Statement regarding the successful conclusion of the Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI)

Brandeis University and the Genesis Philanthropy Group

June 30, 2016

Since 2009, the Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI) has served as a flagship program of Brandeis University, offering educational and scholarly programs focused on the Russian-speaking Jewish community on the Brandeis campus and around the world. BGI was founded and has thrived with the strong support of Genesis Philanthropy Group (GPG).

Over the past seven years, BGI has made a considerable difference in the lives of many young people, while raising awareness of and empowering the Russian-speaking Jewish community on the Brandeis campus. Six cohorts of undergraduate students have benefited from BGI through strengthening their identity, deepening their knowledge of Jewish heritage, and developing valuable leadership skills that will help them become contributing members of the Jewish community.

The impact of the institute has reached far beyond Brandeis’ campus. More than 300 high school students from North America, Israel, Russia, Ukraine and other parts of Europe have participated in BGI’s summer programs, exploring their Jewish identity, fostering their creative talents, and broadening their intellectual horizons, while acquiring a strong sense of belonging and connection to the global Jewish community.

Under the auspices of the institute, scholars from around the world have conducted research, designed academic courses, and developed a strong body of knowledge on the Russian Jewish experience. The institute founded the Brandeis Jewish Leadership Incubator (BJLI), training emerging Russian-speaking Jewish communal professionals who are now providing effective solutions to the challenges of the Jewish community. BGI has engaged the talents of faculty and staff across Brandeis University, including the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program, the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, the Russian Studies program, and the Office of High School Programs.

But the time has come for BGI to wrap up its work, and for BGI alumni to apply what they learned there, continuing their inspirational work beyond the campus gates. While GPG will continue providing funding for some non-BGI programs at Brandeis, as of the end of June the Brandeis-Genesis Institute will cease operations.

Brandeis will remain a vital home for Russian-speaking Jewish community scholarship and an environment where students can explore Russian Jewish identity in the context of other intellectual and cultural interests. Educational and scholarly resources will continue to be available online at the BGI archive. GPG looks forward to continuing to support
Brandeis’ undergraduate students, as well as Russian-speaking high school students from around the world who come to campus for summer programs.

Together, we salute the work of Victor Vitkin, the institute’s executive director, who brought the BGI to new levels of excellence every year. A special thanks is also due to Professor Irina Dubinina for her extraordinary commitment to fortifying the language skills and cultural knowledge of Brandeis’ Russian-speaking students.

Brandeis appreciates GPG’s support in helping the University serve and inspire the Russian-speaking Jewish community over the past seven years, and we look forward to future opportunities for partnership in the years to come.