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Iran's Universities Punish Students Who Disputed Vote

By [ROBERT F. WORTH](#)

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iranian universities have begun disciplining and suspending students who took part in street protests after the disputed presidential election in June, reformist Web sites reported Friday and Saturday.

The new disciplinary actions came as officials reported that a presidential panel has begun an investigation of the humanities curriculums at universities, the semiofficial Mehr news agency reported. Although the panel was formed a year ago, it did not start work until after recent calls to purge universities of professors and curriculums deemed “un-Islamic,” based on the fear that the teaching of secular concepts helped fuel the political unrest following the June 12 election.

The investigation will report its findings directly to [Iran's](#) supreme leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#), Mehr reported.

For weeks, the authorities have voiced concern about the possibility of renewed protests as students return for the fall semester, which begins Sept. 23. Some of the worst clashes during the post-election protests took place at universities in Tehran and elsewhere. Last week, five students at the [University of Mashad](#) who had openly supported an opposition candidate were arrested with no official explanation, several Web sites reported.

The new disciplinary actions have taken place at universities in Tehran, Tabriz and Shiraz, where the Intelligence Ministry forwarded the names of politically active students to the university authorities, according to a report on the Peykiran Web site that named several students.

Some were suspended for up to two years, while others were barred from dormitories or subjected to disciplinary proceedings, the report said. At Tehran University, 50 students living in the dormitories were questioned for hours by a disciplinary committee, according to Advar News, a student-run Web site.

Politically active students have long been vulnerable to disciplinary measures or outright bans from universities, but such exclusions have become more common in the past three years.

Meanwhile, political pressure to further Islamize Iran's higher education establishment has intensified in recent days, with more leading clerics warning about the danger of subversive and secular ideas.

Significantly, several clerics and high-ranking officials have taken aim at [Islamic Azad University](#), which is based in Tehran and has branches around the country. The university is largely run by the family of former [President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani](#), a powerful moderate and leading opponent of President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#).

“This university must once again be purified,” Ayatollah Muhammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi, the president’s spiritual adviser, said during a meeting with new cabinet members, the Rouydad Web site reported. “This purification must occur at the management level and other levels. You see just how many who do not believe in religion, Islam and God have attended and graduated from this university.”

Another cleric, Muhammad-Reza Babai, called for the new minister of higher education to review Azad’s management charter, during a Friday Prayer sermon in the central city of Kerman. The new minister, Kamran Daneshjoo, has also accused Azad of failing to meet standards. Mr. Daneshjoo, who was [confirmed Thursday by Parliament](#), was the deputy interior minister responsible for running the June election, which opposition supporters say was rigged in Mr. Ahmadinejad’s favor.

Hard-liners have long wanted to purge Azad, and the recent unrest may have given them an opportunity, political analysts said. Mr. Rafsanjani, a founding figure of Iran’s 1979 revolution, has lately provided cautious but essential support for the opposition, and taking aim at Azad could enable the government to quietly undermine him and his family.

Other senior clerics have taken broader aim at universities, in what appears to be a coordinated message from the leadership.

And last week, Ayatollah Khamenei warned in a speech to students that the humanities and liberal arts “lead to the loss of belief in godly and Islamic knowledge.”

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Toronto.

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