

Upcoming Trends on College Campuses

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This document is designed to inform you about “what is coming up” on college campuses regarding antisemitic and anti-Zionist activities as we head into the Fall semester. With the national elections this Fall, students may be even more focused on national and international trends.

BDS Referendums

Increased anti-Israel activism on campuses following October 7th and the popularity of the intersectionality framework, which connects various forms of oppression and struggles for justice, has fostered solidarity between pro-BDS movements and other activist groups on campus, such as those advocating for racial justice and indigenous rights. Social media and digital communication have also amplified the BDS message, making it easier for student activists to organize and mobilize support.

Pro-BDS referendums in student government are expected to increase in the months ahead as anti-Israel student activists and groups, galvanized around the “ceasefire now” cause, look for ways to isolate and delegitimize Israel. Many of the BDS resolutions will focus on efforts to have universities divest from companies that do business in Israel, sometimes centered around defense industries, and seek to have the university cut off ties with Israeli academics, suspend collaborations with Israelis, and prohibit study abroad in Israel.

These referenda, while being framed as focusing on advocating for Palestinian rights, contribute to an environment where Jewish students feel targeted and marginalized. The conflation of anti-Zionist sentiments with antisemitic rhetoric leads to a campus climate where expressions of support for Israel are met with hostility. This dynamic exacerbates tensions, creating an atmosphere where pro-BDS campaigns and rising antisemitism feed into each other, fostering division and discomfort among the student body.

People Solidarity Coalitions

Anti-Israel student groups on college campuses are expanding their coalitions with other student organizations to create “People Solidarity Coalitions” to amplify their anti-Israel stances and messaging by leveraging shared social justice goals and intersectional concerns. By aligning with groups focused on issues such as racial justice, indigenous rights, and environmental activism, these coalitions can frame their anti-Israel advocacy within a broader context of combating systemic oppression and injustice. This strategy not only broadens their support base but also integrates anti-Israel messaging into wider campus discussions about equity and human rights. Such alliances enable these groups to reach a larger audience, attract more diverse supporters, and create a unified front that can effectively challenge pro-Israel perspectives. The synergy between various activist groups enhances the visibility and impact of their collective causes, while also fostering a more polarized campus environment regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, anti-Israel student groups are increasingly adopting policies demanding that allied groups not engage with groups or students who are or are perceived to be Zionist - the latter including all Jewish students and groups that do not actively denounce the State of Israel.

Building counter alliances and showcasing the facts around Israel is slow work, but it is essential to combat opposition coalitions. On college campuses, membership of student groups is regularly changing. Jewish students have an opportunity here to always create new friendships, alliances, and programs that share their story - as well as their own personal commitments as Jews to justice and other causes. Local Federations and Jewish communities can also be of help here by maintaining institutional memory and showcasing previous successful initiatives and alliances.

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Activities During the Jewish High Holy Days

[Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP) is an anti-Zionist group committed to severing the connection between Jews and Israel. JVP on college campuses often engages in activities during the High Holidays and Sukkot to promote anti-Israel messaging, aligning these Jewish observances with their anti-Israel political advocacy. During Sukkot, JVP may organize events that highlight the plight of Palestinians, drawing parallels between the temporary nature of the sukkah and the displacement of Palestinian people. They might hold teach-ins, distribute literature, and/or host speakers who criticize Israeli policies, framing the discussion within the context of Jewish values of justice and solidarity. Similarly, during the High Holidays, JVP may incorporate themes of

repentance and atonement to call attention to what they view as Israel's injustices against Palestinians. JVP demonstrates itself to be representative of the Jewish student body, and has designed its activities to resonate with students by integrating political messages with religious observance, thereby amplifying their anti-Israel stance within the framework of traditional Jewish practices.

The clearest way to detract from JVP holiday celebrations is to ensure that mainstream Jewish celebrations are robust and joyful. Appropriately publicizing these services - such as by pitching an article to the campus newspaper about attendance at High Holiday services - can demonstrate that the vast majority of Jewish students are not represented by JVP.

Protests & Disruptions on Campus

Anti-Israel protests on college campuses have been on the rise, driven by Israel's response to remove Hamas from power and free the hostages following the October 7th massacre. Students who participate in these protests view them as part of a broader struggle for human rights and equity, framing their activism within the context of fighting against perceived oppression and injustice. Social media has played a pivotal role in mobilizing support, allowing activists to quickly disseminate information and organize events. These protests, often using language that demonizes Israel and Israelis, raise tensions on campuses as Jewish students feel marginalized and targeted based on their pro-Israel views and identities. The increasing frequency and intensity of these protests reflect the challenges of navigating such complex global issues within the academic environment. We can expect a spike in such protests around October 7th, which this year falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

These protests turn antisemitic when legitimate criticism of Israeli policies crosses into broad generalizations or conspiracies about Jews. This occurs when anti-Israel rhetoric becomes entangled with traditional antisemitic tropes, such as Jewish control. The failure of protest participants to distinguish between Israeli government actions and the Jewish identity of their fellow students and faculty exacerbates these tensions. When Jewish students are prevented from accessing parts of campus and harassed, we see the protests which are framed as advocating for Palestinian rights lead to and perpetuate antisemitism.

Anti-Israel Bias in the Classroom

The growing anti-Israel bias among professors in college classrooms is an increasing concern for many students. This bias often manifests through one-sided presentations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where Israel is predominantly portrayed as the aggressor, and Palestinian perspectives are highlighted without balanced context. Such bias shapes the academic discourse, influencing students' perceptions and stifling open debate. We have seen an increasing number of professors integrating their personal political views into the curriculum, creating a learning environment where students who support Israel or seek a more nuanced understanding feel marginalized and/or reluctant to express their opinions.

Professors are entitled to hold whatever view they choose and cannot be punished for it. However, if a professor exercises his authority by claiming he disagrees with a student's view such as requiring a pro-Israel student write a paper that includes the anti-Israel arguments or discriminates against students by not letting them into a class or harrassing them for their views or identity as Jewish, Israeli or Zionist in class, their actions may constitute antisemitic harassment that subjects the school to take steps to protect Jewish students under Title VI. Any such incidents should promptly be reported to Hillel, the local Federation and/or the ADL.

What You Can Do

Jewish students can take several proactive steps to counter anti-Israel activity on their college campuses, including:

1. **Educational Campaigns:** Organize educational initiatives to inform the campus community about the connection between Jews and Israel, often integral to Jewish identity. Explain the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting the distinction between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism using the IHRA working definition, especially when faced with narratives rooted in different set of facts.
2. **Coalition Building:** Form genuine alliances with other student groups and organizations that support campus unity. Collaborative efforts can strengthen opposition to BDS measures. The first step in coalition building on campus is often friendship. Being able to openly and honestly share experiences and perspectives with friends and peers outside the Jewish community can introduce those perspectives in new spaces. Some groups that as a whole may be good initial choices for further engagement include college Democrat

and Republican groups (who often formally stick to party platforms), pre-professional organizations, and religious and ethnic groups that have traditionally found other geopolitical causes including southeast Asians and West Africans, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist groups, Catholic students and Evangelical students.

Also, look for allies among professors who are more sympathetic to Israel or who advocate for balanced and nuanced discussions about the conflict. These professors can be valuable academic support, host lectures, or lead discussions. Reach out to your Federation, which can interface with decision makers such as the board of governors or elected officials to make sure that the university does not give into boycott demands.

3. **Political Advocacy:** Participate in student government elections and encourage peers to run for positions. Having representation within student government can influence decisions and provide a platform for advocating against BDS initiatives.
4. **Public Awareness:** Write op-eds, create social media campaigns, and host events to raise awareness about the negative implications of BDS for the campus community and the broader Jewish community.
5. **Promote Positive Initiatives:** Highlight and support programs that promote peace, coexistence, and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, showcasing constructive alternatives to the divisive BDS movement.

It is equally important for Jewish students to prioritize their mental and physical health to navigate the challenges that may arise by:

1. **Seeking Support:** Connect with campus Jewish organizations, such as Hillel or Chabad, which can offer support, resources, and a sense of community.
2. **Reporting Incidents:** Promptly report any instances of harassment, intimidation, or antisemitism to campus authorities and organizations dedicated to combating antisemitism. Documentation is crucial for addressing and mitigating such incidents.
3. **Prioritizing Personal Safety:** Always prioritize personal safety by avoiding protests that may become confrontational or unsafe.
4. **Taking Care of Your Mental Health:** Take care of your mental and emotional well-being by seeking support from counseling services if needed. Dealing with hostility and discrimination can be stressful, and it is important to have access to professional help.

At the same time, students may choose to proactively counter anti-Israel and antisemitic protests. Some forms of effective counterprogramming can include:

1. **Journalism:** Op-eds in campus newspapers featuring accurate information about 10/7 and its effect on Israel and the Jewish people and antisemitism, as well as identifying antisemitic and divisive rhetoric in the protests and explaining its impact on campus. Additional angles may include the impact of protests on students with disability; questioning the centrality of protesting Israel over any other causes; or any interference the protests may have on ability to study or engage in other campus activities.
2. **Discussion and dialogue:** The majority of students are not generally engaged in protests, and may have questions or misunderstandings about the war in Gaza, the events of 10/7, and the state of Israel more broadly. Pro-Israel students have successfully engaged this group in dialogue through the creation of a physical or virtual space for open and honest conversation about the subject, as well as through engaging speakers and events.
3. **Commemorations and celebrations:** Vigils to commemorate 10/7 and Yom HaZikaron, and open and unashamed celebrations of Jewish life and Zionism including holidays, shabbat and Yom HaAtzmaut are vital for both the wellbeing of the Jewish community and as a means for others to offer solidarity. Ensure that campus security is informed of these events, but do not shy away from engaging in them or inviting friends and campus allies to join.