

Police arrest 8 pro-Palestine protesters who blocked entrance to Cal Poly SLO

By [Stephanie Zappelli](#) and [Chloe Jones](#)

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Police arrested eight Pro-Palestine protesters blocking an entrance to [Cal Poly San Luis Obispo](#) on Thursday, the university told The Tribune after the demonstration.

At least one Cal Poly faculty member was detained, according to witnesses.

At about 7:30 a.m., a handful of people set up wooden barricades in the crosswalk of California Boulevard and Campus Way. Spray-painted cardboard signs leaned against the barricades reading “Defund Genocide” and “Free Palestine.”

The group gathered to protest Israel’s attacks on Gaza and to demand that Cal Poly divest from companies that support and profit from the war.

Since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, Israeli military attacks have [killed more than 35,000 Palestinians](#) in Gaza, the Associated Press reported on Thursday. Hamas meanwhile still holds about 100 Israeli hostages abducted on Oct. 7, the AP said.

Numerous Cal Poly student groups, including Students for Quality Education, posted a call to action on Instagram on Thursday morning inviting people to the protest.

The Cal Poly chapter of [Young Democratic Socialists of America](#) also posted about the protest on Instagram. In its Instagram bio, the group linked to a [list of demands](#) for the university.

The demands include that Cal Poly support an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, create a supportive space for Palestinian students, faculty, staff and their supporters on campus, drop all charges against student protesters, and divest from companies “that profit off of war, prisons, detention centers and policing,” the list said.

Cal Poly plant sciences professor Ashraf Tubeileh observed the protest from the sidewalk on Thursday. He grew up in the West Bank in Palestine and has marched in other local protests that called for an end to the war in Gaza.

“I hope to see the administration listen to the students,” Tubeileh said. “Our students are in distress, they’re seeing a genocide take place. They are really frustrated about this and they want to make their voices heard.”

Cal Poly spokesperson Matt Lazier said the university does not plan to divest.

“Cal Poly does not have a place in boycotting/divesting from certain countries,” Lazier wrote in an email from The Tribune. “International boycotts and divestment are inherently political and often involve complex and historic geopolitical issues. The role of the university is to serve as a content-neutral space for the free exchange of ideas, thoughts and discourse; the university is not a political body, and its role is not to create public policy and foreign affairs strategies.”



Sheriff's deputies in riot helmets assemble as backup while detain eight pro-Palestine protesters who blocked the intersection at California Boulevard and Campus Way near Cal Poly on May 23, 2024. Stephanie Zappelli szappelli@thetribunenews.com

Police arrested eight protesters, Cal Poly said

At the start of the protest, three people sat beside the barricades, while four others stood in the crosswalk, a [photo posted to Instagram](#) by Cal Poly Students for Quality Education showed.

Eventually, about 30 people joined the protest, according to Tubeileh.

Some people marched across the crosswalk, chanting "Free Palestine" and "Armstrong, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide!" Jeffrey Armstrong is the president of Cal Poly.

Other people gathered on the sidewalk with cardboard signs.

Officers from the Cal Poly Police Department, the San Luis Obispo Police Department and the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office patrolled the area and blocked the intersection to vehicle traffic.

At about 9:40 a.m., some of the protesters linked arms and stood in a circle around the barricade, according to witnesses.

At sometime between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m., representatives of the [Cal Poly Dean of Students Office](#) stopped by to speak with the protesters, according to Tubeileh — which is the first time he's seen university representatives talk with campus protesters.

Police detained two protesters at about 10:50 a.m., according to multiple witnesses. Police then ordered the protesters to disperse at about 11 a.m., the witnesses said.

"Police issued the protesters a dispersal order, as their actions were illegal and blocked a busy road, presenting safety concerns for themselves and for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians in the area. When the

protesters refused to cooperate with the order, police were forced to arrest and remove the individuals from the road,” Lazier wrote in an email to The Tribune.

At 11:15 a.m., two protesters had chained themselves to the barricades, and about 15 officers surrounded the pair. Sheriff’s deputies in riot gear formed a perimeter while police officers detached the protesters from the barricade and detained them one at a time.

Tony Cipolla, spokesperson for the Sheriff’s Office, told The Tribune the deputies were part of the mutual aid public safety team, which Cal Poly requested to help respond to the protest.

He said the gear worn by officers is standard equipment.

“The protest involved an unknown number of individuals and was near the railroad tracks,” Cipolla said. “The railroad tracks contain numerous rocks that can be used as projectiles against law enforcement.”

Cipolla said the deputies wore the gear to protect themselves against “potential and unknown dangers” and prevent injuries.

Responding Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo police department officers were not in riot gear.

“Cal Poly supports lawful protests and demonstrations but will not tolerate illegal activity,” Lazier wrote in the email. “Ensuring the safety and well being of all campus community members and visitors is a priority for the university, and Cal Poly will fully enforce the laws and rules governing its campus to maintain that standard. Anyone who jeopardizes or undermines that through unlawful activity or violations of university policy is subject to the consequences of their actions.”

By 11:50 a.m., the protesters and police officers had all left the intersection.