ABOUT THE CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Center for Spiritual Life offers a safe space for students to explore their spirituality and find their place in the world, on their terms. Whether students are rooted in a particular faith tradition or searching for answers to fundamental human questions, we are here. We have staff chaplains trained in different faith traditions who help students find a supportive community, access a non-judgmental spiritual mentor, and find opportunities to serve others.

Rabbi Seth Winberg, Director

"Through my experiences I have found that hearing others' traditions and sharing my own experiences has truly expanded and formed my own spiritual identity. In finding such an amazing community, I have really found myself and cannot picture what my experience at Brandeis would have been like without my involvement with the Center for Spiritual Life. I feel blessed to have been immersed within such a caring, mindful, and passionate community."

- Benée Hershon '20
403 students connected at least once

58 services (Mass, Jum'ah, Protestant services, Hindu worship)

123 events and offerings

17 campus partnerships

7 student groups supported

37 active student leaders
HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Eid Dinner

The Muslim Student Association, with the support and assistance of the Center for Spiritual Life, hosted a celebratory Eid Dinner on October 19. They welcomed over 100 students to the event, far surpassing both last year’s attendance and their revised projections at the start of the fall. With the arrival of Dr. Harun Spevack as Muslim Chaplain, the MSA and the Muslim Prayer Space in Lower Usdan have seen increased activity.

Diwali

Namaskar, the student organization for Hindu, Jain, and Sikh students, celebrated Diwali on November 9. More than 50 undergraduate and graduate students gathered for a religious ceremony, dance performances, and a festive meal. Anjum Biswas, Hindu Spiritual Advisor, assisted the students’ planning and facilitated the ceremony. Students expressed their gratitude for the support of the Center and the arrival of Anjum and Partha Biswas as Spiritual Advisors.

Messiah Sing

In December, the Christian communities continued their longtime partnership with the Department of Music in Brandeis’ beloved tradition, the Messiah Sing. Chaplains Allison Cornelisse and Rev. Matt Carriker hosted a reception that included lighting and decorating the Christmas tree, decorating cookies, and singing classic carols.
Counterclockwise from top left: Brandeis community members join Brandeis Chamber Singers and University Chorus to sing Handel’s Messiah. | Protestant Chaplain leads students in Christmas carols following the Messiah Sing. | Students create Rangoli designs, an art form involving colored powder. | Catholic students gather in Bethlehem Chapel.
Bhuiyan remembers that last year during Ramadan the only dining option for Muslim students who were fasting was a bagel and fruit because the dining halls were closed by the time they could break their fasts. She explained that after going sixteen hours without food or water, “We need a warm meal. We usually break our fast with something that is really filling or something that is cultural. The iftar meal is supposed to bring the community together.” This year, for the small group of Muslim students who remained on campus after the transition to online classes, Spevack collaborated with the Brandeis dining staff to provide students with a way to pick up healthy, culturally-relevant meals that they could bring back to their residence halls.

Read the rest of the story online at brandeis.edu/now
"Being both Chinese and Jewish has shaped my faith and sense of belonging to multiple cultural groups. The Conversations that Matter Fellowship gave me a safe space to ask meaningful questions about spirituality, responsibility, and identity within a wonderful, diverse community. It's one of the coolest things I've taken part in at Brandeis." - Izzy Yeoh '20

Conversations That Matter Fellowship

Lara Ericson, MDiv and Rabbi Seth Winberg piloted a cohort-based discussion program in January 2020. Over dinner on Thursday evenings, an inaugural cohort of 15 students wrestled with questions such as "For whom are we responsible?" and "How do we disagree?"

In addition to building skills for having challenging conversations and providing a practice ground for applying them, the fellowship built relationships between students of diverse backgrounds.

Since completion of the fellowship, many participants have continued to engage with Spiritual Life, proposing initiatives they hope to pursue in collaboration with Center staff in Fall 2020.
(Clockwise from top left): Hindu Spiritual Advisors Anjum and Partha Biswas hold an interactive cooking class, offering students the unique opportunity to engage mindfulness practices, develop cooking skills, and enjoy a nutritious meal. Students pack over 10,000 meals for local food pantries at the 10th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, as well as engaging in interfaith dialogue through educational workshops on a wide range of social justice issues. Participants engage in conversation during a Multifaith Dinner on sabbath and rest. Spiritual Life staff hand out over 100 ice cream bars to students on the path between Usdan and Goldfarb Library on an unseasonably warm day in late September.
Student Focus Groups

Rabbi Seth Winberg and Lara Ericson, MDiv invited Hindu, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant students to participate in focus groups this fall to provide feedback to the Center for Spiritual Life. These focus groups were well-received by students, one of whom followed up to express,

“We are all very lucky to have these resources and support on campus.”

Common concerns shared by students were practical, including access to appropriate food and transportation to off-campus services during important holidays.

Inaugural Chaplaincy Circle Meeting

Four off-campus spiritual and religious educators chose to officially partner with the Center for Spiritual Life this fall, through the newly formed Chaplaincy Circle.

These affiliates, along with the Center for Spiritual Life and its campus partners, gathered on November 20 for the first of what will be semesterly meetings. The 25 attendees welcomed the opportunity to build relationships and share challenges and best practices in their work.

One participant shared that they found it “a relevant and helpful discussion that created intersections among a number of Brandeis communities. Now we have faces associated with names and more resources to help us better support Brandeis students.”

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