

What Universities Should Do to Prepare for the New Academic Year

Colleges and universities have the opportunity – and legal obligation – to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. ADL, AJC, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Hillel International and the Jewish Federations of North America, along with the undersigned Jewish communal and educational organizations have come together to offer a unified agenda for campus administrators to consider as they plan for the upcoming academic year. Our missions and our work differ, but together we share the goal of ensuring the safety and full inclusion of Jewish students – as well as all students, faculty, and staff – on our higher education campuses across the United States.

I. Clearly Communicate the Standards and Rules Governing the Campus Community, Including Policies on Protests and Demonstrations

Higher education in the United States is renowned for supporting open inquiry, academic freedom, global exchange, and free expression. The ability to articulate and disseminate a wide range of ideas, perspectives, and approaches is central to the American academy's distinguished history. Those objectives cannot be achieved, however, when certain members of the academic community are silenced, harassed, intimidated, or threatened; or when the university's normal teaching, learning, and research activities are disrupted.

It is imperative that as university leaders, you make clear to incoming and returning students what it means to be a member of your campus community, including the behavioral norms that are expected of students and the impact on the whole community when those norms are not met. Similarly, make clear to faculty and staff their obligations as employees and members of an academic community to uphold a commitment to no tolerance for antisemitism. University leaders possess a unique platform to communicate to the entire campus community the unambiguous expectations for the coming year. We urge you to use this platform.

University leaders must also ensure that students and faculty are aware of their campuses' codes of conduct, including policies and procedures for managing protests, demonstrations, postings, and other speech activity, including time, place, and manner regulations. In advance of the start of the academic year, prepare communications about what these policies are, why they are important, how they align with core campus values, and the consequences of violating them. These policies must then be enforced in an even-handed, content-neutral, and consistent manner to prevent activities that impede the university's academic mission or interfere with the rights of any members of the campus community to speak, listen, teach, research, or learn.

It must also be incumbent on university leaders to promptly and directly respond to violations of these policies, as well as to other antisemitic incidents when they occur. University leaders should publish strong, timely statements that (1) explicitly condemn the incident and explain what steps will be taken by the university to address the situation and prevent its recurrence, (2) describe specific support available for the Jewish community, and (3) establish clear expectations for respectful campus discourse tied directly to the mission of the institution. The fact that the incident may involve protected free speech in no way reduces the university's obligation to step up and speak out, as indicated by the U.S. Department of Education: **“The fact that harassment**

may involve conduct that includes speech in a public setting or speech that is also motivated by political or religious beliefs does not relieve a school of its obligation to respond under Title VI if the harassment creates a hostile environment in school for a student or students.”

- *U.S. Dept of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Dear Colleague Letter, p. 3 (May 7, 2024). [Access the full letter here.](#)*

II. Support Jewish Students

A number of steps should be taken to support Jewish students this academic year, including:

- 1. Prevent discrimination against Jewish students in campus organizations, clubs, and institutions.** In many cases this past year, Jewish students have been marginalized and even expressly excluded from student organizations or activities because “Zionists are not welcome.” This form of exclusion becomes even more insidious when the word “Zios” (a term coined by former KKK leader David Duke) is invoked as an antisemitic slur applying this type of litmus test. Universities must take proactive steps to ensure that all Jewish students, including the majority of Jewish students for whom Israel is an important component of their Jewish identity, have full and equal access to all the school’s registered student organizations and student government activities, without exception.
- 2. Unequivocally denounce targeting of Jewish student organizations.** Recently, Jewish institutions like Hillel, the primary center for Jewish student life on campus, and Chabad, another essential Jewish campus organization, have increasingly become targets of attacks, with protesters calling for schools to sever ties with Hillel and Chabad. This is antisemitism pure and simple, and is intended to remove the most important religious and cultural institutions for Jewish students from the campus. Colleges and universities must make clear that these antisemitic demands are antithetical to the institution’s values and will not be accommodated or considered.
- 3. Ensure Israeli students and faculty are welcome, and reject BDS.** Over the past 12 months there has been a dramatic increase in demands for boycotts of Israeli universities, study abroad programs, and research collaborations. Increasingly, academic institutions, departments, and faculty leaders have begun to engage in covert or “soft” boycotts of Israeli institutions and academics that include canceling agreements with Israeli academic institutions, denying Israeli academics visiting professorships, canceling lectures by Israeli professors, etc. Colleges and universities must reaffirm their opposition to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and explain to the campus community why that movement is harmful to students and faculty and antithetical to campus values. Indeed, following the example of a number of institutions this spring, they should publicly affirm their commitment to the free exchange of ideas and access to academic opportunities by elevating their partnerships with Israeli institutions, encouraging students to consider study abroad opportunities in Israel, featuring the work of Israeli scholars and researchers on their faculty or those who collaborate with their

faculty, and highlighting the benefits these associations offer to students, faculty, and the institution.

4. **Show up for Jewish students.** It is vitally important for university administrators to show up for Jewish students and express support for the Jewish community by personally attending Jewish community events on campus. The fall season offers many opportunities for university administrators to directly engage with Jewish students and community leaders during the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), break fast following Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Simchat Torah celebrations, Shabbat dinners, and commemorations of October 7.
5. **Provide antisemitism education and training for all students.** Universities should commit to trainings covering antisemitism for administration and students on a regular and recurring basis. The training should include the different ways in which students may experience conduct as antisemitism, including anti-Zionism, and should include notice that harassment or discrimination based on national origin, which includes a student's actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, is prohibited by university policy. Many universities nationwide have already instituted mandatory antisemitism training for students entering the 2024-25 academic year.
6. **Prepare for October 7 and other moments with high potential for disruption to university operations.** There may be efforts to disrupt regular university operations this fall, especially around the one-year anniversary of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, which killed more than 1,200 people, the vast majority of them Jewish. We strongly urge university administrators and campus safety officers to anticipate these disruptions and take prompt preparatory steps to reduce the impact of those that are unlawful and/or violate university policies. The specific recommendations offered [here](#) are intended, not to suppress lawful protest activity, but instead to address disruptions that target Jewish students and organizations on campus and are unlawful and/or violate university policies. Such disruptions may not only violate local and state laws and/or university policies governing protest activity, but also the civil rights of Jewish and other Zionist-identifying students on campus to participate in campus activities free of harassment, intimidation, verbal assaults, and violence.

III. Ensure Campus Safety

For weeks at the end of the spring semester, college campuses across the country were the sites of protest encampments, many of which were in violation of existing rules and university codes of conduct. In too many instances, these encampments took over common spaces, blocked access to buildings, created barriers to students trying to cross campus (in some cases based on abhorrent and illegal identity-based litmus tests), disrupted classes and exams, and housed protests that were characterized by intimidation, harassment, vandalism, and even violence, contributing to more than 1,400 antisemitic incidents on college campuses last school year – by far the highest number of antisemitic incidents on campus in a single school year since incident tracking began more than a decade ago.

Colleges and universities have the moral and legal obligation to create and maintain a physically safe and secure campus for their students, faculty, and staff. We urge colleges and universities to ensure campus law enforcement is properly trained to recognize and address conduct that violates campus rules and policies and/or that constitutes harassment; that time, place, and manner policies are in effect to govern all campus protest activity; that there is regular and consistent communication with Jewish communal institutions on campus about security needs; and that there is regular communication with and plans in place to liaise with local law enforcement when necessary.

We also urge colleges and universities to make clear the avenues for students to report antisemitic incidents and have timely and effective processes for addressing complaints that are clearly communicated and available to the campus community and that meet the standards required under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Administrators must respond immediately to conduct that deprives students of equal access to educational opportunities in violation of Title VI. Universities must ensure free and full access to all campus buildings, spaces, events, and activities, both in policy and in effect. Conduct that blocks free access to any university spaces must not be tolerated, and appropriate consequences must be imposed for violations.

IV. Reaffirm Faculty Professional Responsibilities

The inherent and unequal power differential between faculty and students heightens the vulnerability of students to faculty coercion and political indoctrination. Universities must protect students from these dangers which interfere with learning. Faculty members have a duty to protect students' academic freedom and encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students. They have no authority to subject students to their particular views and opinions concerning matters extraneous to the course of instruction itself, or to significantly insert material unrelated to the course. Faculty may not discriminate against any student on political grounds, or based on that student's legally protected status. Nor should faculty members be allowed to cancel a class session for the purpose of encouraging students to participate in a political protest or rally preferred by faculty, or threaten to withhold students' grades if faculty demands are not met. These norms of faculty conduct should be made explicitly clear at the beginning of the school year. Universities and colleges must make clear to all campus community members – faculty, staff, and students – the rules that govern the academic sphere, how those rules will be enforced, and the consequences for violation.

Conclusion

To avoid a repetition of the most egregious antisemitic incidents on campus this past year, we urge campus administrators to commit to these critical measures designed to prevent a hostile environment that violates Jewish students' civil rights and capacity to speak, listen, research, and learn on an equal basis with their peers. We are committed to working closely in partnership with all universities to support the implementation of these efforts so that this coming school year is safer and more inclusive for Jewish students, and for all students.

Additional supporting organizations include Academic Engagement Network, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Jewish Grad Organization, Jewish on Campus, National Council of Jewish Women, Olami, Rabbinical Assembly, Sigma Alpha Mu, Sigma Delta Tau, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Zeta Beta Tau.