Can Brandeis Be This Place?

Plan of Action

For
Building Community and Strengthening Intercommunal Coexistence
At Brandeis University
2000-2001

Campus Coexistence Project Leadership Team
September, 2000
Can Brandeis Be This Place?

I'm looking for a place
A very special place
Where I can be me
Where I can grow
And feel safe anywhere I go

It doesn’t have to feel like home,
but welcoming enough
to unpack all of my bags
and know that I'm not alone

I'm looking for a place
that will put its arms around
  my history
  my songs
  my dances
  my prayers
  my stories

I'm looking for a place
where we can stand together,
  learning from each other
  challenging each other
And you won’t let me fall

Most of all I'm looking for a place
  that will hear what I'm longing to say
  that will feel the rhythms of my thoughts
A place that will open its heart and mind,
  As well as its doors.

I'm looking for a place
CAN THIS BE THAT PLACE?

--Jane Sapp, Consulting Artist
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INTRODUCTION

*Can Brandeis Be This Place? A Plan of Action for Building Community and Strengthening Intercommunal Coexistence At Brandeis University* is a map of a journey. Part of the journey -- the work of the Campus Coexistence Leadership Team in Year I of the project -- has already been traveled. This part of the map presents highlights of where we have been and what we have accomplished. Part of the journey -- the work the Leadership Team will undertake in Year 2 of the project -- is yet to come. This part of the map provides guideposts for where we are heading, understanding full well that any journey worthy of the name offers unexpected turns and unanticipated vistas.

This action plan grew out of an extensive series of sessions in which we -- as Brandeis students, faculty and staff of diverse ages, religions, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, class backgrounds and abilities -- grew to understand and respect each other through sharing stories, creating art, and exploring both commonalities and differences. The actions we propose to undertake were developed through an extensive series of conversations, including members of the Leadership Team and the Advisory Board and others in the Brandeis community.

The purpose of this Action Plan is twofold. First, it is designed for the participants of the Campus Coexistence Project ourselves. Members of the leadership team, the advisory committee, and the staff of the project can use this is a resource to remind us of where we have been and to clarify our intentions about where we are heading. In this regard, it is a work in progress, with sections to be filled in as our plans become more solid. People involved in the project may find something missing, or that they have other interpretations of events. If so, these can be added to future versions of the plan.

Second, this document is intended for those who wish to know more about our work -- especially those whose support for our work and participation in its next steps we seek to enlist. Since people may join us to focus on a particular task, this action plan should help them appreciate the larger effort of which their work is a part.

The Campus Coexistence Project is designed not only to address coexistence issues in the Brandeis community, but also to generate knowledge useful to the emerging professional field of coexistence. We are committed not only to conduct the project, but to learn from it. Our learning should focus on questions of coexistence and also on issues surrounding evaluation of this kind of work.

*Can Brandeis Be This Place?* is not intended to be a complete record of the first year of the Leadership Team nor a detailed assessment of all that we have learned from our work. A much more lengthy description of the first year and assessment of our learning can be found in the report by Belle Brett, the project’s evaluator.

The Campus Coexistence Project is one aspect of the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence. In addition to this project, the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence
• supports academic work related to coexistence,
• maintains supportive relationships with an international network of coexistence practitioners and scholars, and
• co-sponsors with the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life the Ethics and Coexistence Student Fellows program.

For further information about the Coexistence Initiative, including updates about the work of the Leadership Team, please visit www.brandeis.edu/ethics/coexistence.

We welcome ideas about our work from others in the larger Brandeis community and in the coexistence field. Please share your responses, questions and suggestions. You can do so by emailing Sara Zenlea (szenlea@brandeis.edu), the assistant to the director of the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence.

The Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence is a program of The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. It is made possible by a generous grant from the Alan B. Slifka Foundation. Members of the leadership team and its advisory board are grateful to Mr. Slifka for providing the financial resources that have made our work possible.

Cynthia Cohen, Director
Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence
Clarifying our Purpose and Establishing Norms:
The Leadership Team began its journey with a discussion of our purpose for being together. The students, faculty and staff came to the project with a clear intention of strengthening the Brandeis community and working together to improve relationships among people of diverse backgrounds.

At our very first meeting, we developed group norms about confidentiality. We also recognized that members of our group would likely differ in the degree of openness with which they felt comfortable sharing with the group, and we agreed to be tolerant of that difference. The facilitators highlighted a distinction between dialogue – which emphasizes listening to understand the meaning of the other – and discussion, which emphasizes an exchange of and competition of ideas. We agreed that both are necessary, but that our work would emphasize dialogue in its early stages.

Sharing Stories and Creating Art Together
Initially, our primary mode of working together was through the sharing of stories. At our retreat, we shared stories about our “aesthetic inheritances” – elements of our traditions and cultures that we absorbed as members of our families and communities. These stories opened windows onto each other’s lives and, to a degree, served to equalize us as members of the group. We simultaneously experienced a sense of “common humanity” and an appreciation for the particularities of experience – the particular foods, clothes, persons, traditions – that inscribe our lives with meaning.

In one-on-one interviews and then in three subsequent meetings, we shared stories about aspects of our identities, including both experiences at Brandeis and in the world at large. Through these stories we began to know each other more deeply. We began to see each other as people who make choices in relation to the events and circumstances of our lives, even when we have been hurt by personal losses and by dynamics such as intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia and anti-Semitism. We discovered that listening to other people’s stories helped us understand our own experiences in new ways.

Through these storysharing activities, we focused not only on the telling of our stories but on listening attentively to each other. For some of us listening presented a challenge; for others, it came quite easily. We did notice, however, that as we listened attentively to each other’s stories, a space was opened inside each of us to hear and receive the person who was telling his or her story.

In a later session, we explored the relationships among our stories by creating art together. We found visual metaphors – a four-chambered heart, a volcano erupting with stories, a pinwheel of transformation – that expressed both the distinctness and the relatedness of our stories.

Exploring Power
At our retreat, we explored power, both in its positive, creative aspects and its negative expression as domination. With this conconceptual framework in mind, we met
in separate groups, and discovered that as undergraduates, graduates, staff and faculty we experienced different kinds of power and often, feelings of powerlessness. From this experience, some of us recognized the extent to which we had been ignorant of the lives of those in different statuses at the university – it is almost as if we operate in separate worlds while sharing the same geography and relating to the same institutional structures.

Throughout our work together, we were challenged to work constructively with the dynamics of power within our group. The statuses we occupy within the university structure endow us with different degrees and kinds of power, and it was impossible to completely remove our interactions within the group from the institutional structure of which we are a part. We became aware of the challenges of creating a group in which all members’ voices are valued equally in the context of an institution in which people are in distinct hierarchical relationships with each other. We worked to become aware of our own particular patterns, and how our own words and silences, actions and inaction, can serve to reinforce or challenge the unhelpful institutional patterns of power at work in our group. While we recognize the different responsibilities associated with different statuses in the university structure, we seek to create a group where each member is equally valued. We intend to make use of our different positions to understand issues from a variety of perspectives and to plan especially effective interventions.

**Majority/Minority Issues**

The composition of our group was varied, not only by virtue of our different statuses in the University and the related difference in age, but also because of other aspects of our identities, including religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and economic class. The stories that we shared and our discussions opened windows onto feelings and issues that surround these differences in the Brandeis community.

At the retreat, when the undergraduate discussed among themselves (and then in a “fishbowl”) questions of power and powerlessness, we could begin to feel some tensions related to their experiences of Brandeis as a “Jewish” institution. For instance, non-Jewish students expressed their frustration at not being able to get their mail on and having to eat at inconvenient locations on Saturday. They were surprised to learn about the degree of diversity within the Jewish community, which they had previously imagined to be quite homogeneous. Several non-Jewish students remembered their surprise when they first realized the extent to which social life and opportunities on campus reflect the life of Brandeis’s Jewish majority. They felt that the pluralistic image they had been given of Brandeis was very different from the reality that they experienced here. Jewish members of the group expressed the concern that non-Jewish members might not understand the historical events and social circumstances that lead them to value or need an institution in which Jewish religious and cultural traditions are given precedence.

During a session at a mid-point in the semester, the facilitators divided the Leadership Team into two groups: one of members who identify themselves as Jewish, and one of members who do not consider themselves Jewish. This division was both troubling and informative. The separation itself raised uncomfortable historical resonances of separation. But the conversations were enlightening. Jewish participants –
both those who are more observant and those who are less so -- identified the extent to which they fear judgment of other members of the Jewish community whose choices are different from their own. They spoke of the vulnerability they feel at being both a minority in the larger world and the majority at Brandeis. They worry about becoming potential targets of others’ anger and resentment, and that their non-Jewish peers wouldn’t appreciate the historical context of Brandeis’s commitment to the Jewish community. Non-Jewish participants expressed a number of frustrations. Students talked about the limited social life and opportunities for dating at Brandeis. Students, faculty and staff all discussed their desire to have more meaningful contact with the Jewish community, with its traditions and culture. Some people expressed the desire for more spaces that feel – aesthetically, socially, culturally – more like home.

Following this event, several Jewish members of the group invited some of the non-Jewish members to attend a Purim festival. A long-time employee of the university was moved to tears by the invitation – the first she had received to attend a Jewish religious or cultural event in her entire tenure at Brandeis.

There were many other perspectives on questions of inter-group relations touched upon in our stories, interactions and conversations, including issues of racism and race relations, sexism and gender equity, homophobia and related fears surrounding sexual orientation. These issues and questions remain to be explored more deeply.

**Issues of Economic Class and Invisibility**

In recruiting for the Leadership Team, it became clear to the staff of the project that there are many institutional barriers to the participation of custodial and service workers in activities like the Leadership Team. Unfortunately, this meant that our own work was to some extent perpetuating what appears to be a pattern in our community, in which those whose physical labor sustains the institution become virtually invisible to many others. We were fortunate to have several members with strong connections to custodial and service workers – who were able to tell us stories about times, for instance, when faculty and students failed even to recognize custodial workers when they changed out of their uniforms.

Stories like this stand in harsh contrast to the ideal of social justice as a core principle of the institution, an ideal cherished by members of the leadership team. As we developed ideas for the action plan, many suggestions were made for supporting members of the support staff at Brandeis to claim a full voice as members of the community.

**Presenting our Work-in-Progress to the Advisory Board Members**

In early April we prepared a presentation about our work for the members of the advisory board and other invited guests. The presentation created a challenge for us, in part because it was the first time we were taking action together outside of our own group, and because we had distinctly different views with how ‘performative’ our presentation should be. Several members of the group worked with our Consulting Artist, Jane Sapp, and came to the session with a proposal for a performance. Others felt uncomfortable, unsure whether we could present something of sufficient quality in the time available, and uncomfortable with the idea of performing itself. We ended up presenting aspects of our stories and our relationships with each other in a variety of
registers, ranging from the poetic to the conversational. The ultimate presentation was appreciated by its audience, but left some members of the group unsatisfied. They felt disappointed that their original work planning the performance was overturned so quickly, and angry that even what they had taken as an agreement for a more modest presentation was not enacted.

In retrospect, this incident represents both a lost opportunity and a source of potential learning. For the facilitators, there are lessons about the importance of allowing group members to confront a conflict rather than try to resolve it for them and being sure that all voices are given equal weight, even when we face pressures of time. For group members, there is a challenge to assert important needs and desires, and to be clear when a compromise can be truly accepted and when it represents too much of a loss. Finally, for the entire group, there are lessons about the importance of clarifying our agreements with each other, especially when we are taking action together outside of the group.

We did learn through this experience that some members of our group are eager to work in the mode of performance, and we can provide space and resources to support them in the upcoming year.

Creating a vision for Brandeis of the Future

Near the end of the spring semester, we created visions of Brandeis in the year 2010. We worked together as undergraduates, graduates, staff and faculty, first creating visual images and then describing the images in words. In retrospect it appears that our vision for Brandeis emerged from two directions. First, we wanted to extend out to the Brandeis community some of the unique qualities of the culture of our own small group. Second, we wanted to support Brandeis to become an institution that more fully realizes its ideals, where people are not confronted by some of the disappointments and frustrations that were revealed in our stories and our discussions.

After many drafts and discussions, we can articulate our vision in terms of five ideas:

• We envision Brandeis as a community filled with opportunities for people of similar and different backgrounds to come to know each other in meaningful ways, such as through the sharing of stories.
• We envision a community where people of different backgrounds can find places where they feel at home – where distinct cultural groups can express and develop their own voices.
• We envision for Brandeis a vibrant and engaging public life – where architectural and social spaces encourage people to come together across differences in university status and background, for conversation, to share music and cultural events, and to engage in rituals.
• We envision Brandeis as a community in which our commitment to social justice is felt in interactions among us and in projects we undertake together.
• Our vision for Brandeis, captured in the poem that opens this document, is for it to become a place that: “will hear what I'm longing to say, that will feel the rhythms of my thoughts -- a place that will open its heart and mind, as well as its doors.”
Articulating Long-Term Goals
After articulating this vision, we translated it into a set of long-term goals.

- Promoting an engaging public life at Brandeis University that brings students, faculty and staff into relationship in ways that transcend the boundaries of our status in the university and our different ethnic, religious and cultural affiliation.
- Promoting a campus environment in which concerns for justice, fairness and respect pervade all of our relationships, interactions, activities and communication.
- Promoting the vitality and expression of the different cultures that are represented at Brandeis as well as respectful and educational points of connection among them.
- Promoting the development of leadership capacity for coexistence and community-building at Brandeis.

We do not see ourselves as being capable of creating these changes on our own. Rather, we wish to promote a set of values and qualities of community life – through actions we undertake, through our conversations with others, by encouraging others to sponsor activities and programs, and by raising awareness of various issues and possibilities on campus. We also intend to expand our own capacities and to work to expand leadership capacity for coexistence in the larger community.

Brainstorming and Prioritizing Actions
In April and May, we met in many small groups to brainstorm ideas for actions that we would take that would help us meet the long-term goals we established for the leadership team. It isn’t possible for us to undertake all of these projects, but we don’t want to lose any of our good thinking, so all of the ideas we generated are listed in an appendix attached to this action plan.

Certain ideas were compelling to a number of people in the group and seem feasible for us to undertake within the framework of the Campus Coexistence Project of the present Coexistence Initiative. They also match our sense of the particular resources and challenges that comprise the current state of coexistence at Brandeis University.

Appreciating Each Other and Celebrating Our Work Together
In May, we met for a final dinner and celebration. In addition to prioritizing the ideas for actions that we generated, we spent time appreciating each member of the Leadership Team. Those of us able to stay were delighted and moved to hear the Springfield Community Chorus, a group of people committed to social justice who sing, talk and build community together.

REFLECTIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

Drafting the Action Plan
During the summer months, the staff of the project met with members of the Leadership Team to draft this action plan and to work on the evaluation of our first year. Members of the project’s Advisory Team reviewed an earlier version of the plan and recommended that we consider ways to make our work in Year 2 focused and coherent.
They also expressed concern that none of graduate student members of the team would be on campus during the fall semester, and asked us to consider recruiting new graduate students in the fall.

This September version of the plan responds to the Advisory Board’s concerns about coherence by proposing that the theme of ‘majority/minority relations’ inform all of the actions we take. The question of recruitment of new members is one we need to address at the retreat. My recommendation is that we seek to involve graduate students (as well as others) in the task groups that we convene, but that we not recruit any new members into our Monday evening sessions. The final decision about this depends in large part on the extent to which Leadership Team members want to build on the trust we’ve established with each other through our experiences last year.

As a result of these conversations, a picture is beginning to emerge of the strengths of the leadership team itself and the challenges it faces as it enters year 2 of the project. Also, by reflecting on the stories and the dynamics of our own work as well as on additional research she has been conducting at Brandeis, Belle Brett has begun to assess the current state of coexistence in the university community as a whole.

Identifying Principles That Inform our Actions

As we began to draft the action plan, it became clear that what we valued about our group was not only the what we do but how we interact with each other and how we approach the project. We would like to maintain the principles which guided us last year, especially as we move into a more action-oriented phase of our project.

• **Commitment to dialogue**: As a team, we have placed a strong emphasis on how we communicate with each other. We believe that our ability to communicate depends to a very large degree on the qualities of presence we bring to each other – as we listen and as we speak. Our primary mode has been dialogue – in which each person listens to the others, with a serious interest in understanding the speaker’s intentions, feelings and meaning.

• **The importance of conversation**: Communities are strengthened when difficult issues are confronted through serious and constructive conversation. In some cases these conversations happen spontaneously; in other instances they need to be structured and facilitated. We believe in the significance of both dialogue – with its emphasis on listening -- and discussion, when people exchange ideas and examine their merits.

• **Willingness to grapple with issues related to differences in ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability and status in the university**: Within the leadership team, we have begun to explore the kinds of power dynamics that are present in our relationships because of various aspects of our identity. While on one level we recognize our common humanity and our complete equality in terms of our dignity as human beings, we nevertheless recognize that aspects of our identity are associated with both privilege and barriers. Respectful relationships across differences require us to be conscious of these differences in power.
• **Willingness to take risks**, Becoming leaders in coexistence has required us to take risks. We risked sharing stories with each other, we risked exploring differences, and we have begun to risk confronting each other when we feel hurt or angry. As we move into a period of taking action together, we will be called on to take more risks. These risks can provide excellent opportunities for growth and for learning.

• **Willingness to engage in critical self-reflection, and to enhance our capacities through cycles of action, reflection, and feedback**: As we begin to take action together, we will have more opportunities to learn new skills, enhance our capacities, understand our community more deeply. This learning will only take place if we reflect on the work we do, and if we give each other honest feedback designed to facilitate each other’s growth and development. Self-reflection, inquiry and feedback to each other will become increasingly important in the second year of our work.

• **Valuing imagination and creativity**: A vibrant community is like a work of art: its disparate elements are brought in to meaningful and beautiful relationships through imaginative structures and creative processes. As a leadership team, we have emphasized the aesthetic dimension of community-building – the ‘aesthetic inheritances’ we bring with us from our families and communities, the importance of narrative in constructing meaning in our lives, the generativity of artistic processes in creating visions for the future and interpretations of our experiences. We will continue to emphasize narrative and the arts in our work together, and intend to structure opportunities for others on the campus to engage in creative modes of community-building as well.

**Leadership Team Strengths and Challenges**

As a team, we are in a very strong position to have a positive impact on coexistence and community at Brandeis. Most important, perhaps, are the relationships we have built with each other. We know each other in a profound way – through the stories we have shared and through creating art together. We have experienced listening to each other and being listened to by the members of the group. In some sense, in the hours we spent together we enacted some of the qualities of community that we hope to promote in the university as a whole, so we can use the memory of our time together as a touchstone.

We have begun the process of shaping our personal stories in ways that allow us to be in a powerful relationship to the experiences of our lives. The willingness to work with one’s own narrative is a key element of leadership, especially in the realm of coexistence work. We are also familiar with oral history, a particular modality of coexistsence work.

We also bring to this work the strength of our diversity. Because we have different positions with the university, and because we are different in religion, ethnicity, race and class we can pool our insights and understanding to create a more complete picture of the Brandeis community than any of us could alone. In this regard, we are probably uniquely well-situated to our task. We also bring a variety of skills and talents. Some of us are strong writers, some of us are good singers, some of us are good at leading activities, some of us are deeply reflective. We have the potential to work in a
variety of modes and to express ourselves in ways that are convincing to the whole array of constituencies in the Brandeis community. Many of us are in positions by virtue of our other roles on campus, to further the agenda of the Leadership Team.

We face several challenges in mobilizing our talents and our strengths. The first is adopting an action plan that addresses core issues, that engages our imagination, and is feasible for us to do well. Then, we need to commit ourselves to the work and be present and consistent so that we can depend on each other.

As we undertake this work, we will probably discover that we disagree and have conflicts about how to proceed. These conflicts and disagreements will challenge us to explore our differences, to confront each other openly and respectfully, and to deepen our relationships in the process.

We will be challenged this year to expand the circle of those involved in our work – while maintaining the qualities of relating we worked hard to develop last year.

In Year 2, each member of the team will be called upon to act in a leadership capacity – within our group itself and also in the actions we undertake on campus.

To be done responsibly, and to live up to our commitments to our funder and to the field of coexistence, our work in Year 2 must embrace both action and inquiry. We will need to prioritize our work so that we have time for both elements. So members of the leadership team will be challenged to take ownership of the inquiry aspect of the project. What do we want to learn – about ourselves, about the functioning of our group, and about coexistence at Brandeis? We will need to address these questions and decide how we want to go about structuring our inquiries.

Assessing Coexistence at Brandeis

This brief assessment of some of the resources and challenges for coexistence at Brandeis is far from an exhaustive list. A more thorough discussion can be found in Belle Brett’s evaluation report – and even then, all of these points must be taken as tentative at this stage in our inquiry. Nevertheless, it will be helpful for us as we commit to an action plan for the next year to consider both the strengths and the weaknesses of Brandeis in terms of coexistence.

There are several features of the Brandeis community that can be important resources for our work. First, there is a general consensus within the institution, at all levels, that community-building is a priority and that issues of coexistence and diversity need attention. Also, there are other groups on campus – including Posse, Peer Perspectives, the Religious Pluralism and Spirituality Committee, to name just a few – that share our goals and can be approached to cooperate with us. The new Senior Vice President, the new Jewish Chaplain are familiar with and supportive of our work.

Brandeis’s commitment to social justice is also a resource for our work. The theme of social justice associated with Justice Brandeis resonates strongly with most people on campus. We can make use of it as a rallying point for activity and identity.

Brandeis University’s commitment to its roots in the Jewish community – while creating certain challenges for coexistence – is an important resource for several reasons. First, in its affiliation with the Jewish community, the institution recognizes the
importance of the existence of distinct cultural/religious/ethnic communities. Unlike many other institutions, the Brandeis ideal is not one of a homogeneous community in which all distinct communities become assimilated. In addition, we can draw on aspects of Jewish tradition – such as imperatives to ‘heal the world’ and to treat outsiders with kindness – to support our coexistence work. One aspect of coexistence work is to support the distinct expression of sub-communities; at Brandeis there is a good deal of support for its Jewish members, students in particular, to explore aspects of Jewish history and culture.

Brandeis is filled with people of different religious, ethnic, racial and class backgrounds and different gender and sexual identities – all with stories to tell, ‘aesthetic inheritances’ from their own communities, experience – both affirming and hurtful – in relation to their identities, and sets of values and commitments. The members of the Brandeis community are the most important strengths that Brandeis brings to the work of coexistence.

At the same time, there are some features of Brandeis that present challenges or obstacles to coexistence. Perhaps most significantly, there is a lack of clarity around Brandeis’s dual commitment to Judaism and to pluralism. This lack of clarity creates a “fuzzy” identity for Brandeis, both inside and outside of the institution. How do these two conceptions intersect and how can they serve to support each other? Within the student body, the uneven demographics work against some members of the community feeling supported in the expression of their identities. Some university policies, such as limited meal service on Friday night, leave non-Jewish members of the community feeling unacknowledged.

Our work in the leadership team pointed to many questions in relation to Brandeis’s dual commitment, some ethical and some practical. We need to investigate further the points of tension and of mutual benefit between Brandeis’s Jewish and pluralistic commitments. What are the responsibilities of the ‘majority’ on campus? What are the issues of the minorities, how serious are they, and what are the institution’s responsibility toward them? What are the most salient intra-communal issues, within the Jewish community, which itself ranges from secular to Orthodox? Are there parts of Jewish and other sub-communities and Brandeis that do not support the ideal of coexistence? If so, what is the relationship between the University’s educational mission and the need for boundaries expressed by some of the sub-groups? How can the institution support more meaningful interaction among members of the Jewish community and others on campus? What are the concerns of Brandeis students and other members of the community who are neither Jewish, nor international, nor an American minority?

There are other challenges to coexistence at Brandeis. One which may have affected our group in its process is the culture of excellence that exists on campus emphasizes individual achievement and can place pressures on people that make it difficult to prioritize community-building work.

The university’s physical structure seems unconducive to social interaction and does not reflect the diversity of cultures that are part of the community. It is difficult to find places on campus where students, faculty and staff all feel welcome and comfortable, or spaces comfortable for interaction and conversation.
These and perhaps other factors combine to create a sense of “atomization” on campus, with many members of sub-groups sticking to themselves, lacking the motivation to move outside of their own circles. Opportunities for exchange are often missed, and misunderstandings persist about the beliefs, values, cultures and experiences of different groups on campus.

The Brandeis community will continue to be diminished as long as some of its members feel invisible and/or disrespected. A challenge to the community is to discover ways in which service and custodial workers can have a stronger voice and feel more at home and welcome at campus events.

Finally, perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to coexistence at Brandeis is the lack of community conversations that address people’s concerns in a productive and proactive way. There appears to be hesitancy within the institutional culture to raise the issue of majority/minority relations – and to openly address the meaning of Brandeis’s commitment to its Jewish roots. Some people have expressed reservations about raising issues about racism or prejudice for fear of appearing anti-Semitic.
LOOKING FORWARD: LEADERSHIP TEAM PLANS FOR 2000-2001

This section of the action plan reflects multiple small group conversations among members of the Leadership Team and staff, and discussions at a retreat held on September 10, 2000. The action plan continues to be an evolving document, and this section in particular will be refined and elaborated upon as various groups develop more specific workplans for this 1999 – 2000 academic year.

Theme
This year the leadership team will focus its inquiry and actions on the theme “Coexistence and Social Justice: Majority/Minority Relations at Brandeis University.” By taking a common overall theme we can give different aspects of our work coherence. Our various projects can reinforce each other, and our inquiries can build upon each other at the end of the year.

Why this particular theme? Brandeis University rests on four pillars: Commitment to the institution’s Jewish roots; Secularism and Pluralism; Social Justice; and Excellence.

We have a sense that in exploring questions of Brandeis’s simultaneous commitment to its Jewish roots and to pluralism we will find the key to improving intercommunal relations of all kinds. This inquiry should take place recognizing Brandeis’s other two pillars as well: our commitment to social justice, a commitment that resonates with almost everyone in the Brandeis community, and our commitment to excellence – a concept that is worthy of examining in light of questions of coexistence.

As a group, we feel we are uniquely well-positioned to take on this question and have the capacity to do so in a productive, positive, respectful and caring way.

Within the general framework of majority/minority relations, we will still be able to explore issues of race and racism, questions of gender and issues of class and economic justice. I have discussed this with almost every member of the Leadership Team and there seems to be agreement on this matter.

Actions
Some of the actions we propose to undertake will explore this theme through reflection, writing and public conversations. Other actions are designed, in themselves, to support the expression of distinct groups and meaningful interaction among people of diverse backgrounds through activities of various kinds. In all cases, we will attempt to enact the principles that we established in our work together last year – so that we are strengthening coexistence at Brandeis in the process of our work as well as in the outcomes we anticipate.

• Meetings of the Leadership Team as a whole. These meetings, to be held once a month, will be used to coordinate our various efforts and to support our on-going learning about ourselves, our group and coexistence at Brandeis University. Cindy will facilitate with members of the Leadership Team.
• Facilitated conversations on Brandeis identity, its commitment to social justice, and particularly tensions and possibilities inherent in the institution’s dual commitment to its Jewish roots and to pluralism. Preliminary conversations will lead to a document with further conversations and refinement of the document to follow. Andreas and others will coordinate, Ora Gladstone of Hillel to participate.

• Training in Facilitating Storytelling Sessions: Series of sessions for leaders of Brandeis clubs and offices designed to empower them to lead storysharing workshops and projects on campus. Carol to coordinate with Cindy.

• Conversation and Response to Campus Events: a drop-in conversation group that discusses recent events and trends pertaining to coexistence at Brandeis. In some cases these conversations might lead to actions and responses (such as a letter to The Justice, a community forum, a behind-the-scenes conversation). Attila, Michele and Ed to coordinate.

• Inclusive and Interactive Events, focusing on a Coexistence Month during January. The month will feature Pete Seeger’s residency. Preparation for residency and follow-up might include: community sings; performance group; exhibit of Brandeis workers’ stories, WBRS airing of Seeger’s music. Besides the month, we will sponsor events such as a gathering for non-Jewish parents on Parents Weekend; facilitating co-sponsorship of events by several cultural clubs; events designed to create opportunities for members of non-Jewish communities at Brandeis to connect to Jewish religion, culture, history; comedy evenings. Roxanne to focus on Coexistence Month. Eva to coordinate calendar of events. Maureen exploring exhibit of Brandeis workers.

• Input into campus architecture and physical space: Maureen to make initial inquiries about how to proceed on our concern that physical spaces at Brandeis facilitate social interaction among diverse groups, reflect the various cultures that are part of our community, and help people feel welcome and at home.

Workplans:
Members of the Leadership Team are now in the process of creating workplans for each of the actions listed above, guided by the following questions. Their answers will help us both coordinate and evaluate our work.

1. What is the purpose of the sub-group and how does it relate to our overall theme of exploring coexistence in the context of Brandeis’s 4 pillars?

2. What people and resources at Brandeis can we call on to support this effort? What challenges or obstacles are we likely to face?

3. What steps need to be taken? How can these steps make good use of the resources and plan ahead for any likely challenges or obstacles?
4. What are our assumptions about why this activity is a good idea? How do we anticipate this particular project will move us forward in our goals or towards our vision for Brandeis?

5. How will we be able to tell if we are doing a good job? What outcomes do we imagine for the short, medium and long term?

6. Who will be invited to participate – both from inside and outside of the Leadership Team?

7. What will be important to document from this part of our work? How will we do it?

8. What do we hope we and those participate will learn from this work and how will we gather reflections and information?

9. Who will take leadership roles in relation to this activity?

10. When will this group meet and where? What do we hope to accomplish in each month of the upcoming school year?

Inquiries

During the first year of the project, we discussed a model of coexistence leadership that embraced change at three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational.

This year our attention turns towards action – action designed to strengthen coexistence and community at Brandeis, much of it focusing on majority/minority relationships and issues.

As we undertake these actions, we will be noting how things are changing: within us as persons, within our group, among sub-groups at Brandeis, and within Brandeis as an institution and as a community.

The various activities we undertake should give us insights into the nature of majority/minority relations in the context of Brandeis’s commitments to excellence and to social justice. We should be learning about areas of cooperation, respect, mutually beneficial interaction, and understanding and well as points of tension, feelings of disregard, misunderstanding and conflict. In relation to our efforts to support the institution clarify the nature of its dual commitment to Judaism and to pluralism, we should be noting which of our strategies have what kinds of effects, how successful we are at understanding issues and bringing people into generative and productive conversation. Similarly, as we undertake projects designed to bring people from majority and minority communities into relationship with each other, we should gather people’s responses to these activities and use their feedback to refine our approaches.

We will continue to work with Belle Brett, the project’s evaluator, in documenting, reflecting upon and assessing our work.
Communications

This year, we will communicate with the Brandeis community by distributing copies of the Action Plan, through the Coexistence Initiative’s website, through the Justice and the Reporter, and through flyers and publicity for our events. Now that our attention is turned outward to the Brandeis community, informing the campus of our existence, our philosophy and our activities becomes increasingly important.
Participants in the Campus Coexistence Project, 1999-2000

Additional Suggestions for Enhancing Coexistence at Brandeis University
1999-2000 PARTICIPANTS IN THE CAMPUS COEXISTENCE PROJECT

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ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR ENHANCING COEXISTENCE AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

In the process of developing this Action Plan, we developed many ideas for strategies to strengthen community and enhance coexistence at Brandeis University. We recognize that we cannot accomplish all of this work ourselves, but we record these ideas here in hopes that others on campus might be able to make use of these suggestions.

Relating to physical space

Ideas for the new Shapiro Campus Center:
• Lighting, décor and atmosphere designed to promote coexistence and interaction
• Music of different kinds
• Student-run food establishments
• Kosher vegetarian food, ice cream, cappuccino
• Pushcarts

Review and recommendations regarding residence policies
• Living units of like-minded people?
• More conscious integration of undergrads of different years and grad students
• More community-building activities for second-fourth year students
• Support each floor or building to sponsor an all-campus weekend events

Committee to review renovations, architectural plans, master plans for impact on intergroup relations

Facilitating opportunities for people to come together across differences
• Film series on various cultures and themes related to coexistence with small conversation groups
• Service projects
  • structure community service day so it brings people together across differences
  • link with Waltham group to have student/faculty/staff project(s)
• Strengthening host program
• Activities that are welcoming to family members, Waltham community, alumni, board members – as well as students, faculty and staff.
• Make Brandeis calendar more congruent with outside community, in terms of school holidays, etc.
• Intramural sports for faculty, staff and students
• Use theater, arts and other cultural events already taking place on campus as opportunity to sponsor meals, conversations, etc., that involve students, faculty and staff
• Coordinate “specialty tables” at the Stein for discussions among students, faculty and staff (similar to “language-speaking tables”)
• Support “take-a-staff member-to lunch/breakfast” program modeled on “take-a-faculty-member-to-lunch” program
• Address fears that staff will not be supported to attend community-building events and the felt-pressures to appear “too busy” to attend such events.
• Open ‘Carnival’ event to family members of staff and faculty

Supporting campus leaders at all levels to think imaginatively about coexistence – in terms of policies and activities
• reports
• conversations
• model projects
• publication of action plan, stories, documentation of leadership team, etc.
• seed money for others to experiment with projects and ideas

Enhancing leadership capacity for coexistence at Brandeis
• create structured, facilitated opportunities for leadership team to grapple with differences among us – in gender, class, race, as well as working more deeply on questions of religious affiliation and status at the university
• sponsor some workshops and trainings that are open to members of the larger Brandeis community

Ensuring that all voices are heard, all members of the community are visible and validated
• create collection of stories in booklet and/or exhibit, designed to create context for more storysharing activities
• publish stories of “less heard” members of the Brandeis community in The Justice and The Reporter
• Support members of the support staff to feel comfortable enough and welcome enough to have a voice on campus
• work with editors of “The Justice” and “The Reporter” to cover staff contributions and stories
• use the web (link to dailyjolt?) to make staff more aware of cultural and recreational opportunities (theater tickets, intramural sports, etc.), and encourage supervisors to print and post events in visible locations
• create opportunities to feature staff talent:
  • staff participation in Culture X
  • employee events (special day?) at Festival of the Arts
  • Springfest with comedy routines, rap groups, etc., of interest to staff and students
• explore whether announcements posted for staff should use languages other than English
• Encourage policies that invest in education, training and promotion of staff members
• Emphasize the legacy of Justice Louis Brandeis, the purposes behind the founding of Brandeis University, Brandeis’ commitments to social justice and activism

Strengthen existing programs and facilitate links among them
• Encourage resources for more welcoming environment and better communications infrastructure for Intercultural Center
• Work with Hillel, Hornstein Program, NEJS, and other centers of Jewish religious, cultural and intellectual life to structure meaningful opportunities for non-Jewish members of the Brandeis community to learn about and engage with Jewish life
• Facilitate discussions among Jewish leaders on campus to address issues of diversity within the Jewish community and the responsibilities and possibilities associated with the majority status of the Jewish community here
• Offer resources to support storysharing sessions between Jewish and other constituencies (such as members of international community, various faith communities, American minority communities, etc.)
• Encourage members of Brandeis’ various Jewish communities to make personal invitations to non-Jewish community members to events such as Sabbath services, Passover Seders, lectures and conferences on themes in Jewish history and culture
• Support Jewish and non-Jewish clubs, centers and departments to co-sponsor events that feature artists and/or scholars that open windows into both cultures, highlighting both similarities and unique elements
• Support on-going Brandeis programs that link people of different backgrounds
  • Host program
  • Peer Perspectives, Posse, Pulse, Diversity Committees, etc.
  • Dialogue groups
  • Events that showcase distinct cultures
  • Culture X (at orientation??)

Support opportunities for coexistence by linking with resources in the Boston area
• Link Brandeis students with the cultural resources of the greater Boston area
• Facilitate joint intellectual, cultural and social events between Brandeis departments or clubs and programs at other local colleges and universities, focusing on programs that have concentrations of students from populations that are culturally and socially isolated at Brandeis, such as a film series jointly sponsored by AAAS and similar programs at Tufts, BC or BU, or Asian studies events sponsored with Wellesley
• Support adequate transportation access to nearby educational institutions and the Green Line at Riverside