Best Practices

Addressing Israel/Palestine Beyond the Classroom

Hillel International | **Campus Climate Initiative**

Purpose

Many college students, Jewish and non-Jewish, are passionate about the Israel/Palestine conflict and hold a wide range of beliefs and perspectives. These varying viewpoints can often be at odds with one another and may lead to an environment where students feel unable to share their beliefs, that their identity is threatened, or that they may subject to discrimination and harassment. University administrators have a role to play in ensuring that their campus communities are welcoming of a wide range of perspectives and beliefs.

Overview

To achieve the twin goals of rigorously supporting free speech and ensuring a safe and welcoming climate for all, administrators must determine how they will establish the tone of discourse on campus, and how they will respond when students feel these expectations have not been met. Because the discussions of the Israel/Palestine conflict emerge in a unique set of circumstances on each campus, this document provides a number of considerations:

- Speech and Campus Discourse
- Identity and relationships
- Safety and Security

Speech and Campus Discourse

Embracing Both Free Speech and Inclusion
Protecting students and maintaining an inclusive campus environment does not come at the cost of silencing others. It is important to understand the nuance of when speech leverages offensive tropes, or crosses into harassment to ensure that all students can engage in discourse free of exclusion or threats to safety.

- Non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies should clearly state the types of conduct that are considered antisemitic by the university

- Cyberbullying policies should name antisemitic threats and bullying as part of the definition of cyberbullying, and clearly outline disciplinary action for cyberbullies

- Academic administrators should communicate to faculty that students must be able to express their identities and perspectives in class, including Jewish and Zionist identities and perspectives, without fear of harassment or discrimination

- The curriculum should provide a multiplicity of courses and perspectives on Jewish history, antisemitism, Israel-Palestine, and related topics

Administration Communications Regarding the Conflict
Sending effective communications regarding the conflict, especially when when tensions or violence are high in Israel/Palestine, must acknowledge the connections students may have to the conflict and its impact on those who identify with various stakeholders.

- Communications should project an understanding of the full range of connections students may have to Israel and/or Palestine (personal/emotional or identity-based, family/friends in the region, political or other beliefs, etc.)

- Statements should seek to avoid imposing a false binary, but instead demonstrate awareness of the multiplicity of views held on campus

Identity and Relationships

Antisemitism Education and Campus-Wide Programming
It is important for campuses to offer programming that helps the community understand why Jewish students may or may not connect with Zionism and/or Israel, and how antisemitism can manifest in speech, Anti-Zionist activism, or criticism of Israel.

- Academic courses should be available on antisemitism and Jewish history

- Co-curricular programming should also be offered on antisemitism and Jewish history

- Regular sessions should be hosted in which students can share with the campus community the diverse ways they express their identities - whether through religion, culture, connection to Israel/Palestine, or other means

Integration Within Student Support Work and Committees
Integrating antisemitism education, and explaining the complex and nuanced relationship Jewish students may have with Israel, into existing student support efforts is integral to growing understanding on campus.

- Antisemitism and/or Jewish history and culture should be included within existing professional development sessions and academic courses, including required courses related to student support

Relationship-Building Between Diverse Religious and Cultural Groups
To establish or strengthen a positive climate, administrators should encourage groups representing various faiths, ethnic backgrounds, and cultures to help students gain a deeper understanding of differing perspectives and foster a culture of productive, respectful discourse.

- Establish all-campus offerings that engage all students in interfaith and intercultural dialogue (e.g., general education courses, new student orientation, etc.)

- University staff and student group advisors should be trained in relationship-building across perceived lines of difference and support their students in building those relationships

Identity and Relationships Cont'd

Relationship-Building Between Diverse Religious and Cultural Groups Cont'd

- Religious and cultural student groups should be actively encouraged to build relationships and work together with Jewish student organizations

- University funds should be dedicated to incentivize religious and cultural student groups to collaborate together

- Institutions should interpret "interfaith" as extending well beyond Jews and Muslims

- Dialogue programming built around the Israel/Palestine conflict or related issues should not be conflated with those intended for Jewish and Muslim students

- Events should be fostered on campus that share first-hand narratives of the conflict, and represent a the spectrum of stakeholders that exist on campus

Safety and Security

Commemorations and Observances
Members of the campus community understand history and politics in many distinct ways. It is important to set a tone, without seeking to equate narratives, for supporting those who remember or commemorate important events to create an environment where all are welcome without fear of harassment or discrimination.

- Be aware of the multiplicity of views and dates commemorated as well as their significance to various communities represented on campus

- Use positive speech when appropriate to demonstrate support for a positive and inclusive campus climate where all students are free to peacefully mark events of significance

Safety and Security Cont'd

Campus Events

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all campus community members is an integral part of supporting the free exchange of ideas, rigorous debate, and analytical thinking. Institutions must provide spaces and environments for events and meetings in a manner that champion dialogue through equal access to campus spaces free of harassment.

- The university should grant access to its facilities for events, provide security for those events as needed, and manage disruptions at those events in a manner that protects both the right to protest and the right to participate and hear speakers free of disruptions and intimidation

- Administrators should directly respond to offensive speech, when it occurs, with productive counter-speech, e.g., through official public statements, social media campaigns, events, and calling for community dialogue

- When events are planned that are likely to stoke tensions on campus, administrators should ensure safety needs are reviewed and adequate security provided