us afterwards. And I was told that it wasn't germane to the conversation. And now he is allowed to speak about it. Is that because he's pro resolution and I'm anti? And then the other question is, why is it that the last session that we talked about, the effects, it was kind of controlled in a very biased way?

But this meeting that we're running this meaning now in a non-biased way, but we're not allowed to talk about the effects and the impact on the lives of the graduate students?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** To your first question, we had a question on the floor raised so [redacted] responded in turn to remain germane to the question itself. No one was calling the point of order in the chat or otherwise as far as I witnessed. To your second, we changed the format due to the requests and accusations that we were not impartial enough last round. Robert's Rules are written into our bylaws. So, we're just keeping up with them a bit more.

**Grad FOLLOW:** So why are we having this though I feel like if we knew that it was biased and people were having conversations and making complaints that it was biased last time. Be able to have that conversation again, because the last conversation was bias. So we need to be able to actually have this conversation about the effects and impacts. In an unbiased way before we move on past it, because before we only had a discussion where it was ruled in a very biased way and I know you don't feel that way because you are pro resolution. And the people who are in charge of this are mostly pro resolution. But that's unfair to the people who want to talk about the impact. In a negative way. You feel like you control the because it was biased in your opinion. So I want to have this conversation about the effects where we can talk about them. And actually all have our like and concerns addressed. Because a lot of students feel really scared and uncomfortable about this. And we need to make sure that students feel safe on campus. So we need to talk and make sure that everyone is feeling like they're heard.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** We have had hours of conversations, including large quantities of time from people who oppose the resolution, and we have many pages of comments from both for and against students in our minutes.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** We did have conversation on the drawbacks -- we just aren't allowing that discussion to get beat into stone.

**Sen. POINT OF INQUIRY:** This is supposed to be a discussion on ending the debate right?

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Yes.

**Sen. RESPONSE:** Can we please enforce Robert's Rules here?

**VP Fox RESPONSE:** Respectfully, you have no idea what I or anyone else in this Senate would vote on this Resolution. So, be careful when you say 'everyone' would vote on it. Your point is acknowledged and unless another Senator makes a motion on your behalf, I would like to call a vote to end this discussion at this time.

**>>MOTION TO END DEBATE CARRIED >>** 43 yes, 3 no, 4 abstain

[Voting on Old Business commences]

**>> SENATOR MOTION TO TABLE NEW BUSINESS >> SECONDED  
MOTION CARRIED >> 45 yes, 1 no, 2 abstain**

**>> SENATOR MOTIONS TO ADJOURN MEETING  
MOTION CARRIED >> 50 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain**

Letters Totals (10/21): 21 Support, 7 Opposed

Letter in Favor

I am a Jewish student and in support of this resolution. Because of the profound vitriol and opposition to this resolution from other Jewish students, I find it necessary to voice my support and describe in brief why, as a Jew, I do support this GPSS supporting the BDS Movement, and that the GPSS shouldn't be dissuaded from supporting the resolution.

My ties to Judaism are profound: I'm religiously observant and devote my academic and creative work to Jewish trauma, with particular focus on the Shoah and pogroms. My grandmother came to Haifa pre-statehood as a refugee from soon-to-be-occupied France, my father was born in Haifa, and I have family currently there right now. I grew up with a Zionist Hebrew School education. While there are many details to how I've come to support Palestinian-led movements, the fundamental one is that being Jewish is not a good reason to oppose justice movements for Palestinians, and it is not a good reason by itself to accept Israel's actions. Not being critical of Israel simply because one does not want to is intellectually and morally bankrupt, and as graduate students we should be especially well positioned to see that. I urge my Jewish peers to reflect on the ways in which they've come to their beliefs and take a sober look at the policies, inequities, and violence that have prompted the BDS Movement with the intellectual rigor they'd apply to their graduate studies. I want to acknowledge the generational trauma that we're carrying in our bodies as we debate this, and invite us to not let adrenaline and cortisol define the substance of our views. It's hard but necessary work.

The general conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is both inaccurate and trivializes the history of the Jewish Diaspora, as well as the development of Zionism itself. The Yiddishkaiyt fiercely debated Zionism as one of many visions for Jewish safety and equality, with many using the concept of Doi'kayt (Yiddish for "hereness") to oppose the visions of Zionism; Sephardic, Mizrahi, and East African Jews come with many different political experiences and epistemologies, and were neglected in the creation and endurance of Israel. We also need to acknowledge that the current iteration of Zionism, as it's defined by its loyalists, is the most conservative and militant version to have existed. Zionism itself was a diverse ideology in its inception, and included the famous philosopher Martin Buber's vision of Zionism: Jews living in and near where Biblical Jews lived without the establishment of a nation-state, alongside and in reciprocal community with Palestinians and Arabs, as well as Bedouins, Druze, and whoever else may reside there. Movements against Israel are a reflection of Zionism narrowing and becoming the most militant and exclusionary practice conceived of by early Zionists.

Most importantly, the conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism creates more anti-Semitism, both semantically (by calling things antisemitic that aren't) and more profoundly by telling people who believe the inequities, violence, displacement, and erasure of Palestinians (by whatever word you'd like to call it; human rights experts regularly call it apartheid) they must take such violence as intrinsic to Judaism. This rhetoric effectively demands of these witnesses to choose between humanizing Jews and humanizing Palestinians. I'm here to say to whoever is reading that this is a false choice.

These are just a few of the reasons that the 200+ group of scholars in Antisemitism Studies--including Jewish, Holocaust, Israel, Palestine and Middle East Studies--clarified that "Boycott, divestment and sanctions are commonplace, non-violent forms of political protest against states. In the Israeli case they are not, in and of themselves, antisemitic" ("The Jewish Declaration on Antisemitism," Guideline 14. Source: <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>)

Please vote yes on resolution N3

#### Letters Against:

My name is [redacted] and I am a third year student in the [redacted] program. I wanted to reach out to you about the GPSS resolution 2021-22N3 which endorses the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and calls for an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions and scholars. I had previously reached out to my specific senator [redacted], but as the resolution has been passed onto the second round of review and voting, I thought it best to reach out to you. **Specifically, I am asking the senators to deeply think about this choice and to vote against it.** Our school has time and again spoken out against prejudice and hatred and I believe by supporting this resolution we would be doing just that. In particular, alienating and putting Jewish students in harm's way.

To clarify, I believe that this resolution will create the perfect opportunity for increased antisemitism on our campus, which in itself is reason enough to vote against it. However, antisemitism is a longstanding prejudice that has been around since Judaism's inception and unfortunately still has a hold, even unconsciously, over many in the United States and even on campus. **By supporting and enacting a resolution that ignores the unbreakable tie between Israel and the Jewish community, as well as solely placing all hate, blame, and violence on Israel, undoubtedly will lead to a rise of antisemitic speech and action.** A strict anti-Israel stance only provides a justification for individuals to be more openly antisemitic and limits the possibility of any more advanced discussion considering the nuances of the situation. Performance support, which is entirely what this resolution is founded on, rarely does any good in the conflict and instead provides a bandwagon for others to jump on and create a prejudice. Although I could provide sources that will report on the rising antisemitism in the United States and more specifically on college campuses as well, both in terms of the strong anti-Israel mentality and the BDS movement, I'm sure the senators as a whole have thoroughly researched both sides of the argument. As such, I think the understanding that this idea may be rooted in trying to come from a supportive standpoint, **unfortunately, fails to understand and protect**

**their Jewish students who are already marginalized and often ignored or worse, mistreated.** It is very easy from our standpoint, both geographically and culturally distant from the current conflict to apply our own moral code. However, we must remember it is not the United States and that this conflict has been going on far longer than when we've recently started to pay attention to it. Unfortunately, this resolution does not seek to create actual change for our studies, ensure protection for our VT Jewish community, or work to improve any prejudice, it is an attempt at showcasing that "something" is being done, to take a side on a very divided and complex issue without concern for alienation of students and no regard that it may encourage the current and growing antisemitism.

Overall, I feel that passing this resolution will do nothing but soothe conscious' of people who are not directly in or impacted by the actual outcome. **As is senators duties, I beg you to think of all of your students, not just the loud ones denouncing Israel right now, but your Jewish students who may feel as though they have to choose saving face or hiding their identity rather than speak out about something in concern of prejudiced backlash.**

Within Virginia Tech we already struggle to ensure that no hateful or harmful words or actions are being taken against our marginalized students. This resolution would only create more division and anger and prejudice if passed. **As such, I ask for the senate to please vote no towards this bill going any farther.**

Thank you for your time.

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The BDS resolution has no place in the hands of the GPSS, and it has no place in the Virginia Tech community. A motion such as this with substantive consequences should not be taken under consideration by a motley group lacking mastery of these matters. This resolution would carry very real consequences for members of the Virginia Tech community (with Jewish members far over-represented), for those wishing to join this community, and for our colleagues abroad. Those who do specialize in this field have informed you that this resolution is anti-semitic, yet you retort (read: gaslight) saying "No, no, you misunderstand" and hide behind the handful of Jews that you've found to support it while silencing those who don't. But do *you* understand? Have you learned from sources other than the media's constant barrage of propaganda and a few wikipedia pages? I've been receiving education on the conflict for the past 25 years and cannot say I've scratched more than the surface.

There's so much crap and human rights abuses around the world. China's silencing of Hong Kong and encampment of the Uyghur people, Saudi Arabia killing children in Yemen (with US weapons), festering genocides in Myanmar, South Sudan, Ethiopia. There's even abuse of migrants and refugees right here in the US. So, why go after Israel? In an exemplification of psychology's [availability heuristic](#), the answer lies in the media: it is relentless in its Middle East coverage. And we, as constant and often unwilling absorbers of the media surrounding us, internalize its messages. They disproportionately report (often one side of) the story, and consequently we disproportionately see it to be a problem. Don't take it from me, take it from an actual journalist:

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/israel-insider-guide>. When she

worked at AP, they had "more than 40 staffers covering Israel and the Palestinian territories," which was "significantly more news staff than the AP had in China, Russia, or India, or in all of the 50 countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined." And the reports from certain areas, especially ones in conflict like Gaza and Israel, are very slanted: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/ap-collaboration-nazis-reporting-news>. For example, news organizations have to cooperate with Hamas in order to report there, effectively creating censorship. But most people are unaware of these deals with terrorist organizations.

That being said, my acknowledgement that the media heightens both our attention and disapproval of Israel's actions is not an endorsement of any wrongdoings by Israel. But this resolution is not an effective way to oppose those actions. How can Israeli and Jewish community members hear these calls to cut ties with Israel and not feel as though they are being targeted? You are very intentionally singling out a single minority group and saying "You don't belong here." That's why I was so shocked to see this blatantly discriminatory resolution come across GPSS's agenda, as inclusivity is touted to be a value of the organization.

Furthermore, what will this even accomplish beyond reason for a self-congratulatory pat on the back? The resolution is vague at best, leaving subjective decisions like, "This CEO has ties to Israel, so we shouldn't work with his company." Well, if he's Jewish, then yeah he probably does, seeing as hundreds of thousands of Jews moved there in the few years following WWII. The only tangible result of this resolution is the ostracism of your community members. Empirical research shows that associated minority groups are disproportionately affected by campus events relative to majority and other groups, and in ways that are often unseen (e.g., [Richman & Jonnassaint, 2008](#)).

Realistically speaking, the student senate is overwhelmingly composed of students from unrelated fields and is not a collection of experts on the Middle East conflict and international relations. Due to the way the student senate is organized, there are no more than two senators from even relevant departments. Therefore, the GPSS doesn't have a place in organizing a movement with such widespread impacts. Please read the articles I hyperlinked and recognize your blind spots, the bias that has been inflicted on you, and your lack of expertise in this area. I do. I'm good at some things - this is not one of them. I should not have a say in passing something like this at an institutional level - and neither should you. If you want to protest human rights abuses, that's great, really - but this isn't the way. Strangleholding research and progress through a resolution recognized to be anti-semitic is not the way. It's too unwieldy and vague to enforce, it alienates members of your community, and it shows that you dismiss the voices of minority group members of your community. Please uphold Virginia Tech's principles of the community and inclusivity and refrain from passing this divisive, ineffectual resolution.

Additional sources provided:

- [https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Summers\\_Academic\\_Freedom\\_and\\_Antisemitism.pdf](https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Summers_Academic_Freedom_and_Antisemitism.pdf)

- <https://www.amazon.com/Anti-Zionism-Campus-University-Studies-Antisemitism/dp/025303406X>
- [https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MSU-ILR\\_Elman\\_Atkins\\_2020.pdf](https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MSU-ILR_Elman_Atkins_2020.pdf)
- <https://academicengagement.org/from-scholarship-to-swastikas-explaining-campus-antisemitic-events/>

**Comments Against (Submitted at 2015 hrs on 10/21):**

Our two senators will be voting on behalf of our students for each resolution, however, many expressed concerns regarding the topics of the resolutions. The majority of our students feel that there are specific resolutions, such as Defunding the VT Police and support of BDS, that are not appropriate for a graduate leadership board. I believe that this concern stems from the potential for these resolutions to be polarizing, without directly affecting our graduate studies. As a vet school, and as Virginia Tech, I know we are all striving to create diversity, and furthermore inclusion. We feel that politically charged resolutions will not help in this mission.

I have included some direct quotes from our students that were submitted to our poll:

The GPSS should be a non partisan organization dedicated to representing and including ALL graduate students regardless of political beliefs. Introducing political subjects will divide and degrade the standing of the GPSS.

Unless a resolution will directly be affecting how the graduate program works, I don't think they need to be making political statements. If it involves the safety of students then it is relevant to the community, but supporting causes as the GPSS should not be political. At least from my understanding I don't see that as a purpose for this group.

The university should not contribute to further polarization between political beliefs. A university with such vast opportunities should not polarize itself based on a current national popularity in topics.

As a community, we would also like to state that we see great benefit in many of the resolutions in bettering life for graduate students. We appreciate the passion and work ethic that is very apparent in making these changes. Thank you for taking the time to read this email, I know we are all incredibly busy balancing school and extracurriculars. If there is something more I, or our GPSS representatives, can do to facilitate this conversation, please let me know.