

Regarding the proposed discontinuation of the Certificate for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

To AP&P Committee,

I am writing in response to the recent decision to discontinue the Certificate for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. I am unable to attend the public hearing on September 28 because I am living in Japan this year, and the time difference would be difficult for me to overcome. Regardless of my own time zone-related limitations, I would ask the Committee to reconsider the date of the public hearing because September 28 is a Jewish fasting holiday called Tzom Gedaliah. (See #3 for more explanation.) If it is possible to do so without my presence, I would be very grateful if my thoughts could be shared in some way. I have written them below.

1) I understand that the decision to discontinue the Certificate for Holocaust and Genocide Studies is based on low enrollment. However, the significance of this topic transcends economic concerns such as enrollment numbers. In an era where education and understanding of the Holocaust is at an all-time low among younger generations of students; Holocaust denial is on the rise; and very few Holocaust survivors are still living, it is deeply insensitive to weigh the value of this subject in terms of enrollment numbers. If anything, KU has a responsibility to encourage people from all walks of life to pursue a greater understanding of the Holocaust and genocides more generally. It is vital to instilling empathy and historical literacy and ensuring that such atrocities are not repeated.

2) The Jewish population of Kansas and of KU is very low. It is already very difficult to be a Jewish person in this state and in this university. Diminishing the value of this certificate program runs the risk of making Jewish students feel like their experiences, family histories, intergenerational trauma, or even just their presence here is not important to the KU community. If we only maintain programs based on enrollment, then minority populations will be less represented among their peers. Furthermore, their cultural, religious, and historical contexts will continue to be undervalued and misunderstood by the university community as a whole.

3) As case and point, the decision to hold the public hearing to determine the future of the Certificate for Holocaust and Genocide Studies on September 28 shows a lack of consideration for the needs of religious Jewish community members. This year, two of the Jewish High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) fall on September 25-27 and October 4-5. The ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-days-of-awe-asseret-yimei-t-shuva>), and they are supposed to be a time for Jewish people to focus on solemn introspection, seeking forgiveness and meaningful dialogue from the people in their lives. In particular, this year the fasting holiday Tzom Gedaliah falls on September 28. Holding the public hearing on this day pressures observant Jewish students to choose between their religious/cultural practices. On a personal note, as a Jewish KU student, I have experienced more instances of this kind of conflict than I can count, including multiple tests being scheduled on Yom Kippur, an orientation being scheduled during Pesach, and a lecture that was directly related to Jewish history being scheduled on Rosh Hashanah.

With my thanks for your time and consideration,

Rachel Quist

September 22, 2022

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Homayoon Rafatijo, Ph.D., Esq.
KU Athletics, *Senior STEM Tutor*
Spencer Fane LLP, *Intellectual Property Attorney*

Academic Policies and Procedures Committee
University Governance
govern@ku.edu

RE: Program Discontinuance request for the Undergraduate Certificate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Dear Members of the Academic Policies and Procedures Committee:

Thank you for your invitation to submit written brief regarding the Program Discontinuance request for the Undergraduate Certificate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. It is indeed a great honor and a privilege to be able to communicate my view on this topic. My name is Homayoon Rafatijo, and I am currently a senior STEM tutor at KU Athletics as well as an intellectual property lawyer at the law firm of Spencer Fane LLP. Prior to starting my law practice, I was an adjunct teaching professor of chemistry at the University of Missouri for several years. I respectfully submit this brief in opposition of the Program Discontinuance request before you. I present my argument in two parts.

1. DISCONTINUING THE HOLOCAUST STUDIES IS IN DIRECT COLLISION WITH UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS'S STATUS AS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS IN KANSAS

Several years of service in academia have allowed me to appreciate the critical role that institutions of higher education play in the society as a healthy, unbiased marketplace of ideas. To that end, creating more welcoming platforms and programs through which students can become acquainted with different cultures—as well as major historical events shaping those cultures—would, I believe, add to the acumen of the campus. Clearly, terminating such programs would have

an exact opposite effect. Hence, it is my humble opinion that discontinuing this program would undermine the University of Kansas's status as the pinnacle of marketplace of ideas in the State of Kansas.

This honorable Committee is entrusted with an important decision-making task regarding the Program Discontinuance request before it. Grant of this request does not merely end a program; it will have far more detrimental implications. Grant of this request will deaden an idea. It is your duty to ensure that each and every idea has its display in the University of Kansas's marketplace of ideas, for ideas studied in universities become the ideas that shape our society.

2. AT A TIME WHEN HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION HAS BECOME PREVALENT, DISCONTINUING THE HOLOCAUST STUDIES IS UNWARRANTED

We are living at a time when politically motivated deniers of Holocaust take advantage of general public's complete lack of awareness about Holocaust to promote antisemitism. Recently, Iran's President has shamelessly cast doubts on occurrence of Holocaust as a historical event: "There are *some signs* that it happened. If so, they should allow it to be investigated and researched." Having a university program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies serves the very purpose of educating people like the Iranian President about this appalling historical event, so that they can no longer further their antisemitic agenda by distorting historical facts.

The Iranian President's remarks are chiefly calculated to disinform unaware masses, and sadly there are too many suffering from disturbing lack of basic Holocaust knowledge. The 2020 U.S. Millennial Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Survey shows that 63 percent of all national survey respondents in the U.S. did not know that six million Jews were slaughtered during Holocaust, and 48 percent of national survey respondents could not name a single Nazi

concentration camp.¹ The KU Undergraduate Certificate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies would be one step, an important one though, toward nationalizing, if not globalizing, the Holocaust education.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Academic Policies and Procedures Committee, admittedly, balancing the intellectual needs of Jayhawks with budget considerations is a difficult challenge. However, I deeply believe one must not allow budget considerations cloud one's judgement, notably when doing as such would not only undermine University of Kansas's commitment to provide a marketplace of ideas but also in effect promote antisemitism. I ask that you vote against the Program Discontinuance request for the Undergraduate Certificate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Warm Regards,

Homayoon Rafatijo, Ph.D., Esq.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/survey-finds-shocking-lack-holocaust-knowledge-among-millennials-gen-z-n1240031>; <https://www.claimscon.org/millennial-study/>

Considering the dramatic rise of antisemitism in recent years, I find the cancellation of any related program deeply concerning. Considering that books like *Maus* and the diary of Anne Frank have been banned in public schools across entire states, I also find it deeply suspect. Considering that each year the Holocaust falls further from living memory, and we are faced with fewer and fewer living survivors with firsthand experience, it seems to me that the importance of Holocaust Studies is only becoming *more* critical over time, not less. I do not know the specific reasons behind this proposed discontinuation, but I can imagine very few legitimate ones. As a Jew myself, as a member of this academic community, and as a citizen, I think it is morally incumbent on me to share my extreme reservations on the discontinuation of this program.

Garrett Highley
MFA program in Fiction