

Hillel

Summer 2021

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To Our Dear UVM Community,

What a year. Through exile and adversity, our Jewish community at UVM was resilient and adapted to whatever they encountered through this unique time in our history. I'm writing to you today from the Burack Hillel at 439 College Street, on the last day of our fiscal year, reflecting back on all our students and staff were able to achieve.

This summer issue features some wonderful examples of how our UVM Hillel engages with Israel and the Middle East with all of its complexity and nuance. As the spring semester concluded, Jewish students at UVM and across the country experienced unprecedented bigotry because of their Jewish identity, as well as the conflation by others of Zionism and their Jewish identity due to the conflict between Hamas and Israel. We supported hundreds of students who had "nowhere else to go" during this period.

Hillel at UVM unequivocally supports every Jewish student's right to be Jewish in their own way.

As we enter the summer season, our staff is planning for an unprecedented fall, but in a different way than you might expect. We anticipate hosting over 500 students for our opening week BBQ and activities. We are planning a High Holiday experience truly reflective of our UVM community with kayak tashlich on the lake, outdoor services, and a week of immersion with Jewish song leader Eric Hunker, back with us for the 6th consecutive year. Students are going to be seeking friends and community and we are doubling our engagement staff to meet that need.

50% of all students on campus have never experienced the UVM Hillel that we were before the pandemic. This gives us an opportunity to be the best possible Hillel for these students when they are back on campus, together for the first time. The insights we have learned by supporting students and the Jewish community this year will help position us in the years to come to eventually reach all 2,500 Jewish students at UVM 6+ times in a year. That's the magic number of interactions at which point Hillel's impact helps ensure that Jewish students will make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel at UVM and for the rest of their lives.

Thank you for reading along with our new print quarterly publication. Please reach out with any feedback, content you'd like to see in future issues, or let us know what you're up to so we can feature you in our Alumni Notes section.

Enjoy your summer, see you in the fall, and thank you for supporting Jewish students at UVM.

Matt Vogel
Matt Vogel, Executive Director

Israel Learning Fellowship

How might my identity be bound up with Israel, its people, its policies, and its history? How might the categories of race apply to Jewish identity? What about Israelis? What is the role Israel plays in Jewish identity?

How can Israelis and Vermonters talk about this together?

These are just a few of the questions we present to students, followed by a discussion of how they might seek the answers themselves. **The Israel Learning Fellowship (ILF)**, a 10-week cohort-based conversational and learning course, allowed students with different backgrounds to deepen their understanding of, and explore their relationship to Israel on their terms.

Our UVM students connected weekly with Israelis from Ben Gurion University as part of a combined cohort of American and Israeli students. Lee Cohen, the Director of Hillel at Ben Gurion University, saw this joint fellowship as a positive result of the pandemic because it opened more students up to the idea of Zoom learning. Lee was one of the facilitators for this fellowship and was thrilled to provide this opportunity for her students who were lacking knowledge about the structure of Judaism in America while creating the space for them to share their experiences in Israel with the UVM students.

When reflecting on the impact ILF had, she said that, "It was about talking through the small things, the random details about students' lives in Israel and the U.S. They



could see their differences, but more importantly their similarities. They learned that it is because of their Jewish identities that they have so much in common while the structures they live in create real differences." Each of the sessions provided 'break-out rooms' for students to have open conversations with their peers without any staff present, and that is where the most meaningful conversations happened.

One of the UVM participants, Isabel Berman '24, shared that UVM Hillel has been an amazing part of her student experience and that she feels empowered to educate others with the knowledge she has gained from the Israel Learning Fellowship. She was excited for the chance to learn more about Israel, but the fellowship ended up providing so much more.



"It was about making connections and building relationships that opened the door to future travel to one another between Israel and the United States," she shared.



Isabel was particularly grateful for the opportunity to hear first-hand from her new friends during the recent outbreak of violence in Israel. She said it was a valuable experience "hearing about the conflict through their eyes." Lee felt that it was just as beneficial for the Israeli students to hear the impact the violence in Israel had on the lives of the Americans as they saw a rise in antisemitism across the United States.

We know that today's students find a thriving Jewish life on campus with Hillel and simultaneously experience unprecedented challenges being their full selves as Jews in our broader community if they identify their connection to Israel or Zionism, even with all the complexity that entails. Through programs like the Israel Learning Fellowship, we hope to educate our students as they navigate their identities. We want to ensure that every student feels that they have a place at UVM. Hillel is where we can be Jewish together.

In response to the challenging antisemitism students experienced at the end of the semester, **Jewish Communities of Vermont (JCVT)** showed them that no one is ever alone. Below are just a few of the many messages sent from individuals across the state to our students after the increase in antisemitism on campus.



"Please know that you have friends and support within your nearest Jewish community. You are our future, we love you!"

"You are not alone. We are all family here. Whether your relatives are in VT, neighboring states, or a bit farther away, remember that you have a Jewish family here."

"As Vermonters, we want everyone in Vermont colleges, particularly Jewish students, to feel welcome, safe, and supported in their college years. You add so much to our community."



"We view all Jewish students as if they were our own children. You are not alone. We care!"

"We don't know one another but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that you are valued for who you are. Hate has no home in this little green state."

"Please do not let these experiences diminish your pride in being Jewish. The Jewish community in Vermont has your back."

"You are valued. You are loved. We're here."



"Although the Vermont Jewish community might be smaller than those in other states, we are here for you and dedicated to supporting one another, especially our students who are attending school in Vermont, whether you be Vermonters or not."

To learn more about the Jewish Communities of Vermont (JCVT), visit www.jewishcommunitiesofvermont.com

Class Notes

Life Beyond Graduation

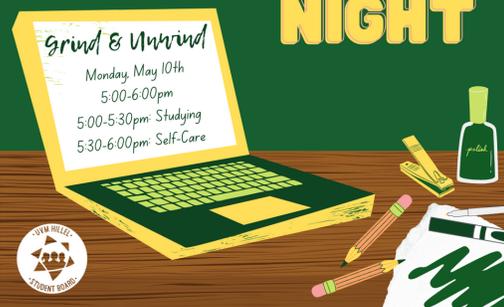
'09 - After many years in the affordable housing and non-profit world, **Josh Neirman** decided to make a career change and get his master's in Experiential Education and Jewish Cultural Arts from GWU. Now, Josh works for Moishe House as their Immersive Experiences Mentor where he gets to work with Jewish young adults from around the world and helps them plan their own peer-led Jewish learning retreats. Originally from Thetford, VT, Josh's involvement with Hillel helped start his Jewish community building journey. From helping plan Chanukah parties to attending Shabbat services and dinners, these experiences helped lay the foundation for his continued involvement in Jewish life wherever he has lived. Josh is extremely grateful for the pluralistic Jewish community that Hillel created and all of the learning and leadership opportunities that came along with it!

'20 - A little over one year since graduating, **Allyson Tazbin** is preparing to staff her first Birthright Israel trip as the IACT (Inspired, Active, Committed, Transformed) Coordinator for Israel Engagement at Brandeis University Hillel. Allyson studied Early Childhood Education at UVM but found a true passion for the work Hillel does helping students find their personal joy and connection with Judaism and Israel. She loves her role as a Hillel professional because she knows she is helping to change the lives of her students, the way UVM Hillel staff did for her. Allyson is excited to return to Israel and watch others find their love of the land and their Jewish community to return to campus with.

Submit your class notes: ali@uvmhillel.org



STUDY & SELF-CARE NIGHT



*These are four examples of other awesome programming that took place in the spring semester.

Hillel

The University of Vermont



Open the camera on your phone and point it here to support UVM Hillel

Invest in the Future of Jewish Life

Thanks to a unique partnership with the UVM Foundation; alumni, parents, family, and friends can make a gift to UVM and have 100% of your donation be directed to Hillel. Every one of us holds a special connection to Burlington, Vermont and our UVM community. We invite you to share in the joy of giving to the university. Help make a difference for today's UVM Jewish students so they can make a difference in our world.

Visit <https://go.uvm.edu/hillel21> to make your tax deductible gift.