



The Brandeis University President's Initiative on Antisemitism

OUR FIRST 18 MONTHS
FALL 2024

Founded in April 2023 in response to surging antisemitism on American campuses,

the Brandeis University President's Initiative on Antisemitism honors Brandeis' distinct responsibility to the Jewish community and to the ideals of higher education.

As a research institution founded by the American Jewish community, Brandeis is uniquely situated to examine issues of antisemitism on campus and to develop data-driven responses. We are committed to enhancing understanding of antisemitism in all its manifestations and to emboldening leaders to challenge antisemitism on their campuses.

Recognizing that antisemitism forms well before matriculation into a college or university and that biases reverberate well beyond institutions of higher education, the Initiative also offers programming to middle and high school leaders and educators, as well as to Jewish communal professionals. Engaging with and sensitizing these influential community leaders to the sources and consequences of antisemitism aids them in addressing its impact early in students' educational development.

THE INITIATIVE ENDEAVORS TO:

- Convene and support university leaders
- Raise awareness and sensitivity about antisemitism
- Partner with expert researchers and practitioners to enhance understanding
- Provide tools and research for data-driven, action-focused practices
- Cultivate relationships among the professionals to learn best practices and share challenges
- Develop spaces to integrate substantive content into existing curricular materials
- Practice transmitting ideas to learners in an accessible and digestible manner

The Initiative has a productive partnership with Boundless, a think-action tank, co-founded by Rachel Fish, GSAS PhD'13, and Aviva Klompas. [Boundless](#) identifies and disrupts the challenges impeding leaders and organizations from meaningfully educating about Israel and Jew-hatred. In addition to leading the Initiative, Fish also serves as special advisor on antisemitism to Brandeis' president.

IMPACT NUMBERS

100

Administrators attended the Brandeis Leadership Symposium on Antisemitism in Higher Education

43

Administrators participated in the Frieze Family Foundation Summer Institutes

385

Higher education administrators joined four webinars

145

Greater Boston middle and high school educators and leaders took part in Identifying and Addressing Antisemitism in Our Schools

50

Executives from 23 Jewish Community Centers across North America participated in the JCC Executive Seminar on Antisemitism

Higher Education Initiatives

In its first 14 months, the Initiative piloted two programs for higher education administrators: a symposium and the Frieze Family Summer Institute for Higher Education Administrators.



BRANDEIS LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM ON ANTISEMITISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Brandeis hosted its first leadership symposium on antisemitism in higher education for university administrators from November 14–15, 2023. Over 100 participants from 21 colleges and universities were welcomed to campus.

During this day-and-a-half-long symposium, institutional teams of 3–5 senior administrators — presidents, provosts, deans, DEI officers, admissions, and communications staff, and others — heard from experts and participated in interactive workshops to gain a broader knowledge and understanding of Jews, Judaism, and Israel. Participants also networked with peers, planting the seeds for development of “communities of practice” to share successes, challenges and future opportunities.

“The symposium provided essential resources and networking at a pivotal moment in the life of our university.”

ADMINISTRATOR, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The symposium allowed for meaningful collaboration with a variety of organizations: Boundless, Academic Engagement Network, Hillel International’s Campus Climate Initiative, Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, and leading academics and experts.

Following the symposium, the Initiative provided continuing education webinars on: Title VI under the Office of Civil Rights; expressions of antisemitism; teaching Israel in a time of crisis; and the influence of foreign funding on universities and colleges. Access to the [webinars](#) is publicly available.

WHAT PRACTITIONER PARTNERS ARE SAYING

“Planned well before the Hamas atrocities in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the humanitarian catastrophes caused by the Israel-Hamas war, and the campus crises these events in the Middle East generated, the symposium’s organizers could not have foreseen how timely the inaugural convening would be. President Ron Liebowitz and his team crafted an expertly run and outstanding multi-day convening that combined learnings about Jewish identity, the complexity of the Jewish experience, and antisemitism with hands-on skills-building exercises. Participants came away with many strategies for meeting an immediate and urgent need: fostering Jewish inclusion and combating antisemitism while also ensuring their campuses remain welcoming and robust educational environments for all.”

MIRIAM F. ELMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT NETWORK
FACULTY AFFILIATE AND FORMER ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Frieze Family Foundation Summer Institutes for Higher Education Administrators

From June 3-7, 2024, the Initiative piloted a four-day Summer Institute on Countering Antisemitism in Higher Education for academic and student affairs professionals to engage in an intensive in-residence program. Leading academic and legal experts provided a robust curriculum covering the history of antisemitism and the varied and nuanced ways it affects higher education; the results from research and other relevant studies; case studies; legal responsibilities associated with Title VI, delving into anti-Zionism and its relationship to contemporary antisemitism; and the sharing of best practices to most effectively confront antisemitism.

To ensure maximum impact upon return to their home campuses, each participating college or university was required to attend as a team of two to four individuals from different professional positions. During the Institute, these teams were asked to develop a project or initiative to address antisemitism in their campus communities, utilizing the knowledge and toolbox of practices and actions they acquired during the Institute.

To support the teams in this crucial and difficult work, participants received stipends for completing the intensive program and for implementing their campus initiatives. We look forward to learning from these campus initiatives to ascertain the impact and long-term feasibility for meaningful climate change on campus.

Administrative teams came from a broad spectrum of higher education institutions, including Harvard College, Harvard Business School, and Harvard Graduate Schools of Arts and Sciences and Education; large state schools, including Universities of Delaware, Michigan, Virginia; small liberal arts colleges, including Amherst, Concordia College, Dean, St. Francis; historically Black colleges and universities, including Dillard, as well as Tufts, MIT, Emerson, and Washington University in St. Louis.

“...Brandeis has an extraordinarily robust trove of scholarship expertise that should be a part of basic education for all those seeking inclusion, social justice, and educational efforts at universities across the U.S.”

ADMINISTRATOR, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

WHAT ADMINISTRATORS ARE SAYING

“The summer institute was an exceptional program. It has the potential to make a real difference in helping people understand the history and complexity of antisemitism and start to question their own beliefs and frankly, their ignorance.”

ADMINISTRATOR, HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

“Thank you for organizing this summer institute at such a critical time. The presentations provided relevant, timely, and important information. I thoroughly enjoyed the week and left energized and determined to make a difference on my campus. I especially appreciated the information about the survey data, Title VI, Constructive Dialogue, and the careful attention to presenting the roots and contemporary expressions of antisemitism.”

ADMINISTRATOR, CONCORDIA COLLEGE, MN

Middle and High School Initiatives

The Initiative convened independent and public school leaders and educators from middle and high schools in Greater Boston for a day of learning called “Identifying and Addressing Antisemitism in Our Schools.” Attendees included 145 school personnel from 52 schools and districts, among them, heads of schools, principals, superintendents, DEI professionals, and educators from the humanities and social sciences.

Practitioners from an array of educational institutions presented content about antisemitism tailored to middle and upper school settings, delving into the nature of antisemitism, its manifestations in the 21st century, and how to navigate difficult conversations in the midst of the Israel-Hamas war.

Recognizing that this symposium was the beginning of a longer educational process, we endeavored to:

- Build a brave space for administrators and educators to lean in with curiosity to examine antisemitism and the factors that contribute to its cultivation
- Provide meaningful professional development to school administrators and educators on antisemitism
- Introduce school professionals to educational resources and individuals who can serve in a long-term relationship with schools to counter Jew-hatred

“I loved how each speaker challenged us and didn’t shy away from difficult questions. I hope this is one of many great opportunities to gather and learn.”

HEAD OF SCHOOL, GREATER BOSTON



WHAT PARTICIPANTS ARE SAYING

“I thought [the day] was excellent. I was especially impressed by how the speakers were willing to ‘go there’ to push the group to a healthy discomfort. I’m not sure we can truly evolve and learn without those critical conversations and an openness to listen. Institutions need to do more of this.”

HEAD OF SCHOOL, GREATER BOSTON

WHAT PRACTITIONER PARTNERS ARE SAYING

“It was a pleasure to collaborate on behalf of Facing History & Ourselves. I was impressed by the significant turnout of school leaders of independent schools. Particularly impressive was the personal outreach Dr. Fish cultivated, which brought these schools’ DEI directors together to grapple with fault lines and problematic frameworks in that field that prevent an effective response to combating contemporary forms of antisemitism. ... While speakers did not shy away from difficult conversations, the tone remained respectful and focused on creating inclusive school environments for ALL students.”

DIMITRY ANSELME, CHIEF OFFICER, GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT, FACING HISTORY & OURSELVES

Partnership with JCCA

Brandeis developed a four-day institute, “Navigating Israel and the Rise of Antisemitism,” to address the specific needs of Jewish Community Center (JCC) senior executives. Held on the Brandeis campus from July 14-17, 2024, leaders gained foundational knowledge about antisemitism, gleaned insights from research, and interacted with communal leaders to hone skills for practical application. Professionals were reinvigorated and felt a degree of confidence to enhance organizational effectiveness by sharing novel approaches, identifying points of intersection, and considering new pathways for countering antisemitism.

Participants included 50 executives comprising 23 two-person teams of CEOs and senior executives from JCCs throughout North America, as well as JCCA senior staff members. JCCs are ideal partners given their wealth of community services, such as early childhood education, health and wellness programs, and civic engagement which draw 1.5 million people through their doors every week, 500,000 of whom are non-Jewish. The JCCs also reach a large sector of the Jewish community in North America that does not participate in other communal institutions. Their participation in Jewish life is centrally identified with the JCC.

We are living in a moment in which all Jewish communal leaders have a responsibility to directly confront Jew-hatred, educate their community members, and have opportunities to humanize Jews, Judaism, and Israel to communities that may lack familiarity. Investing in JCC executives is a substantive opportunity to impact the broader Jewish community and engage deeply with non-Jews about the issues that deserve greater articulation and urgency.

WHAT JCC LEADERS ARE SAYING

“The dramatic rise in antisemitism following October 7 and ongoing efforts to delegitimize Israel have become urgent challenges. We understood quickly that our JCCs needed training and support to leverage their local influence to meet this moment. We could think of no better or more credible partner than Dr. Rachel Fish of Boundless and Brandeis University — who together with JCC Association’s Mandel Center for Jewish Education — designed a brilliantly curated and seamlessly implemented academic seminar with an all-star lineup of faculty. After four days of learning and networking, these 50 JCC senior professionals came away more knowledgeable and confident, armed with common language and resources to help them lead and thwart antisemitism, proudly stand with Israel, and fight all forms of Jew-hatred. We are deeply grateful for this important partnership and believe we now have a proven and effective model worthy of replication and scale across all JCCs and Jewish leadership organizations.”

JENNIFER MAMLET, ACTING PRESIDENT AND CEO, JCC ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA

“I am still processing all the information I learned, [but] I already know how valuable this experience was. The information was so important for me to better be able to do my job. I had no doubt this would be a good experience, but the top-notch presenters and the time and effort put into making the program so powerful were beyond impressive. I especially want to thank you for offering this experience at no cost. [Our JCC] is currently operating in a budget deficit and had there been a fee to attend, I can almost guarantee I would have not gone. ... Thank you for the difference you are making for JCCs and for the entire country.”

JCC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Future Plans

As we look ahead, we are thinking big about challenges and opportunities. We envision developing a Teacher Training Institute for middle and high school educators and leaders. The Teacher Training Institute is a component of a larger vision for Brandeis to serve as a central address to train public and independent school educators, Jewish communal leaders, and higher education administrators. All of this work falls under the Initiative's rubric.

Demand is rising for educational experiences where participants can ask questions, engage substantively with the content, and learn the skills needed to transmit and integrate content into the classroom. It is not enough to provide educators with lesson plans; they need time to build the requisite foundational knowledge to have the confidence to teach the subject and feel equipped to engage with their student body.



The Teacher Training Institute will have an in-residential component at Brandeis University followed by an immersive study tour in Israel. Following the Institute, educators and school leaders will integrate their knowledge and learnings into the curricular materials. The Initiative will provide continuing education to the participants and offer “office hours” to support these educators in their teaching practice.

We are in the initial phase of learning how to engage boards of trustees around antisemitism. If trustees do not understand how Jew-hatred manifests on campus, then we cannot expect higher education leaders, particularly presidents, to lead with clarity and conviction.

We intend to provide trustees with curated learning experiences led by experts and practitioners to better equip them to navigate and confront antisemitism on campus. The trustees need to consider implementing policies to ensure that all students are learning within a hostile-free environment. Trustees will also need to consider the impact of structural challenges within the institutions of higher education that are hijacking or manipulating the purpose of the university. Some of these structural challenges include: faculty abusing the classrooms for ideological or political purposes; the impact of foreign funding on campus through academic programs and student groups on campus; the influence of outside detractors with an intent to create a hostile environment on campus; knowledge of Title VI under the Office of Civil Rights Act; and the lack of implementation of existing school policies.

Finally, as the Initiative's work becomes known, we are increasingly being asked to consult with and tailor educational programming to individual colleges and universities as they develop task forces and other institutional responses to antisemitism on their campuses.

Leadership



Ronald D. Liebowitz was Brandeis University's ninth president from 2016-24. The former president of Middlebury College, Liebowitz is a recognized administrative leader in higher education, whose academic scholarship centers on political geography, Russia, and higher education.

Brandeis is a medium-sized private research university with global reach, dedicated to first-rate undergraduate education and groundbreaking intellectual discovery. Founded by the American Jewish community at a time when many elite universities were discriminating against Jews and others, Brandeis is a secular institution animated by Jewish values, including a reverence for learning, critical thinking, and making the world a better place.

"Ours is a community rooted in purpose, guided by our founding values, and poised to lead in education and research in the 21st century," Liebowitz has said of Brandeis. "It is our charge, our opportunity now, to reignite the flame of our mission for a new generation."



Rachel Fish, GSAS PhD'13, serves as special advisor to the Brandeis University President's Initiative on Antisemitism and is an associate research professor at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. She is co-founder and president of Boundless, an independent think-action-tank promoting Israel education and combating Jew-hatred. In addition, she teaches Israeli history and society at The George Washington University as visiting assistant professor of educational leadership in The Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

Previously, Fish was the executive director of the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, senior advisor and resident scholar at the Paul E. Singer Foundation in New York City, and executive director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, where she trained the next generation of academics in the field of Israel Studies.

Fish completed her dissertation, "Configurations of Bi-nationalism: The Transformation of Bi-nationalism and Palestine/Israel 1920's-Present," on the history of bi-nationalism and alternative visions for constructing the state of Israel. She has served on the faculty at Brandeis University, Harvard University, and The George Washington University, written articles for several publications in the mainstream press and academic journals, and co-edited the book "Essential Israel: Essays for the 21st Century."

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