

Statement of Professor Kate Floros

March 31, 2024

On April 4, 2023 the Deputy Consul General of Israel in Chicago spoke to my US Foreign Policy class at my invitation. One defining feature of this class is invited talks by American and foreign diplomats, and this was the third visit by an Israeli diplomat in the 11 years I have taught the class. This was the first visit, however, that was planned without collaboration with the UIC Office of Global Engagement, formerly the Office of International Affairs. A staffing change in that office led to a loss of institutional knowledge that hampered planning for diplomatic visits. Ten successful and uneventful years of the program led me to believe that I could plan the consulate visit without institutional support. Sadly, that was not the case, and I made several missteps in the run-up to the consul's visit.

One of the challenges of arranging the visit was dealing with the security requests the consulate made. Because these requests were only discussed the week before the scheduled event, there left little time to reflect on nuanced aspects of the situation. In previous years the talks had occurred in a more controlled environment, but my classroom was on the first floor of the ARC which is a wide-open public space. This created additional security concerns for the consulate security team and exposed the event to more interaction with the larger UIC community than previous visits.

For previous visits I had always been asked by UIC staff to provide a class roster to ensure that the only people to attend the event were those registered for the class. I presumed that this roster was shared with the consulate; however, upon further reflection, it is probable that the roster was not. Nonetheless, when I was asked for a roster by the security team, I didn't think the request was odd, and so I provided it. To my embarrassment, it didn't occur to me until after the event, that protection of student information might be an issue. I have been informed by the university that I did not violate any law or policy, but sharing the roster was ill-advised, and such a misstep will not be repeated in the future.

The part of sharing the roster about which I have the most regret is the identification of one class member who self-disclosed to me that she was a member of Students for Justice in Palestine. In late March 2023 when I shared the roster with the consulate, I was not familiar with the student organization or the nature of their advocacy. In a phone conversation with the consulate security team, I was asked if anyone had objected to the visit, and I mentioned that one student, who said she was a member of SJP, questioned why I extended the invitation. I was uncomfortable with the request to identify the student, who, to my knowledge, is not Palestinian, but I was also concerned about the event falling apart given the short time frame, so I reluctantly provided the requested information.

Through this whole process, I relied on my big-picture, state-level knowledge of foreign policy to guide my actions. What I failed to appreciate, and what I was completely ignorant of, is the micro-level, day-to-day concerns and fears of Palestinian and Palestinian-American students for themselves and family members living in Palestine. I know that there were two Palestinian-American students in the class because they self-identified to me as such, but there were likely others who had not disclosed their heritage. I have no way of truly understanding the fear that my sharing of the class roster may have sparked in those students, and I sincerely apologize for the distress my actions caused. I also extend my apology to the other students in class for sharing their names as well. It is a practice that I will never repeat.

I have spent the last year reflecting on what occurred before, during, and after the April consular visit, my responsibility, and what I can do to ensure nothing similar happens in the future. I certainly don't have all the answers, but I can pledge to work with the Office of Global Engagement for all future visits by foreign diplomats and allow their trained staff to navigate any security concerns of the consulates. I can also pledge to work more diligently to create a classroom environment where students are empowered to advocate for themselves if they believe that topics, readings, or guests are potentially harmful. I can't guarantee that all students will be comfortable with everything about my courses, as I'm not sure that's possible in any political science course. I do want students to know that I will listen to their concerns with an open mind and sympathetic heart. I applaud the bravery of the student who questioned me about the consular invitation, and I'm sorry that other students did not feel that they could also express their concerns to me.

The past year has been very difficult for me in the face of attacks on my professional integrity. Feeling defensive myself, I was not able to recognize the motivating fear and concern that prompted those attacks. It was only in the past week that anyone, in this case a colleague, reached out to engage in a dialogue. It was through this dialogue that *my* humanity was affirmed, which allowed me to more clearly recognize the impact my actions had on others. While I will do everything in my power to ensure there is no "next time," I am not infallible, nor is any other member of the university community. I hope that my misjudgment and its aftermath will encourage others to be clear about the harm they have experienced and direct about possible remedies. We can hunker down in our respective corners, or we can work with our allies to bring about meaningful change. If we are unwilling to talk and listen to each other, I fear that we will only experience more missteps and harm, which is destructive to the entire community.

I practiced poor judgement, and I am sorry. I will do my best to do better in the future.

Professor Kate Floros, PhD