



Report from Task Force 3 / Working Group 1 on Issues Related to Jewish Scholarship, Leadership and Service

March 18, 2019

Part I. The Brandeis Story

Brandeis was founded by American Jewish leaders, to serve as an antidote to bigotry and antisemitism, and as a contribution from American Jewry to American higher education. In our work on the Task Force on Honoring Our Founding Values, we have heard from various stakeholders that the Brandeis story—of commitment to inclusion, to critical inquiry, and to service and social justice, informed by the Jewish historical experience—still “makes sense.” Brandeis’ self-understanding has coherence, even if there are inevitable tensions. The Brandeis mission continues to resonate.

Brandeis is a crown jewel of the American Jewish community; it is among that community’s most celebrated institutions. American Jews, including many alumni, are justifiably proud of Brandeis and its contributions, through our exemplary scholarship and teaching, to the Jewish community, to America, and to the world.

Early in its history, Brandeis employed the metaphor of “host”: Just as other communities serve as hosts at their institutions, the Jewish community would embrace the role of host at Brandeis. But that metaphor no longer resonates with the Brandeis community. All of Brandeis’ stakeholders—its students, its faculty, its staff, its alumni and friends—ought to feel at home, with a full sense of ownership, rather than being guests at someone else’s table. We are gratified that so many do so. To the extent that some do not, we have work to do.

Three values, grounded in the Jewish historical experience, are central to Brandeis’ culture and its mission. These values are not exclusively Jewish, nor do they represent the essence of Judaism or of Jewish culture. Other institutions surely embrace versions of the same commitments. But this is our story; as we tell our story to ourselves and to the world, we celebrate and commit to these as the best and noblest expressions of Jewish culture, on which we hope to build for the future.

1. *Inclusion:* Brandeis was founded at a time when exclusion of Jews and others was still an accepted practice. Brandeis remains committed to overcoming prejudice, discrimination, and exclusionary structures wherever they occur.
2. *Critical inquiry:* With “truth” on our seal and in our motto, we are committed to the open, persistent critical inquiry that is our best instrument for unveiling deeper truths and greater insight. The Jewish cultural reverence for learning should always be accompanied by questioning. As one prominent teaching within the Jewish tradition encourages us, “Turn it over, and turn it over again.” We celebrate critical inquiry into our practices, our assumptions, and our commitments.
3. *Service and social justice:* We acknowledge that “social justice” generates as many questions as answers, and some are justifiably suspicious that it represents a commitment to specific social policies. Nevertheless, we draw on the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, “repairing the world,” as a guiding

principle for a life well-lived—that is, a life committed to making the world a better place, to serving others and institutions greater than oneself. We celebrate the members of our community, past and present, who embody these commitments.

In articulating and celebrating these values emerging from the Jewish past, we also acknowledge that we have not always lived up to our ideals. Nevertheless, they remain central to the Brandeis story, and we aspire to enact them in ever deeper and more meaningful ways.

Part II. Recommendations

We believe that Brandeis is and ought to remain distinctively Jewish in three particular ways.

First, Brandeis, as a secular institution, has pioneered leading scholarship on Jewish history, culture and life, and has a special responsibility to continue to play this role. We should nurture and support these centers of excellence, while encouraging innovation as they seek deeper and broader impact.

Second, Brandeis has been a home for a remarkably diverse Jewish campus community; we should support the vitality of that community, alongside and in fruitful interchange with other campus communities.

Third, Brandeis has employed Jewish symbols to effectively honor our founding and celebrate our values—including first and foremost the figure of our namesake Justice Louis D. Brandeis; we should embrace these symbols and employ them effectively as educational instruments.

In what follows, we elaborate on each of these areas.

Part II/A. Recommendations Regarding Jewish Scholarship

Scholarship on Jewish history, culture and life—pursued in academic departments and research centers—has been and should remain a centerpiece of Brandeis’ research, programming and teaching activity. Through a set of focused interventions, we have the potential to leverage our strengths for deeper and broader impact on our students, on multiple fields of scholarship, on the Jewish community, and on the world. We need to actively promote cross-disciplinary interactions, to remove structural impediments, and to develop a more integrated intellectual environment.

We recommend:

1. Brandeis should commit to NEJS as a flagship inter-disciplinary department in the University, a home for critical, non-apologetic inquiry into Jewish history and culture from ancient to modern times, alongside inquiry into adjacent cultures (Bible and the ancient Near East, Arabic and Islamic cultures, Christianity and Christian cultures, and the modern Middle East). The study of each of these is valuable independently, but the hallmark of NEJS is to engage the interdependence and comparisons of these fields under one roof. Brandeis should seek to develop support for graduate

study in these fields.

In addition, the study of Hebrew language and literature, as well as the study of the cultures and history of Israel, should be a distinctive strength of Brandeis.

2. Brandeis is home to scholarship, expertise and leadership on contemporary Jewish issues and concerns that are unequaled, in quality and quantity, anywhere in the world. The prominence of this work on “Jewish social policy” has been a long-standing asset to the University and should continue to play that role. We should develop a structure or mechanism to increase collaboration and coordination among those units (Hornstein, CMJS/SSRI, HBI, MCSJE, and perhaps others) that currently focus on the study and teaching of these issues and concerns. These units share a common extroversion towards the Jewish community but without prior commitment to any particular religious or cultural ideology. They view their missions as serving the diverse Jewish community of the 21st century, asking probing questions about that community and convening critical conversations about those questions, and developing Jewish communal leadership that is informed by the best and most insightful scholarship available. Through a new structure or mechanism, they will more collaboratively help the Jewish community live up to its ideals.

Design principles for this new mechanism or structure include the following:

- It should strengthen both horizontal connectivity (among peers) and vertical connectivity (i.e., create better and deeper learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, who do not currently have access to many of the intellectual resources on campus within centers and institutes).
 - It should preserve the autonomy to pursue distinct and distinctive scholarly agendas, while increasing cooperation.
 - It should promote the development of interesting new directions for scholarship that reach beyond the mandate of any single unit (examples might include a multidisciplinary initiative that explores the evolving makeup of the Jewish community, or an initiative to develop the field of adult Jewish learning).
 - It should also promote the development of new directions for teaching (e.g., executive education).
 - It should enable stronger coordination between those units and administrative departments such as Communications and Development.
 - It should enable appropriate collaboration with Brandeis Hillel and Precollege Programs (in particular BIMA and Genesis), which also serve important roles in advancing the University’s mission and its distinctive Jewish character.
 - It should encourage engagement with the rest of the University rather than separation from it; that is, it should prioritize intellectual projects that bring people together across differences and collaborate with other units whenever possible.
3. Brandeis should strengthen the development of professionals for the Jewish community through the Hornstein program, which leverages Brandeis’ resources not only in Jewish studies but in non-profit management, public policy, and education, to link knowledge and practice. In addition to aligning the work of research centers with teaching at Hornstein and making the intellectual resources

available more readily to students through the mechanism or structure described above, this will also entail a reinvestment in Hornstein faculty and leadership.

4. Brandeis should develop new sources of support for intellectual projects that maximize and incentivize the interaction and engagement between Jewish studies and the Humanities and Social Sciences more generally. This might include support for undergraduate fellows, for doctoral students, for dynamic pedagogic innovation that would turn Brandeis into a laboratory for the teaching of Jewish studies and adjacent cultures, and for research initiatives that cross disciplinary boundaries (the Diaspora Working Group is a model).
5. Brandeis University Press is an important vehicle for advancing the University's scholarly mission, both within Jewish studies scholarship and more generally. Now that the Press has exited the UPNE consortium and embarked on an independent path, we have the opportunity to invest in the Press to ensure its long-term stability (for example, by endowing the directorship).

Part II/B. Recommendations Regarding Campus Communities

A remarkably diverse Jewish campus community has been and should remain a hallmark of Brandeis. A commitment to the vibrancy of the Jewish community should be matched by a commitment to the thriving of each individual and the diverse and intersecting communities that support and nourish them. We envision a robust *community of communities*—that is, a Brandeis community in which students find the support of a community of peers from a shared heritage or background (or more than one) within which they are most comfortable, as well as finding opportunities for meaningful interactions with members of other communities.

Jewish students choose Brandeis knowing that it provides an exceptionally supportive environment for diverse Jewish life and culture, alongside a broader diversity on campus. Brandeis embraces the Jewish experience in all its pluralism and seeks to provide a context for inter- and well as intra-communal conversation.

We recommend:

1. Brandeis should employ appropriate admissions policies to create the robust and diverse community of communities that we hope to see.
2. Brandeis should support the organizing and community-building that are necessary for the creation of robust communities. Within the Jewish community on campus, this is Hillel's mission; together with the Office of Spiritual and Religious Life, Hillel can also be the catalyst for cross-community interactions.

3. Brandeis should celebrate, encourage and support the pipeline of undergraduates who are motivated to enter public service generally. It should use its expertise on the issues and concerns of the Jewish community to more deliberately support those who want to enter Jewish public service.
4. All students should have the opportunity to learn about aspects of Jewish studies and the Jewish community, as they relate to their particular interests, if they desire.
5. Brandeis should also invest in other strong, healthy, diverse communities, especially for racial and other minorities. Brandeis should also invest in the structures and initiatives to enable communities to interact in constructive ways (such as Common Ground and Brandeis Bridges); this will not happen by itself. We need not fear disagreement or diversity of perspectives. Instead, as Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, “there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth.”

Brandeis should build a community of communities, for the benefit of all.

Part II/C. Recommendations Regarding Jewish Symbols

We tell our story, in part, through the symbols that we embrace. For Brandeis to be distinctive, its symbols must be distinctive as well. Fortunately, we have a set of symbols that mark Brandeis as a place with an important Jewish legacy, a place that embraces significant Jewish values, and a place with an important ongoing relationship with the Jewish community even as it is welcome to all.

There are three Brandeis symbols that we ought to celebrate, and to use more effectively for the purposes of building our distinctive educational environment: the Brandeis seal, the Brandeis calendar, and the figure of Justice Louis D. Brandeis himself.

We recommend:

1. Brandeis should recommit to the centrality of the Brandeis seal, including its centerpiece—the Hebrew word *emet* (“truth”). We ought to explain the seal to incoming students, staff and faculty, and employ that moment for educational purposes. To be sure, Brandeis is not the only university with Hebrew on its seal. But unlike other institutions which were motivated by Christian Hebraism, Brandeis’ seal was intended to signal the value of truth that it declares, as well as the institution’s foundational relationship to Jewish history and culture.
2. Brandeis should recommit to the Jewish calendar as the organizing calendar for the University, affirming its value as a symbol of Brandeis rather than merely an accommodation to a segment of the community. All students should feel welcome to learn about and participate in Jewish holiday celebrations. Again, we ought to explain the calendar to incoming students, staff and faculty, and employ that moment for educational purposes.

3. Brandeis should seek opportunities to celebrate, and to study, the life and work of Justice Brandeis as a great American and a leader of the Jewish community of his time. We should not and do not need to endorse any particular policy that Brandeis himself adopted, but conversations about important social issues might well benefit from being grounded in his words and deeds. As the founding Trustees wrote, “we hope to create an enduring monument to the integrity of his Americanism and to the prophetic quality of his Judaism. Our vision has been charged by the challenge contained in his ideal of a great university.”

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