USC University of Southern California

MEMORANDUM

To: President Carol L. Folt

From: Dean Varun Soni
Chair, Advisory Committee on Jewish Life at USC
CC: Members of the Advisory Committee on Jewish Life at USC

Date: August 23, 2022

Subject: Recommendations for Supporting Jewish Life at USC

Over the last several years, there has been a dramatic rise of public antisemitism in the United States that has also impacted USC. Indeed, over that time, we have witnessed antisemitic social media attacks against our students and others, and wrestled with how to best reconcile our commitment to expansive free speech with our responsibility to keep our community safe, secure, and free from threats and intimidation. These challenges have given us a unique opportunity to think deeply across disciplines and domains about how we can do a better job ensuring that our campus remains a destination university for Jewish students, faculty, and staff.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON JEWISH LIFE

As part of the continuation of this work, in January 2022, President Folt created and convened a new Advisory Committee on Jewish Life to "review a number of proposed actions to tangibly support Jewish and Zionist students, faculty, and staff." Over the course of the spring semester (2022), this committee held five meetings and open discussions with students, faculty, staff, external partners, and others. Each of these meetings focused on developing recommendations to support Jewish life at USC across several areas, including: experiences of antisemitism and anti-Zionism; university communications, processes and policies; the Jewish experience on-campus, especially for students; and education, training and curriculum.

Over the course of our work, the committee realized and acknowledged that many of the topics discussed could be applied more broadly to the benefit of all: helping all students and communities to feel more included, clarifying the university's incident response protocols, and highlighting the university's policies regarding hate speech and harassment across all platforms.

In chairing this committee, my goal was to facilitate conversations, find consensus, and empower the committee to offer clear, actionable, meaningful recommendations for your consideration. I am very grateful to the committee members for their open, honest and candid discussions, as well as for the passion and dedication each member showed in attending and participating in each meeting. With their generosity of time, trust, and wisdom, they truly exemplify what it means to be part of a Trojan Family that loves and supports one another.

On behalf of the committee, please find below an initial set of recommendations across seven distinct areas of focus that will make USC more equitable and inclusive for Jewish individuals and communities on campus. Please note that these recommendations do not constitute an exhaustive list but rather an important starting point. Many of these recommendations are underway, or have already been implemented. Our goal is to audit these recommendations in one year from the date of this report's submission to determine progress and assess additional needs.

Recommendation for a standing committee: While the committee deeply appreciated the opportunity to meet over the course of the semester, the committee also recognized that the work of supporting Jewish life and combating antisemitism is urgent and ongoing. As a result, the committee recommends the establishment of a standing Advisory Committee on Jewish Life that continues to meet regularly to discuss critical issues regarding Jewish life, oversee the implementation and assessment of this report's recommendations, and offer additional suggestions to promote and support Jewish life at USC. The committee's remit, term limits, and scope will be more specifically detailed upon implementation, in consultation with the current members of the advisory committee.

A) DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

As a university, we received numerous requests from many different stakeholders to consider formally adopting a non-binding working definition of antisemitism. Accordingly, the committee reviewed a number of definitions of antisemitism, including: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Nexus Document, Jerusalem Declaration, and the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. The committee also discussed what it means for the university to adopt a definition that is not legally binding and agreed that adopting such a definition would not substantively change university policies or processes.

Several committee members strongly felt that the university should formally adopt a definition of antisemitism as an opportunity to educate our community and align our policies. They argued that it is very difficult to combat antisemitism if people do not know what that entails or means. As a result, they believe that our actions do not match our rhetoric because we are addressing antisemitism in abstract and theoretical terms as opposed to being specific and translational.

Other committee members thought that defining antisemitism would limit the university's ability to proactively address it as a complex, evolving, multifaceted, global phenomenon. Adopting any one definition of antisemitism necessarily means negating or discrediting a different definition, and they contend that could have a chilling effect on how antisemitism is discussed, denounced, and dismantled on campus.

Although the committee did not come to a consensus regarding the formal adoption of a non-legally binding definition of antisemitism, the committee did agree that the definitions are important as educational resources and could be helpful in informing and expanding the university's approach and framework to combatting antisemitism on campus and in the world.

Recommendation: The committee recommends centering the definitions in campus conversations and programs as a way of educating the larger university community, with a specific focus on student, faculty, and staff leaders, about the history and impact of antisemitism. These definitions and others should continue to be reviewed by the

recommended standing committee and could be helpful in evaluating future incidents and assisting in the university's response.

B) UNDERSTANDING ANTI-ZIONISM

Over the last several years, more than one-third of Jewish university students in the United States report that they have experienced antisemitism on campus, both inside and outside the classroom. For many Jewish students, their experiences of antisemitism are directly connected with their Zionist identities and Israel advocacy, and they view anti-Zionism in American higher education as a manifestation of antisemitism on campus.

At the heart of this issue is a complex and contentious question: Is anti-Zionism a form of antisemitism? While there is much debate and deliberation about this question, the committee agreed on several points.

The committee unequivocally supports expansive free speech rights that are at the heart of USC's research and teaching mission, including criticism of Israel.

But based on conversations with students, faculty, and staff, the committee also expressed concern that anti-Zionist rhetoric sometimes employs antisemitic tropes, stereotypes, and caricatures, including Holocaust denial and inversion. Such rhetoric might also argue against the existence of a Jewish homeland or the right of Jewish self-determination. As a result, many Zionist students, faculty, and staff feel attacked, targeted, and dehumanized on the basis of religion as their view of Israel as the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people is inextricably linked to their Jewish religious identity. Additionally, students report that they have been excluded from student government leadership and social justice opportunities on campus because of their Zionist identities, and that they have been bullied and doxxed online because of their Israel advocacy.

Recommendation: Highlight and publicize the university protections that all students have to be free from bullying, harassment, and intimidation, regardless of whether that implicates a protected-class identity. This communication and clarification could be part of a larger university framework of articulating values, expectations, and processes.

Recommendation: Acknowledge explicitly that anti-Zionism can sometimes be experienced as antisemitism in responding to issues and incidents.

C) UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

Upon reviewing university communications protocol and meeting with members of the communications team, the committee focused on several areas that could be clarified and enhanced, including incident response, civil discourse expectations, and communications about the university's actions to combat antisemitism and support Jewish life.

Recommendation: Whenever antisemitic incidents arise, respond quickly and publicly while highlighting and articulating the university's values, standards, and expectations.

Recommendation: Review communication processes and timelines for incident responses, including targeted outreach, resource lists, and reminders of reporting responsibilities. Develop a clear distribution group for communications related to significant antisemitic incidents.

Recommendation: Publicly reiterate the university's opposition to academic boycotts like the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign (BDS). The university has rejected BDS a number of times and the committee recommends posting a standing statement to one of the university's webpages. Refer any concerns directly related to the university's investments in this area to the Advisory Committee on Investment Responsibility.

Recommendation: Develop new ways to communicate and showcase the extraordinary work that is already being done by Jewish organizations and individuals on campus, such as the USC Shoah Foundation and the USC Casden Institute. This could include a centralized website, calendar, and/or mailing list specifically focused on opportunities and activities across the university.

Recommendation: Establish a formal network of external stakeholders – including, but not limited to, the ADL, Jewish Federation, AJC, AEN, Hillel International, and others - for the purposes of communication, collaboration, and support.

Recommendation (due to launch Fall 2022): A USC Student Commitment that outlines the university's expectations and is the latest iteration of the Culture Journey.

Recommendation (already extant): Continue to distribute broadly the university's policy on who speaks for the university and in what context, which clarifies the policy on departments issuing political statements (https://policy.usc.edu/political-activity/).

Recommendation (already extant): Continue to use the website https://we-are.usc.edu/addressing-antisemitism-2/ (and eventually build a new dedicated website that is decoupled from other campus challenges) to chronicle the university's progress towards combatting antisemitism and supporting Jewish life.

D) HUMAN RESOURCES AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

With regular participation by the Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX, the committee considered several university policies to better support Jewish life on campus, as well as required training modules and staffing needs.

Recommendation: Explore the possibility of creating a full-time position – Director of Jewish Life – at the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, similar to positions at other peer universities. This role would work closely with DEI initiatives and the new standing committee.

Recommendation: Continue to clarify and expand the university's holy days policy to better accommodate students, faculty, and staff, and reimagine how the policy is communicated to different stakeholders.

E) STUDENT LIFE

Not only were student leaders represented on the committee, but the committee also met with other students to have difficult but encouraging conversations about the Jewish student experience on campus. The committee benefited greatly from the insight, honesty, and enthusiasm of the students involved in this process, who collectively proposed and supported the following recommendations.

Recommendation: Work with USC Hospitality to establish a kosher / halal food station in a dining hall that all students can use as part of their meal plan, and that serves fresh, hot, healthy food with the appropriate levels of supervision. In addition to this, work with Hillel and Chabad as they develop their own kosher kitchens so that their facilities could also offer meals as part of the student meal plan.

Recommendation: Implement "office hours" and additional programming for Hillel and Chabad at the University Religious Center, and utilize the university's Religious Center for more Jewish events on campus.

Recommendation: Clarify the role of Student Affairs leadership in regard to student government and student organizations, especially in terms of support and intervention during specific incidents involving antisemitism and other forms of hatred.

Recommendation: Clarify the role of Student Affairs in addressing and adjudicating cases involving online threats and social media hate speech.

F) RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

The committee recognized the need for increased and improved educational and research opportunities to integrate the Jewish experience as part of the fabric of the university's history, and elevate inclusion of Jewish voices and history into the university's core ongoing work. The committee recognizes that academic recommendations are best considered by academic deans, department chairs, and faculty members.

Recommendation: Continue to integrate Jewish culture and identity into university programs and events, like Visions & Voices, Center for the Political Future (Warschaw Lectures), LA Times Festival of Books, etc, and advertise those events broadly.

Recommendation: Continue to develop programs and communications to ensure all students are able to engage with the USC Shoah Foundation in a meaningful way – including internships, program and educational opportunities.

Recommendation: Continue to develop educational activities that build bridges between Jewish groups and other religious groups on campus to promote inclusivity and mutual respect.

Recommendation: Build an archive at USC Libraries focused on the history of Jewish life at USC.

G) DEI AND TRAINING

The committee agreed that additional support resources, training modalities, and religious literacy opportunities should continue to be embedded within the university's new DEI framework. The below recommendations are already in progress and being implemented.

Recommendation: Include Jewish voices and perspectives for university DEI initiatives and programs, and a include a representative from the standing committee in the university's new DEI Council.

Recommendation (in progress): Review and update the faculty handbook to reiterate the importance of respect in their interactions with students. Integrate this in the onboarding of new faculty.

Recommendation (in progress): Develop training modules on religious discrimination and antisemitism as part of the onboarding process for students, faculty, and staff.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the committee, we are so grateful to you for convening us and giving us the opportunity to present recommendations for your consideration. We also very much appreciate the chance to work at a university that has so many resources, programs, and opportunities for Jewish students, faculty, and staff, as well as strong existing relationships with external partners. As a next step, we suggest appointing the new standing committee to move these

recommendations forward and we look forward to working with you to identify members for this new committee.

On a personal note, I deeply appreciate your unwavering support of religious and spiritual life, and I believe that the opportunities and recommendations addressed in this report will help empower inclusion, belonging, and interconnectedness within our university community.

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