

Questions to Ask as You Navigate University and College Choices

Selecting a university or college is one of the more significant decisions students and their families will make. As you explore institutions of higher education, here are some questions you can ask to get a better sense of how these institutions are managing and addressing concerns of antisemitism. This is not by any means an exhaustive list, but it does provide some scaffolding to explore the campus climate and develop a more in-depth understanding of what may or may not be happening on the campuses you are considering.

Campus Organizations & Resources

Below are some of the various resources that you can explore.

- Key Jewish student life organizations: [Hillel](#) and [Chabad on Campus](#)
- Studies about antisemitism on campus: Brandeis University's [Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies](#) and the [Anti-Defamation League](#)
- Resources focused on the Department of Civil Rights Title VI: [The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](#)
- Resources and programs for higher education administrators: [Brandeis University Presidential Initiative to Counter Antisemitism in Higher Education](#), Hillel International's [Campus Climate Initiative](#), and Academic Engagement Network's [Improving the Campus Climate Initiative](#)
- Materials for staff, faculty, and students committed to engaging in open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement: [Heterodox Academy](#)
- Resources on deconstructing the academic framing and positioning of terminology often utilized to challenge Israel's right to exist: [The Academic Engagement Network](#) and [Scholars for Peace in the Middle East](#)

These are just a snapshot of organizations doing important work in the campus space. Familiarizing yourselves with their work, resources, and initiatives may be valuable in the process of learning about the higher education ecosystem.

Campus Organizations & Resources

Reviewing course catalog offerings, particularly in the fields of the humanities can help you glean important insights. The course titles and the faculty associated with the courses will provide a window into the types of subjects offered.

We also recommend reading Professor Jonathan Haidt's essay, [The Telos of the University](#), to orient yourself to the challenge that university leaders are currently facing: is the purpose of the university the pursuit of truth or social justice?

Haidt argues that the institutions must choose one of these pursuits as their ultimate purpose as they are in conflict with another. The pursuit of truth has traditionally been the primary purpose of academic institutions, and all should flow from that pursuit. More recently, for many higher education institutions truth has not been the chosen path and the result is what we have witnessed throughout the 2023-2024 academic year.

Guidance for Engaging Campus Professionals

The questions below can serve as a useful guide as you begin to explore higher education institutions. There are a variety of ways in which you can raise these substantive questions. On campus tours, for instance, it is worthwhile to meet representatives from various departments and administrative positions and ask them your prioritized questions. You can always follow up with them via email regarding additional thoughts or questions that surface. However, do not expect student tour guides to have the answers to these questions. It is beyond their purview, and that is why it is valuable to speak to the professional staff. When you do reach out to the higher education staff, try to direct your questions to the most appropriate personnel.

The contact information for the university staff is usually available on the school's website, thereby allowing you to reach out and connect. You have a greater chance of having an administrator respond if you ask a handful of questions rather than inundating them with the entire list of questions below. You can also request a meeting online or a phone call to engage more deeply with a particular set of questions or highlight your specific concerns.

Questions to Ask Administrators

University Leadership:

- Has the university publicly taken a position on BDS resolutions put forth by student government or academic departments/programs?
- If the university makes public statements about political matters, have public statements about Israel been made since Oct. 7?
- Does the university uphold their written policies on campus behavior and speech?
- Does the university enforce their own policies on time, place, and manner restrictions?
If there have been active encampment and anti-Israel protests on campus, how has the administration responded?
- Has the leadership participated in educational programming by Hillel International Campus Climate Initiative, Academic Engagement Network (AEN), Brandeis University's Presidential Initiative to Counter Antisemitism in Higher Education, or America Jewish Committee (AJC)?

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Offices:

- Have the DEI professionals been trained in understanding Jew-hatred?
- Are they knowledgeable about Title VI under the U.S. Civil Rights Act? Is there a Title VI investigation pending on the campus? If there is a Title VI investigation pending, what steps are the university taking to address the outlined concerns?
- Have the DEI office personnel participated in educational programming by Hillel International Campus Climate Initiative, AEN, Brandeis University's Presidential Initiative to Counter Antisemitism in Higher Education, or AJC?
- Does the DEI office subscribe to a paradigm of "power, oppressor" vs. "powerless, oppressed"?

Student Life Administrators:

- Have Student Life Administrators responded effectively to Jewish and Zionist student issues?
- Do Deans of Student Life and Deans of Residential Life have the requisite training to identify and address antisemitism on campus? Have they undergone specific training regarding antisemitism?

Questions to Ask Academic Departments

Heterodoxy on Campus:

- Is intellectual diversity present in courses and public programming on campus?
- Are there independent centers that embrace diverse intellectual positions?

Middle Eastern Studies:

- Does the Middle Eastern Studies program/dept. have courses that present substantive content regarding the State of Israel?
- Has the program/dept. taken a position on Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)?
- Is the program/dept. a member of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) or the Association for Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA)?

Jewish Studies:

- Does the Jewish Studies program/dept. have courses on the modern nation-state of Israel?
- Does the Jewish Studies program/dept. offer courses on the history of antisemitism and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism?
- Are Jewish Studies faculty proponents of BDS?
- Does the program/dept. offer courses that explore modern Jews and Jewish communities?

Faculty:

- Are faculty (from any discipline) involved in Academic Engagement Network or Scholars for Peace in the Middle East?
- Is there a faculty task force to address issues of antisemitism on campus?
- Are faculty involved with Jewish life on campus?
- Do faculty see a part of their role as supporting students outside of the classroom and not merely focusing on their research and teaching?
- Has the university accepted funding from dictatorial and autocratic Arab governments? If so, has the university been transparent about the 'terms of agreement' between the university and the donor?
- Has the university reported the foreign funding to the Federal government?

Freshmen Orientation:

- During the week of orientation, is an educational framing provided for various identity communities and, if so, are Jews included in the framing?
- Do first year students and transfer students receive educational training on understanding antisemitism and how it manifests on campus?

Questions to Ask Student Organizations

Student Government:

- Has the student government advanced BDS positions?
- Is there opposition within the student-elected representatives to BDS referendums?
- Have members of the student government participated in an Israel experience trip?
- Have there been active campaigns to delegitimize Jewish and Zionist students who have run for student government positions?

Student Newspaper:

- Is there a diversity of opinion pieces written about Israel and Jewish students in the school press?
- Have journalists participated in an Israel experience trip?

Student Organizations:

- Do student groups on campus exclude Jewish and Zionist students because of their identities?
- Have student organizations made public statements or issued petitions that target Jewish and Zionist students?
- Have the Deans of Student Life effectively addressed the organizations that targeted Jewish and Zionist students? If so, what were the ways in which those groups were addressed?
- Is there an active Student for Justice in Palestine organization on campus and how has it engaged in terms of the Israel discourse on campus?
- Is there an active Jewish Voices for Peace organization on campus and how has it engaged in terms of the Israel discourse on campus?
- Does the school have a ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) program?

Greek Life and Athletics:

- Have there been issues of antisemitism within Greek Life or athletic programs on campus and if so, have they effectively been addressed by the university?
- Do Greek life mentors and athletic coaches have training in identifying and addressing antisemitism?

Questions to Ask Jewish Life Groups on Campus

Jewish Organizations:

- What options are there for Jewish life and engagement on campus as far as Hillel, Chabad, and other cultural and political programming?
- Are there a variety of opportunities to engage with Israel on campus-political organizations, cultural activities, Israel trips and experiences (with Jewish and non-Jewish students), exploration of Israeli society, etc.?
- Are there opportunities to travel to Israel with the university?
- Does the university have academic programs with Israeli institutions of higher education?
- Are faculty involved in Jewish life on campus, and if so, in what capacities?

Reporting Antisemitism on Campus:

- Do all campus staff members know how to report and where to report incidents of antisemitism?
- Is the Office of Equal Opportunity trained in addressing matters associated with antisemitism?
- Is campus security trained and aware of antisemitism? What security protocols are in place?