AJC Center for Education Advocacy

CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM on Campus

An Action Plan for University Administrators



CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM on Campus

An Action Plan for University Administrators

As antisemitic incidents continue to spike on college campuses, university leadership has a uniquely important role to play in addressing antisemitism and ensuring the safety and well-being of Jewish students, faculty, and staff. American Jewish Committee[1] (AJC), the global advocacy organization for the Jewish people, maintains that in addition to meeting the immediate needs of Jewish campus citizens, **real change requires a sustained commitment to improving the learning and living environment for everyone**, including Jewish community members.

To further this mission, AJC established the Center for Education Advocacy[2] (CEA) to consolidate all of the organization's work in educational spaces under one umbrella. The Center's founding comes on the heels of antisemitic protests on dozens of college campuses, which left many Jewish students feeling vulnerable and isolated, with some fearing for their safety and concealing their Jewish identity on campus. Jews of all ages, in all educational spaces, must be able to learn and grow without the threats of harassment, intimidation, and violence. We have updated our action plan to provide more focused recommendations about immediate, near-term, and long-term action steps to improve the campus atmosphere.

Our plan is responsive to the data from AJC's State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report[3] that highlights the threat that antisemitism poses to the integrity of our shared institutions. AJC experts are available to work in partnership with university administrators to help build an atmosphere more resilient against rising Jew-hatred. Please contact Dr. Sara Coodin, AJC Director of Academic Affairs, or Dr. Daniel Rosenthal, AJC Assistant Director of Academic Affairs at academic@ajc.org, for more information about this action plan or to discuss how we can help.

[1] AJC.org
[2] AJC.org/CEA
[3] AJC.org/AntisemitismReport2024

What Administrators Can Do Right Now

Prioritize campus physical security. Security concerns have risen in proportion to escalating threats of violence against Jews on campus in the months following the brutal October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attack. It is the university's responsibility to anticipate these security needs in Jewish cultural and religious spaces on campus, for programming featuring Jewish and Israeli speakers, and in spaces where Jewish students and faculty routinely live and work and where they may be at risk. Ensuring the physical safety of Jewish students, faculty, and staff is a basic and necessary first step in creating an atmosphere where Jewish campus citizens can work and learn freely. We recommend coordinating with Jewish organizations on campus, such as Hillel and Chabad, to address current security needs, and we encourage university leaders to enforce existing rules and codes of conduct and take appropriate action, up to and including expulsion and/or termination, for anyone who threatens physical harm to Jews. If your school requires additional security reinforcements, AJC can help by connecting you with the DOJ's Community Relations Service[4].

Clarify and publicize the rules surrounding campus protests and be prepared to enforce them. Protecting free speech on campus means ensuring that no single voice prevents others from speaking freely, and that hecklers are not given a veto to disrupt scheduled events. Administrators play a vital role in assigning time, place, and manner restrictions on protests, and enforcing these regulations promptly when they aren't respected.

Publicize and streamline your school's **reporting mechanism for hate crimes and bias incidents**. In order for a campus to remain equitable and inclusive, it is essential that students, faculty, and staff have ready access to confidential channels to report bias and harassment. Staff who address bias complaints also need to be fully cognizant of current guidelines from the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights that provide a framework for complaints about antisemitism under Title VI.

Clarify and raise awareness around the university's **standards for educational programming** to ensure that events like teach-ins and panel discussions meet basic educational criteria, such as those outlined in the AAUP's guidelines on academic freedom[5]. It is essential that programming bearing the university's name offers expert-led opportunities to learn about complex topics, including Israel/Palestine, Zionism, and antisemitism. Ensure your campus community knows that programming that bears the university's name must meet these standards, including a transparent relationship between the session's stated title and its contents. Programming on antisemitism should be especially sensitive to these standards. It should never become a shell for anti-Zionist or antisemitic messaging without reference to the history or lived experience of anti-Jewish hate.

Ensure that **Student Life staff take an active role on campus** so that problems can be dealt with preemptively and in real-time, rather than responsively after-the-fact. An active peacekeeping approach to engaging with the student community ensures that administrators remain present and closely attuned to potentially harmful situations on the ground as they are happening, and can respond before they spiral out of control.

Connect with and show up in support of Jewish students on campus. Jewish students need to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed. Work with AJC and campus organizations like Hillel and Chabad to engage with a diverse group of Jewish students to understand how situations like the Hamas-Israel war and increased anti-Zionist/Israel rhetoric on campus is impacting their safety, sense of belonging, and overall experience on campus.

Convene a task force to combat antisemitism and appoint members who are responsive to the concerns of the Jewish community, and committed to addressing the actual spaces where campus antisemitism is manifesting now, including anti-Zionist spaces. Ensure that there are clear timelines for review and implementation of task force recommendations and action steps, where appropriate. If antisemitic incidents occur on your campus, make clear, unwavering statements that specifically name and condemn them.

Consult Crisis on Campus[6] for key resources from AJC's Center for Education Advocacy to help you navigate this tumultuous moment and stand with Jewish students.

[4] www.justice.gov/crs

[5] www.aaup.org/programs/academic-freedom/faqs-academic-freedom

[6] AJC.org/CrisisOnCampus

What Administrators Can Do in the Coming Year

Work actively and intentionally to **cultivate intellectual pluralism** and protect free speech on your campus by recognizing the impact of political statements by departments and programs, and the chilling effect these have on inclusion and free speech. For undergraduates and graduate students, junior and adjunct faculty, an atmosphere of free academic inquiry and exchange crucially requires an environment free from bias, including political bias. Consider taking steps in line with the 1967 University of Chicago Kalven Report[7], and discourage departments and programs from issuing statements that signal that only certain perspectives or identities are welcome or free to express themselves.

Professionalization is an opportunity for early-career teachers and researchers to hone the skills required to cultivate critical thinking in their classrooms and foster truly inclusive and pluralistic educational and research spaces. Set a clear expectation for junior faculty, ABD PhD students, TA's, and professional school instructors that leadership in the classroom requires creating space for critical dialogue and intellectual curiosity, and fostering the skills required for evidence-based argument, particularly on complex topics like Israel/Palestine. Discourage instructional models that instrumentalize the classroom to promote partisan political opinions or showcase ideologically-driven activism that shuts down critical inquiry.

Ensure that programming on diversity and inclusion at your school addresses the history, culture, and identity of Jews and antisemitism, led by instructors who are qualified to deliver that education. Relatedly, enhance awareness of and accommodations for Jewish holidays, culture, and practice[8]. Programming in spaces devoted to student life can and should productively address the distinctive histories of minoritized communities and the particular obstacles and hatreds they have faced in ways that encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect, allyship, and dialogue. Jews have an important place in those conversations. Contact us[9] to discuss how AJC's educational programming[10] programming can help.

Consider participating directly in AJC's unique educational programs and opportunities to learn more about the Jewish people, Israel, Zionism, and antisemitism, including:

Project Interchange[11], an educational institute of AJC that has sent over 6,200 influential opinion leaders, including university administrators and educators, on customized educational seminars to Israel to learn about the country firsthand. Since the first trip in 1982, participants have gained direct, in-depth insights into Israel's diversity, democracy, complexity, and accomplishments.

The University Presidents Summit on Antisemitism[12]. Our first summit took place in 2022. The second, sponsored by AJC, Hillel International, and the American Council on Education, took place in September of 2024 in Washington, D.C. We anticipate hosting our third summit in 2026

Long Term Action Items

Commit to disrupting anti-Zionist echo chambers on campus by fostering intellectual diversity in academic programs and departments. Universities have a vital role to play in ensuring that multiple perspectives about Israel and Zionism are represented on campus to discuss the complex realities of the Middle East.

Adopt innovative hiring practices to ensure viewpoint diversity in university departments, schools, and programs. Elected officials, including Members of Congress, have directly challenged schools that have failed to take action against intransigent antisemitism. University administrators should be prepared to challenge departments and programs that are resistant to fostering academic exchange that includes diverse, fact-based perspectives about Israel and Zionism, and that fail to take accusations of systemic antisemitism seriously.

Support research that is committed to understanding the historical sources of antisemitism[13] and its relationship to other forms of extremism and hate. AJC's State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report[14] makes clear that there is no combating antisemitism in a vacuum. One of the most important ways to confront it is to incentivize and elevate scholarship that examines the interlocking histories of various hatreds, including antisemitism, anti-Black racism, homophobia, and Islamophobia. University leaders have a vital role to play in ensuring that research directors address antisemitism as part of a focused and broad coalition effort to address hate.

[7] https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/KalvenRprt_0.pdf
[8] AJC.org/5YearCalendar
[9] academic@ajc.org
[10] AJC.org/HigherEdPrograms
[11] AJC.org/ProjectInterchange
[12] AJC.org/UniversityPresidentSummit2024PressRelease
[13] AJC.org/OriginsOfAntisemitism
[14] AJC.org/AntisemitismReport2024

Elevate the voices of Jewish, Israeli, Arab, and Palestinian students, faculty, and community members who are actively pursuing sustained dialogue, and mutual understanding. Often, quieter and less extreme voices have little visibility on campus compared to those who actively seek attention through inflammatory rhetoric. Find ways to include voices that seek to engage in constructive dialogue and support their efforts.

Work with interfaith and intergroup specialists, including chaplains, to create pathways towards engaging together on challenging topics. Create forums for students to engage in ways that move conversations toward cultivating empathy and building bridges that support living together in community.

Elevate role models from the Jewish campus community, including strong student leaders, outstanding cultural life directors, and innovative faculty. As with any minoritized community, Jewish role models foster a sense of belonging and purpose for Jews on campus. Emphasize the importance of actively recruiting scholars who exemplify leadership and mentorship in their intellectual and pedagogical work. Find ways to elevate the work of outstanding Jewish student leaders and ensure they have a place within campus initiatives designed to support marginalized communities.

American Jewish Committee (AJC)[15] is the global advocacy organization for the Jewish people. With headquarters in New York and more than 75 offices, institutes, and international Jewish community partnerships worldwide, AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.

AJC's Center for Education Advocacy (CEA)[16] sets the standard for responsible advocacy, thoughtful pedagogy, and intellectual integrity, fostering inclusive educational communities that refuse to normalize antisemitism in any form.

The **Academic Affairs**[17] department within AJC's Center for Education Advocacy works with administrators at all levels, as well as student-facing faculty and staff, to provide strategic guidance that helps set campuses up for success in their efforts to counter and prevent antisemitism. AJC shares universities' deep commitment to working within the frameworks that make research and teaching excellence possible, and higher education's sustained commitment to robust pluralism as a keystone of our democracy, which allows all groups, including the Jewish community, to thrive.

AJC American Jewish Committee

[15] AJC.org
[16] AJC.org/CEA
[17] academic@ajc.org