

Alt-Hampshire Gazette

Read Globally, Act Locally

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SPECIAL EDITION: SMITH COLLEGE STUDENTS CREATE “PEOPLE’S UNIVERSITY”

DEMANDING DEMOCRACY ON CAMPUS & DIVESTMENT FROM GENOCIDE

EDITORIAL: Smith College Students for Justice in Palestine Lead; Admin and Board of Trustees Must Follow

Those following the global movement for a Free Palestine are well aware of the wave of student activism on campuses across the United States and other parts of the world, particularly in the spring of 2024. A little-known fact is that the Smith College chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) was one of the very first student organizations to take decisive action demanding divestment from weapons-makers complicit in the Gaza genocide. On March 27, 2024, one day after the Smith Board of Trustees sent out a college-wide email announcing its refusal to divest, more than 50 members of Smith SJP and other students marched to the College Hall administration building and took occupancy. The student occupation of the building lasted for 11 days and garnered national media attention.

Weeks later, on May 7, students at UMass Amherst set up a Gaza encampment on the lawn outside the Student Center. The university administration called in campus, town, and state police who destroyed the camp on the day it was erected. In the process, they broke bones, caused asthma attacks, and arrested over 130 peaceful students, faculty, and community members.

As community members, River Valley for Palestine and many other organizations throughout western Massachusetts have stood in awe of the commitment and courage of activists at the Five Colleges including Smith SJP. Since late 2023, we have followed SJP’s efforts to lead a reluctant Smith administration and Board of Trustees to do the only morally defensible thing and divest the College’s holdings in weapons-makers* complicit in the

U.S.-Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Territories.

Two years since the occupation of College Hall, the political climate nationally and at Smith has worsened. The support for genocide and ICE of the Biden/Harris administration has morphed into the support for genocide and ICE of the Trump administration. In the fall of 2024, in reaction to the occupation of College Hall and before “Genocide Joe” left office, Smith President Sarah Willie-LeBreton announced a new policy governing student activism on campus euphemistically titled “Policy Governing Time, Place, and Manner of Expressive Activity.” The new policies are repressive and draconian, as you will see elsewhere in this edition of the *Alt-Hampshire Gazette*.

Nevertheless, the students of SJP have persisted, despite a heightened atmosphere of unsafety, fear, and repression, to call on their College to exhibit moral leadership. Last week, Smith’s “Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility” (ACIR) informed students that they refused, once again, to vote on a divestment proposal supported by 500 signatures and 56 Smith organizations, and said that they would not commit to any vote in the future. In response, SJP announced the creation of a “People’s University” to shine a light on the repression on campus and the complicity in genocide far away, and issued a set of three demands (see below).

A circle of tents on Chapin Lawn went up on the evening of Friday, April 17, in which teach-ins and other activities were held to educate the Smith College community and

Northampton residents about repression at Smith and the ongoing need for divestment and democracy on campus. As SJP explained on their Instagram, “Over the past days, our community conversations have proven the extent to which the Smith community desires a fundamental change to the bureaucratic internal structures that decide where our labor power and profit is directed. We, the People’s University, request a meeting as soon as possible to discuss next steps on building a liberated Smith.”

Smith SJP’s People’s University has faced fear tactics from the College. “Campus Safety” officers and administrators have followed students entering and leaving the tents, used surveillance cameras, student card readers, and cell phone locators to track student movements, and addressed students by their names despite their use of face masks and head coverings to shield their identities from the administration and its “Conduct Board.”

The Smith administration is working not only to censure and censor its students, it is apparently hoping to teach them that success in life is based on compliance with the most egregious violations of human rights, murder, and genocide by the prevailing political and economic powers. This contemptible message is exemplified for Smith students by the cowardly behavior of the Board of Trustees and the Smith administration’s violations of students’ First Amendment rights.

With this Special Edition of the *Alt-Hampshire Gazette*, River Valley for Palestine hopes to pay tribute to the wisdom, courage, and

tirelessness of Smith College students led by SJP, and to educate our neighbors in Northampton and beyond about what the struggles at Smith are all about. You will find: 1. A list of the spring ’26 SJP People’s University demands; 2. a letter from SJP to the Smith College community; 3. a letter from SJP to the Smith administration and Board of Trustees; and 4. a chronology of student activism at Smith around Palestine and campus repression.

We believe that Smith SJP’s courage and *sumud* (Arabic for ‘steadfastness’) when student activism on so many campuses around the U.S. is currently comparatively quiet in the face of brutal on- and off-campus repression, has a great deal to teach us all about speaking truth to power.

This we know to be true: Smith SJP will eventually win. One day, hopefully sooner than later, Smith College will divest from genocide. One day, Smith will boast about its student movement for a Free Palestine and for democracy on campus. As the title of Omar El Akkad’s 2025 book states, “One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This,” referring to the genocide in Gaza.

As community members, we say: Free Palestine. And we say: Free Smith College. In the freedom of one lies the freedom of the other.

*Smith College invests in the following weapons-makers: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon RTX, L3Harris, Northrup Grumman, & General Dynamics — all companies that profit from slaughter and surveillance in Palestine and around the world.

(Jennifer Scarlott/Alt-HG is published by River Valley for Palestine)



SJP Letter to the Smith Community

April 17, 2026

To the Smith College community,

On Thursday, April 16th, the ACIR (Advisory Committee on Investment Responsibility) met to discuss the Ethical Investment Policy Proposal put forth by AJP (Alums for Justice in Palestine). **They once again refused to vote.** The Ethical Investment Policy was proposed by AJP and SJP in November 2025. This is the second divestment proposal put in before the ACIR since 2023. **The proposal asks that Smith withdraw its investments in weapons companies, military contractors, and other corporations that violate international human rights law.**

Smith has an ethical responsibility to end their complicity in genocide and align their investments with their stated values.

For the past three years, students, alumni, and faculty have shown an outpouring of support in favor of divestment and an ACIR accountable to the Smith community. In the spring of 2024, a referendum in favor of divestment was passed by the student body with 89% voting in favor of divestment. **In the past 2 weeks, 56 Smith organizations have endorsed our open letter to the ACIR and over 500 individuals have signed a petition in support of the policy.**

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The Smith College People’s University Demands and Palestinian Liberation

April 17, 2026

The following demands were written by Smith SJP as a response to the ACIR’s lack of internal and external transparency and democratization. It includes input and references to previous demands made by Smith students and staff in an attempt to increase political literacy.

Demands: ACIR Structure, Academic Environment, and School Functioning

Why We Chose These Demands: The Advisory Committee on Investment Responsibility, or the ACIR, formed after the fossil fuel divestment campaign as an agreement from the College to have a space where students and alums can bring proposals on investments to those with decision making power. According to the Smith College website, the purpose of the ACIR is to “advise the Investment Committee (and, through it, the Board of Trustees) on matters of social responsibility and the Smith College endowment.” Smith SJP submitted a proposal two years ago, of which the rejection from the ACIR incited the two week-long College Hall occupation. This past November, Smith Alumnae for Justice in Palestine, AJP, submitted a new proposal taking into account the feedback from the previous proposal. Unfortunately, this meant stripping **any mention** of Palestine from the new proposal so as to make it more aligned with the conservative values of the ACIR. Still, the ACIR has refused to meet with AJP and SJP on the

proposal, despite meeting with SJP numerous times on the previous proposal. Additionally, the College stripped the names of the ACIR members from the website after the College Hall occupation. After the many meetings the ACIR has called since November, it refuses to vote on our proposal. Thus, the bureaucracy and missions of the ACIR is clear: to create a barrier between the Smith community and the Board of Trustees. As community members we also feel that it is the responsibility of the College to provide political education so as to build a community of informed and involved comrades. Ultimately, we believe that this connects to the undemocratic functioning of the College as a measure to prevent actual community input and involvement.

How Our Demands Relate to Palestinian Liberation: The Student Intifada all around the world has revealed how undemocratic colleges are. Investment in genocide is obscured and decided behind closed doors where community members have no say in how our money is spent and how decisions are made. We want this institution to be democratic, and in order to do so we must build mechanisms through which we can actually have power over the College’s functioning. Power to the students, faculty, staff and community members. United we create the profit for the College and united we have the power to change how despotic *Continued on page 2...*

SJP Letter to the Smith Administration

April 20, 2026

To the Smith administration:

At the People’s University, we are carrying on the legacy of student activism at Smith. Sit-ins have occurred throughout Smith’s history, including during the 1986 South African Apartheid divestment campaign (which successfully achieved divestment), the 1990 UNITY sit in (which resulted in the UNITY orgs being given access to the Mwangi center), the 2002 Student Grassroots Organizing Group sit in (which was launched in a response to racist incidents in the houses), and, most recently, the 2024 Students for Justice in Palestine sit-in at College Hall.

We are a group of students who have come together in order to stand up for what we believe in. We make decisions from consensus, and we have clearly communicated within ourselves and amongst the wider Smith community.

In disciplinary proceedings, people of color disproportionately face harsher charges that replicate systems of oppression beyond Smith. Therefore, we demand that the process by which the Conduct Board evaluates our case and future cases include a review board of professors and a larger group of students to help eliminate biases and profiling. Furthermore, during our Conduct Board case, we reserve the right to communicate amongst one another as we see fit. To ensure the Conduct Board’s review proceeds equitably, we must have the ability to compare our charges. Last, we reserve the right to not identify other individuals during Conduct Board proceedings.

Should anyone involved in the People’s University be summoned by the Conduct Board, we demand that every person receive

the same charges. In order to preserve the academic integrity of the school, we demand that no student face consequences that would prevent them from receiving a well-rounded education due to their moral convictions. We are merely actualizing the education we receive at Smith, and we would like to be able to continue to receive this education. We believe that the consequences levied by the Conduct Board should not prohibit access to educational knowledge gained beyond the Smith classroom through programs, including but not limited to Praxis, Five College courses, international experiences, study abroad, and internships. These educational experiences should not be privileges withheld from those who lack the socioeconomic means to access these opportunities outside of Smith. We understand that the People’s University is in violation of the student and campus policies, but if you want to respect the student activism that the school so publicly champions, these are requests that must be enacted.

In the People’s University, we have been concealing our identities and asking that no photos be taken of us in order to ensure the safety and security of students both inside and outside of our group. This is to ensure our safety from Smith and the safety of the broader Smith community from the federal government. We ask that the school does not take photos of us or our space. In the new Time, Place, and Manner policy, there is no longer any description as to where this footage goes, and we would like to take all precautions to ensure that it does not end up in the hands of bad actors, which is highly possible. We would especially like to protect the safety of Black and Brown students, who face greater danger

when their information or images are released, and we ask that Smith join us in securing this protection.

We are here because we believe in a better future for Smith, one where student beliefs are valued and supported with concrete action. We ask that you meet The People’s University

Chronology: *Progressive activism at the College goes back to the movement for rights & votes for women in the late 19th & early 20th centuries and includes Vietnam war protests and much more. As happens at so many colleges and universities, Smith College boasts about past activism on campus while vigorously repressing the activism of present-day students.*

While David DeSwert (Smith Executive VP for Finance & Administration) continues to assert that the endowment is “not a tool to respond to global events,” and Alexandra Keller (VP of Campus Life & Dean of the College) wants students to consider “alternatives” to protesting, Smith students have always organized around world events, especially as it relates to the College’s role in them.

December 2023: Smith Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) submits first draft of proposal for College divestment from weapons-makers partnering in Israel’s genocide in Gaza to the Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility (ACIR).

2/13/24 & 3/15/24: SJP submits 2nd & 3rd iterations of divestment proposal in response to feedback from ACIR.

3/26/24: SJP meets with DeSwert & Keller to discuss an ACIR vote on the divestment proposal. During the meeting, SJP discovers that the Board of Trustees has emailed the entire College saying they will not divest.

3/27-4/9/24: SJP occupies College Hall, the administration building.

5/15/24: SJP meets with Board of Trustees.

as what it is, a non-violent invitation to enact structural change in support of creating a truly democratic institution.

Until return and liberation,
Smith Students for Justice in Palestine and the People’s University

Fall 2024: President Willie-LeBreton announces a new, repressive policy regarding student “expressive activity” on campus.

February 2025: SJP holds rally at Board of Trustees dinner.

9/19/25: Northampton City Council votes to divest from apartheid Israel.

2025-’26: Board of Trustees, DeSwert, other admin ignore meeting requests from SJP. Board of Trustees promised to meet yearly with SJP but denies this.

November ’25: Smith Alum for Justice in Palestine submits divestment proposal to ACIR.

February ’26: SJP holds rally in front of Alumnae House during Board of Trustees dinner.

April ’26: SJP gathers 500+ signatures, endorsement of 56 Smith organizations on Ethical Investment Policy Proposal petition to ACIR.

4/16/26: ACIR meets to discuss Proposal. Board of Trustees secretary Palladino informs SJP that ACIR did not vote on the Proposal, will not commit to voting in the future.

4/17/26: SJP launches People’s University on Chapin Lawn & announces three demands.

4/21/26: SJP requests Pres. Willie-LeBreton and Board meet with them to discuss new demands for democratization of ACIR and political education at Smith.

SJP Letter to the Smith Community Continued...

The long-term support of divestment proposals and transparency from the Smith community has been met with dismissal and suppression. **Smith has silenced student free speech** through the passing of the time-place-manner protest policy, assaulting student protestors, and physically obstructing protest through limiting accessibility to public space.

Since January, the ACIR has deferred its decision three times, and **there is still no timeline to vote**. How much longer will they stall and postpone while the genocide in Palestine continues? While the US and Israel wage unjust wars across the world? While ICE wages war on our very own neighbors? **Their refusal to vote is a refusal to divest from the global issues of genocide, war, and occupation.**

In response to this latest act of complicity in genocide, we have launched the People’s University on Chapin Lawn. The People’s University is an opportunity to educate the community and build solidarity with one another as we collectively imagine a better future for Smith. The People’s University has created a list of demands, including restructuring the ACIR to make it democratic and transparent. We demand that the ACIR create an Investment Policy Statement (IPS) to serve as a binding document for its functioning and that a Divestment Task Force is created. We demand that ACIR appointments be made through a democratic process of nominations and elections instead of appointments. We ask that these changes be overseen by a Transparency Oversight Committee, which will consist of faculty, staff, and students to ensure accountability. We demand that Smith take steps toward becoming a more democratic institution, giving students, faculty, and staff more power over important decisions by allowing the Smith community to create and join working groups on key issues. We demand that Smith finally establish a required course on race (something students have been advocating for since 1968!) and a Critical Engagement Latin Honors designation (in order to ensure student engagement with the ethical implications of their major). A more detailed explanation of our demands can be found on our Instagram (@smith_sjp)



We urge members of the Smith community, 5 Colleges, and the Northampton community to join us at the People’s University for teach-ins, community discussions, workshops, art-builds, and more. View the schedule for the upcoming week on our Instagram (@smith_sjp).

We aim to make the People’s University a welcoming space for all students who wish to learn and stand in solidarity with us. We are in contact with a number of lawyers and local organizations who are helping ensure that we keep each other safe across campus. We are in constant conversation with students and faculty to ensure everyone’s voice is heard. We encourage any students who feel concerned to share their thoughts with us on an anonymous, encrypted form linked in our Instagram bio. We are happy to answer any questions, respond to concerns, and/or connect you with resources.

The People’s University emphasizes that there is a deep connection between the colonial violence that we are seeing in Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, and the Congo, and the escalation of federal violence we are seeing across the U.S. We see, again and again, the dynamics of domination that colonialism relies on being replicated within the state. Smith participates in this cycle through their material choices and their inaction. There should not be one more day where Smith is invested in genocide, apartheid, or the state-sanctioned violence committed by our federal government. **Please join us at the People’s University to demand democracy, transparency, and an end to Smith’s complicity.**

Until return and liberation,
Smith Students for Justice in Palestine

The Smith College People’s University Demands Continued...

this so called “liberal, non-profit” institution is. It continues to push a neoliberal agenda and refuses to address the genocidal world events we are all complicit in, and now it is coming back home to the belly of the beast. We must act together for our comrades in Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan and beyond. Now is the time to critically consider the guise of the liberal facade, the “Human Rights” framework which Smith disciplines us under. Instead, let’s educate and learn from each other, create coalitions and build a liberated Smith. Solidarity to our comrades and the workers of the world!

1. ACIR:

- The improvement of the functioning of the ACIR: Establishing an Internal Policy Statement, an end to the time restriction on submitting proposals, and an open meeting on a semesterly basis to take questions from students and faculty. These questions must be answered as honestly and openly as possible, including but not limited to submitting documents and other evidence used to support decisions.
- Our demands will be overseen by a Transparency Oversight Committee (TOC), which will include an even ratio of faculty, students, and community members who meet monthly and report their findings at the ACIR meetings and to the Smith public.
- ACIR Elections: Open elections on a biannual basis where anyone is eligible to run. Elections will open to the entire Smith community in a direct democracy format.

2. Academic environment:

- Democracy at Smith not only requires that students, faculty, and community members have the ability to make themselves heard, but also that they have the proper means to form educated opinions that promote critical thought. Because of this, we ask that Smith implements a required course on race, which Smith students have been advocating for since 1968. The required course on race is essential to ensuring that all students are given the resource to take the first step in becoming critical thinkers who can improve their communities through critical thinking, both within and outside of Smith. Additionally, we ask that Smith works on designing a Critical Engagement Latin Honors designation, or an adjacent program meant to provide a space for learning and reflection about the fields of study that students engage with. While some classes provide a space for students to investigate their field of study, this is not true across the board. We believe that there needs to be a space for students to investigate their fields of study and how they interact with

communities across the world. The genocide in Gaza has been enabled by the STEM field, which produces the technology that creates the conditions for violence in Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, across the world, and domestically in the United States. It has also been enabled by the humanities and social sciences, whose refusal to engage with the impact of academia and the inability to name the violence occurring in Palestine contributes to a paper genocide. As an effort towards the implementation of these two academic criteria, we ask that Smith immediately funds and supports a Genocide Lecture Series, similar to the one at our neighboring school, Mount Holyoke, to invite scholars to share their work on genocide and inform the broader Smith community. We also ask that Smith continues its commitment to the Palestinian Student Scholarship, which started the summer of 2024. We ask that Smith take immediate action on this, and we also ask that it does not water down the language of the scholarship to be generalized to students from “war-torn countries,” as it has attempted to do.

3. School functioning:

- Recently, Smith has made decisions about the implementation of Artificial Intelligence and centralizing dining without adequately consulting the faculty, students, and staff who will be most affected by these changes. In order to minimize the harm of these decisions and prevent this in the future, we demand that all strategic plan working groups be open to student membership on a volunteer basis. The meetings will be held open to the Smith community, welcoming all members. A process will be established, where students, faculty and staff can form new groups according to the needs of the Smith community. New working groups will be formed if there is an unmet community need aiming to be addressed, at least two student groups endorse it and there is at least 3 dedicated people (including at least 1 non-admin, student, faculty or staff) working in it. The Transparency Oversight Committee will approve the formation of new working groups based on the criteria established. Working groups will be able to make informed decisions and hold meetings with administration, Board of Trustees and ACIR. The Divestment Task Force, similar to the Study Group on Climate Change that was formed to achieve fossil fuel divestment recently, will be one of such groups. If the suggestions made by working groups are not followed, the Board and ACIR should be accountable and explain their reasoning to the Smith community, answering their questions and listening to their grievances.