



Educators & Students

Ethics & Trust

The detention of a Tufts University student might force changes in student media policies

Student journalists are weighing new editorial risks after ICE detained a Tufts student who co-wrote a column criticizing university policy



Tufts University student Rumeysa Ozturk, who was arrested by immigration agents while walking along a street in a Boston suburb, talks to reporters on arriving back in Boston, Saturday, May 10, 2025, a day after she was released from a Louisiana immigration detention center on the orders of a federal judge. (AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi)

By: [Cliff Anthony](#)

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and the government. This predicament stems from the detention of Tufts University doctoral student Rumeysa Öztürk by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials on March 25.

The Turkish native, who is on a student visa, was on her way to her friend's house on March 25 when ICE officials, wearing [masks, swooped over her](#) from a street in Somerville, Massachusetts, resembling a scene from Bourne movies. She was released from detention on May 10 following a court order.

What's Öztürk's sin?

She co-wrote an opinion piece for the university's campus publication, The Tufts Daily, slamming the university president Sunil Kumar for not implementing three resolutions passed by the student union.

The op-ed, co-written by three others and endorsed by 32 Tufts School of Engineering and Arts and Sciences graduate students, ran a year ago.

Titled "[Try again, President Kumar: Renewing calls for Tufts](#) to adopt March 4 TCU resolutions," the op-ed urged the "university to end its complicity with Israel insofar as it is oppressing the Palestinian people and denying their right to self-determination."

The resolutions, approved after a four-and-a-half-hour spirited debate by students, urged Kumar "to recognize genocide in Gaza, for the university to divest from Israeli companies and for it to cease selling Sabra products in dining halls," according to the student publication. Sabra, a New York-based dipping products company, [purportedly supports the Israeli Army](#).

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The Tufts Daily column doesn't contain any incitement to violence. Nor does it condemn the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack that killed more than 1,200 people, the majority of them Israeli civilians. The op-ed reflects the views of Graduate Students for Palestine, Tufts Students for Justice in Palestine, the [Tufts Faculty and Staff Coalition for Ceasefire](#) and [Fletcher Students for Palestine](#).

The ICE officials got wind of the op-ed and detained Öztürk, claiming her piece "[may undermine U.S. foreign policy by creating a hostile environment for Jewish students and indicating support for a designated terrorist organization](#)."

However, in his order to release Öztürk, Judge William K. Sessions of the U.S. District Court for Vermont said that "[her arrest and detention appeared likely to have been carried out](#) solely in retaliation for an op-ed." He went on to state her arrest "has raised a substantial claim of a constitutional violation."

In light of Öztürk's detention, student editors and advisers will have to consider how a story, an op-ed or a column would be interpreted by the government.

Another dilemma would be whether to take down quotes and bylines in published stories.

Most mainstream and student news media have an established policy not to remove them.

Now, student editors and advisers will be forced to delete stories and bylines if requested by students because there's no guarantee that the State Department and ICE officials will not comb through the archives and haul up the authors.

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not comb through the archives and haul up the authors.

During my two decades as an adviser to student media in the Cleveland area colleges, I have found these outlets provide a training ground for American-born and international students to express their views without any concern of retribution. International students would visit the newsrooms in awe and take the opportunity to write for these publications because of the restrictions and lack of student media in their country. Now, they will think twice before submitting their articles.

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Student media operate on shoestring budgets provided by the college's activities fees. A few publications are self-funded through advertisements and support from alumni. However, they don't have the wherewithal to defend their editors, guest columnists and advisers.

It's noteworthy that [the Student Press Law Center](#) and 14 other journalism organizations have denounced ICE's action.

There are many ramifications of the Öztürk episode. Foreign students will be dissuaded from enrolling in U.S. universities, depriving U.S.-born students the chance to interact and broaden their knowledge of the socio-economic developments and culture of other countries.

"International [students](#)," according to the [State Department's Education USA](#), "enrich U.S. universities and communities with unique perspectives and experiences that expand the horizons of American students and make U.S. institutions more competitive in the global economy. The knowledge and skills students develop on campus prepare them to become the next generation of world leaders who can work across languages, cultures, and borders to solve shared global challenges."

It's also an opportunity to demonstrate to international students that there's room for dissenting voices in a democracy. Unfortunately, the Öztürk incident shows that the U.S. is no better than Turkey, her homeland, [which has a poor record of press freedom](#).

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Cliff Anthony

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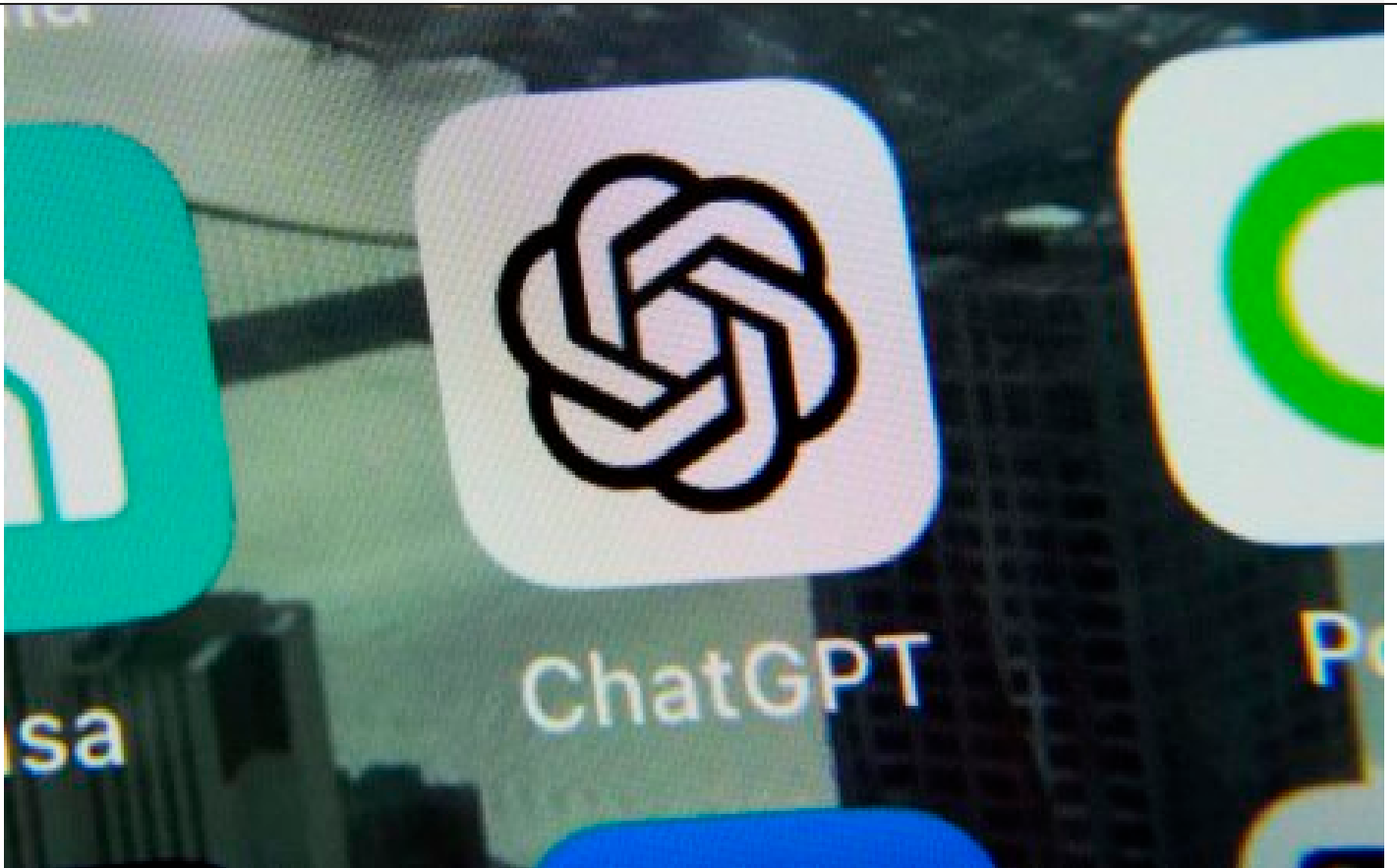
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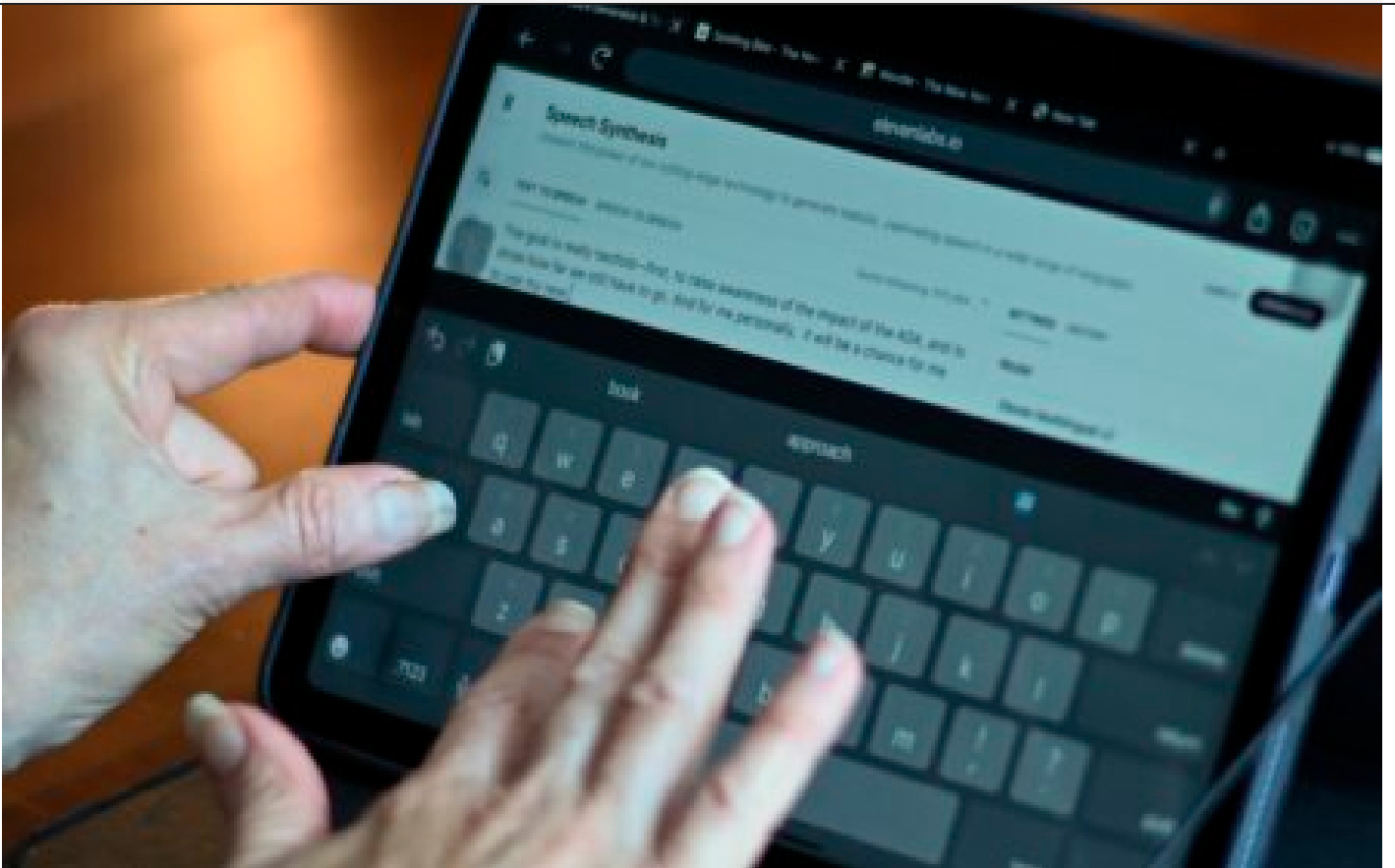
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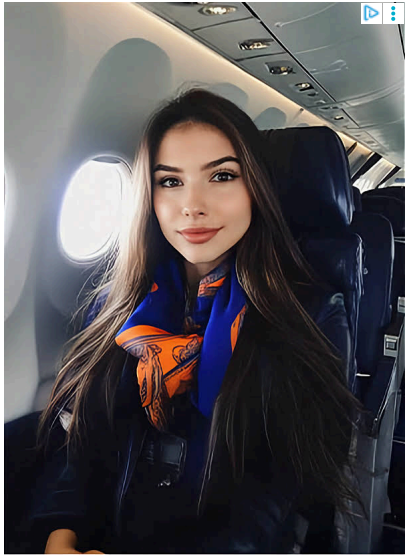
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