



Iron Swords War

SNAPSHOT



November 2,
2023*

The Fight Against Anti-Semitism on US University Campuses

* The brief offers a current overview¹ based on the information accessible to us at this time.

The Challenge

In the wake of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and amidst the prolonged warfare, a formidable and alarming surge in anti-Semitism has become palpable on a global scale. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the United States and extends its grip over university campuses. Jewish organizations in the U.S. are orchestrating concerted efforts on many fronts to assist Jewish students in dealing with such circumstances. This undertaking necessitates an unwavering commitment to confront the escalating challenge of anti-Semitism.



Campus Climate Analysis

- ▶ **Heightened Fear and Apprehension:** Pervading not only in response to the Israeli situation but also in the campus' responses.
- ▶ **Seclusion, Silencing & Villainization:** Students sense an onslaught of anxiety as administrations seemingly fail to condemn Hamas actions and its sympathizers.
- ▶ **Eroding Sense of Physical Security:** There has been a surge in reported physical attacks; Students express feelings of isolation and occasional physical threats spanning the entire campus landscape, from student residences to public spaces; some students have abandoned campuses.

Anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiments have lingered on campuses for years, but since the Hamas attack, an alarmingly escalation is evident; numerous physically aggressive and digital anti-Semitic incidents have been documented since October 7, portraying a deeply tainted campus climate.

1. This status report is based on the information presented during a meeting of JFN (Jewish Funders Network) on November 2, 2023. The following individuals participated in the meeting:

- **Alyza Lewin**, President, Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
- **Sarah Fried**, Chief External Affairs Officer, Hillel International
- **Jacob Baime**, CEO, Israel on Campus Coalition
- **Miriam F. Elman**, Executive Director, Academic Engagement Network

Leaders of universities bear a critical responsibility in addressing this ominous climate, vocally denouncing it, and implementing concrete measures against it. The university campuses, often viewed as crucibles and epicenters for ideological, political, and communicative activities, witnessed initial expressions of support for Hamas as early as October 7, spreading from campuses into surrounding streets and cities. The Jewish community struggle against anti-Semitism movements grapple with a substantial portion of the “information war” manifesting in the digital realm and social media, where students and young people predominantly source information, news, and analyses.

Responses of Jewish Organizations

➤ Hillel

- The influx of referrals to Hillel centers is unprecedented, including students who have not sought assistance before.
- Operating 24/7, Hillel centers provide a rich array of activities, programs, services, and communal gatherings. Specially curated events on Shabbat cater to students desiring a vibrant Jewish community experience.
- A palpable sense of resilience and pride resonates among students, a testament to the central emphasis Hillel places on unwavering support of them.
- Hillel centers serve as a robust infrastructure for organization and advocacy, delivering tailored content materials that address the current context.
- The training of student leaders from 150 universities has reached unprecedented levels, equipping them with tools for impactful expression and influence on social media.
- Digital tools for personal use are deployed, encompassing mental health resources, mechanisms for reporting anti-Semitic incidents, and logistical and legal support.

Hillel maintains extensive networks with university administrations, actively working to foster positive climates on approximately 50 diverse campuses. This initiative addresses a spectrum of sophisticated anti-Semitic expressions and acts as a sounding board for Hillel, engaging with numerous administrations and hundreds of managers to spur action, provide support, and safeguard the Jewish student community.

➤ Brandeis Center for Human Rights:

- In response to the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, the center has been dynamically representing students affected by anti-Semitic and anti-Israel incidents. Notably, the center has expediently handled numerous cases in the past three weeks, consistent with its ongoing commitment.
- A webinar shedding light on students’ rights and the obligations of university administrations underscored a pervasive lack of awareness among students.
- A written directive addressed to hundreds of universities has meticulously elucidated legal requirements, specifying actions university administrations must take to safeguard Jewish students on campuses. It was made clear that the incidents of anti-Semitism are in clear violation of anti-discrimination laws applied to universities in a way that can deny them federal funding.
- In collaboration with the [ADL](#), the center has jointly advocated for extensive investigations into the [National Students for Justice in Palestine](#). This organization and its supporters openly endorse terrorism and exhibit complete solidarity with Hamas. Universities are strongly urged to scrutinize, eradicate, and prohibit the presence of student groups aligned with terrorism.
- Prudence is advised in executing internal university investigations, considering potential triggers for investigations by external entities such as the U.S. Department of Education. Students are strongly encouraged to seek legal counsel to discern pertinent courses of action.
- The center is strategically formulating additional legal frameworks, encompassing the filing of complaints with education departments and pursuing federal lawsuits. In collaboration with the ADL and Hillel International, the

center is establishing a comprehensive platform to streamline students' complaint submissions and provide tailored legal guidance.

➤ Israel Coalition on Campuses

The organization has strategically deployed a digital platform for students and faculty to facilitate the confrontation of misinformation prevalent on social media. Employing an expansive monitoring system, it systematically identifies and disseminates both pro-Israel and anti-Israel messages, fostering responsive engagement among its diverse platform members.

➤ Academic Engagement Network

- Already on the day of October 7, a proactive communication was sent to the network's members across 300 universities, forewarning of challenging weeks ahead and underscoring the need for network members to exhibit decisiveness and resilience. Subsequently, members demonstrated these qualities throughout the ensuing weeks.
- Virtually all pro-Israel reactions emanated from these network members, with over 3,000 faculty members endorsing meticulously crafted statements and letters organized by the network. This empowerment mechanism not only amplifies student voices but also serves as a conduit for impactful communication with university administrations. In a noteworthy instance, Columbia University's administration directly engaged with network members who spearheaded pro-Israel initiatives, urging them to lead a university-wide initiative against anti-Semitism.
- The organization has tactically navigated through three phases since the events of October 7:
 1. In the initial phase, it spurred universities to issue unequivocal statements condemning anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist incidents, emphasizing the preservation of freedom of expression for students and academic freedom for researchers.
 2. The second phase strategically addressed concerns surrounding student protests related to supporting terrorist activities, including the dissemination of content glorifying Hamas' achievements. Recognizing that many faculty members are less active on certain social networks, concerted efforts were invested to expose them to content prevalent on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. This aimed at ensuring their awareness of materials encountered by their students and procuring pro-Israel resources.
 3. In the current and third phase, an organized effort is being led by network members themselves, who concurrently serve as academic faculty members. This endeavor targets anti-Israel statements made by other faculty members, organizations comprising diverse faculty members, and other academic organizations.

Developing Requirements for Sustainable and Expanded Responses

- Implementing measures to bolster personal security on campuses.
- Broadening the real-time response to crises.
- Extending initiatives to strengthen Jewish communal ties, Jewish identity, and mediation plans between groups; a pivotal need for investment in programs fostering Jewish identity and ties with the State of Israel.
- Present-day students represent the next generation of American Jews, undergoing profound trauma that necessitates tailored support.
- Substantially amplifying the scope of service and response offerings – encompassing legal counsel, mental health and resilience development.
- A significant augmentation of human resources to address the entirety of inquiries – from students and faculty within various organizational bodies. Legal assistance, resource provision, knowledge, and messages tailored for communication and social media, psychological support, and more, have intensified since the events of October 7, 2023. Investing in skilled and professional personnel working with Jewish students on campuses is essential.

- Sustained and fortified efforts are crucial for enduring a lasting commitment to the struggle.
- Specific funding and grants are required for targeted programs enriching faculty members with credible and robust information and arguments against anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israel actions. Research indicates that an increased availability of reliable information correlates with diminished opposition to Israel and heightened support.
- Acknowledging and strengthening the struggle against professors and faculty members who exploit their pedagogical influence to propagate anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic propaganda.
- Best Practice – The most effective course of action lies in the actual coordination, synchronization, and collaborative efforts of all organizations. This enables students to seek the necessary support from Hillel centers, fostering a sense of community, legal guidance, emotional support, and more.
 - In joint activities, include non-Jewish organizations considered meaningful partners (e.g., [Passages Israel](#), [Philos Project](#)).
 - Participation of non-Jewish students in various training programs is highly significant.
 - In seminars intended for university administrations, the involvement of non-Jewish administrative personnel, particularly those leading DEI initiatives, is crucial for enlightening them about the integration of Jews and Jewish identity under their purview.

Deciphering Hate Speech vs. Freedom of Expression

The university landscape grapples with a stringent interpretation of hate speech, where pro-Palestinian rhetoric and endorsements of Hamas find refuge under the banner of freedom of expression rather than being scrutinized as hate speech. How does one contend with this narrow definition, and how can we broaden the understanding of hate speech?

- It is imperative to articulate that the anti-Semitic incidents pervading American campuses transcend the realms of expression, freedom of speech, or political dialogue. We are confronting situations where students, based on their Jewish (or Israeli) identity, are victims of targeting, harassment, and physical assaults. In such instances, anti-discrimination statutes come into play, compelling universities to take action and safeguard the afflicted students. If, in effect, students find themselves unable to participate freely in classes due to prejudiced instructors or are restrained from navigating the campus freely – **the issue transcends freedom of expression and gravitates towards discrimination and harassment.**
- Hatred does not begin in physical aggression but in biases and stereotypes. It progresses through insinuations and bullying, evolving further into isolation, scorn, and denigration before culminating into physical violence. **Universities must unequivocally articulate moral principles from the outset to forestall any downward spiral.**
- The [definition adopted by IRHA regarding anti-Semitism](#) is pivotal as it encompasses elucidations regarding instances where critiques of Israel surpass permissible boundaries and are construed as anti-Semitic. This definition doesn't transgress legal frameworks but rather serves to decipher these expressions as justified criticism of Israel or manifestations of anti-Semitism. While it remains acceptable to scrutinize Israel and its policies, it transgresses ethical boundaries when the discourse involves demonization, delegitimization, or application of a double standard concerning Israel.

Calls on campuses denying Israelis the right to self-define may, per the IRHA's definition, be classified as anti-Semitic. **Universities bear the responsibility of applying the IRHA definition judiciously when scrutinizing expressions and actions suspected of having anti-Semitic undertones.**

Navigating Palestinian Terror Sympathizers' Network

How do we contend with the intricate web of organizations supporting Palestinian terror, and why does the federal government abstain from investigating the [National Students for Justice in Palestine](#) organization and its financial sources?

- The intricacy is apparent: Accusing a particular organization exclusively proves challenging. In practice, there exists a network of activities and organizations operating under various guises, including Palestine Legal at Brandeis University, providing legal aid oriented against the state of Israel, Israelis, and Jews. Beyond that, these entities coalesce under a shared strategic goal with the [American Muslims for Palestine](#) organization, championing the termination of American support for Israel and the ostracization of American Jews. Presently, concerted endeavors are underway to direct efforts against this network through legal channels such as congressional hearings.
- The investigation of cases and incidents poses a formidable challenge for universities, institutions primarily dedicated to research, pedagogy, and education. Our focal point revolves around compelling universities to enforce principles of proper conduct and policies. Historically, actions were taken against SJP, resulting in the suspension of its activities across diverse campuses. Furthermore, universities possess the capacity to mandate training and awareness programs for student bodies and organizations, fostering the ability to identify and prevent anti-Semitic expressions. This equips universities with tools to leverage before resorting to investigative measures.

Reshaping Academia: Philanthropy's Influence on Pedagogy

Is it necessary to exert influence on pedagogical aspects such as the syllabus, course planning, and reading materials? Is it necessary to scrutinize and identify areas where critical thinking and liberal values are undermined?

- The disciplinary schism deeply rooted in academia becomes apparent on the anti-Israel front, there's a prevalence in the fields of social sciences and STEM. The crux of the matter surfaces in the tender areas of humanities and soft social sciences, where there's an insinuation of anti-Zionist ideologies cascading into anti-Semitism, evident in study materials and pedagogical approaches, official departmental proclamations, and written directives.
- Parallel to the academic freedom universities uphold, there exists a commitment to furnish quality education while averting any form of discrimination against diverse communities, including Jews. Universities possess the latitude to harmonize between lecturers and various courses.

Philanthropic Discourse: Should Philanthropy "Close Its Checkbook"?

What is the stance of Jewish organizations regarding calls for donors to cease contributions to universities that fail to take a clear stand against anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic entities within their frameworks? Is this an effective campaign or does it carry the potential for a backlash?

- The starting point lies in the perpetual possibility of reinstating withheld funding. With that in mind, there should be consequences for universities that have not voiced a clear message against anti-Semitic and other hate speech and practice – now is the opportune moment for philanthropic leaders to enact moral guidance. Nevertheless, an essential query emerges: Is it smart, particularly at this juncture, to relinquish the influence wielded at the university level?
- A noteworthy consideration is the establishment of dedicated task forces, focused on combating anti-Semitism in locations where donors have declared a suspension of contributions, such as at Penn (University of Pennsylvania).
- It's necessary and feasible to redirect funding towards the battle against anti-Semitism on campuses. **If withholding support from a university, it is both possible and recommended to contribute to Jewish organizations operating within the university, benefiting both students and the fight against campus anti-Semitism** (as advocated by Matthew Bornfman). Over time, this matter will necessitate universities to monitor the enrollment status of Jewish students, as they are susceptible to economic ramifications even also in this regard.