

June 6, 2024

Harvard University
Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism
Preliminary Recommendations

I Introduction

On January 19, 2024, Interim President Alan Garber established a Task Force on Combating Antisemitism. On February 25, he announced the Task Force's membership, which consists of two co-chairs (Professors Jared Ellias and Derek Penslar), seven additional ladder faculty, and two student representatives. Three officials from the University's central administration and a former executive director of Harvard Hillel serve as advisors.

The Task Force's charge is as follows:

It will examine the recent history of antisemitism and its current manifestations on the Harvard campus. It will identify causes of and contributing factors to anti-Jewish behaviors on campus; evaluate evidence regarding the characteristics and frequency of these behaviors; and recommend approaches to combat antisemitism and its impact on campus.¹

In March, the Task Force began its work with a series of preliminary meetings among its members and between its co-chairs and the co-chairs of the Task Force on Combating Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab Bias. There followed two months of listening sessions that brought Task Force members into contact with students, faculty, and staff from throughout the University and its chaplaincy organizations – the College, GSAS, the professional schools, Hillel and Chabad. In total, there have been more than forty listening sessions attended by over five hundred Harvard affiliates.

As members of the Task Force recently wrote in *The Crimson*, the listening sessions provided abundant reports that since last October, and to some extent long before then, many Jewish students (and especially Israeli students) have been subject to shunning, harassment, and intimidation.² These findings reinforce the necessity of preliminary recommendations for policy changes that should be implemented at the earliest feasible date.

Our preliminary recommendations focus on short-term actionable items rather than long-term structural changes. The Task Force will devote the summer to intensive study of Jewish life at Harvard (historical and current) and existing policies regarding protest, complaints, and discipline. Working jointly with the Task Force on Combating Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab Bias, our Task

¹ <https://www.harvard.edu/president/news/2024/announcement-of-presidential-task-forces/> (accessed May 19, 2024)

² <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/5/23/penslar-ellias-antisemitism-task-force/> (accessed May 24, 2024)

Force will consider the most effective means for bridging difference and fostering pluralism within our campus community.

The findings of our Task Force's summer research will be incorporated into a substantive report that will be submitted in the Fall. Our final report will offer a detailed analysis of how Harvard got into its current crisis of community and lay out proposals to transform our University culture for the better over the medium- and long-term.

II Recommendations

Clarify Harvard's values

- A) When these recommendations are released to the public, they should be prefaced by a statement that antisemitism and anti-Israeli bias -- like Islamophobia, anti-Arab bias, racism, misogyny, homophobia, or transphobia -- are forms of hatred that have no place within the Harvard community. The statement should clarify further that
- differences of religious observance and political affiliation are a matter of personal right.
 - conversations about those differences should be grounded in mutual respect and appreciation of common belonging to the Harvard community.
 - disagreement about contentious issues – including Israel/Palestine – do not justify aggression or malice, nor should it lead to exclusion from a Harvard-recognized organization or activity.

Act against discrimination, bullying, harassment, and hate

- B) The situation of Israeli students at Harvard has been dire. They have frequently been subject to derision and social exclusion. Discrimination, bullying, or harassment based on an individual's Israeli nationality is a gross violation of University policy and, beginning immediately, must be both publicly condemned and subject to substantive disciplinary action. The administration should explore methods to build support systems for Israeli students and to ensure sufficient ability to prevent, or if needed, capably and speedily address, such issues in the future.
- C) We have heard disturbing reports that faculty members and teaching fellows discriminate against or harass students because they are Israeli or have pro-Israel views. Harvard should make clear that such behavior by instructional staff is contrary to University policy and will be subject to disciplinary action when it occurs. As teaching fellows are often very early on in their teaching career, antisemitism and anti-Israeli bias need to be included in training for these essential employees in the College.
- D) Social media has become an increasingly pernicious source of antisemitic text and images. The University should
- encourage its constituent units to incorporate into their codes of conduct and values warnings about the damage to our community caused by intemperate speech and offensive imagery in social media postings.

- make clear that harassment, abuse and intimidation in Harvard-related social media postings could have disciplinary consequences.

E) In our listening sessions and many private meetings with students, we heard from many students who believe that extracurricular student life is now characterized by political litmus tests that make it impossible for some students to participate in activities because of political views unrelated to the activity. Students expressed deep regret that these barriers (along with others) prevented them from connecting with students whose political views on some topics might differ from their own but who share other interests and views.

We strongly believe that the University needs to ensure that extracurricular student life remains vibrant and accessible to all students and supportive of an overall culture of belonging, consistent with Harvard's values and principles of non-discrimination, across a diverse campus and student body.

Improve disciplinary processes

- F) At present students suffer from a lack of transparency, clarity, and clear process for the submission of complaints of antisemitic or otherwise hostile behavior. OEDIB staff as well as Academic Advisors and residential staff must be knowledgeable as to their own proper roles when approached by students complaining of antisemitic or otherwise hostile behavior. University employees who receive complaints should be trained to do so without prejudice, to guide students in the process of reporting, and to follow up, or ensure that there is follow-up, not only in an initial reply or form-message but until the matter is resolved. Those who have reported incidents need to be apprised as to where the matter stands (explaining, when necessary, that some details may not be communicated because of confidentiality concerns).
- G) At present, the policies of administrative boards and other disciplinary bodies vary widely across the University's separate units, and there are significant disparities across units in the handling of disciplinary cases. There needs to be communication and a striving for consistency in disciplinary cases across the University's constituent units.
- H) The lack of follow-up after complaints regarding antisemitic expression or behavior causes many members of the Harvard community to doubt that the University is committed to imposing substantive consequences for antisemitic expression or action. To restore the community's trust in Harvard's disciplinary processes, the University should—to the extent legally possible—reveal information about disciplinary cases (e.g., the number and outcomes of cases) in an aggregated and anonymized form.

Implement education and training

- I) At its most recent summit in April, the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging demonstrated its commitment to include antisemitism awareness and training in its purview. In that spirit, the administration should institute anti-harassment training

for all students, including examples of recent antisemitic incidents on campus and a review of the process to report incidents.

- J) Orientation (including all pre-orientation programs) for new students (undergraduate, graduate, and professional), student organization leaders, peer advising fellows (PAF), residential undergraduate supervisors (Proctors and Tutors) should center around the construction of a Harvard community that celebrates diversity but is bound by common core values. To the extent that Orientation discusses issues of oppression and injustice, antisemitism and anti-Israeli bias should be included. Similarly, the First-Year International Program should include antisemitism training and condemn discrimination based on national origin.

Foster constructive dialogue

- K) The University should commit to fostering spaces for productive dialogue on difficult subjects in ways that support and affirm the ability of all students to participate. Possible initiatives include
- A high-profile series of talks, attended by the President or Provost, between pairs of individuals who disagree vehemently on controversial issues but do so respectfully and productively.
 - A series of talks by Harvard faculty on historic and contemporary relations between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The talks would be tailored for a broad audience and held in student residences to maximize undergraduate attendance.
 - Recognition of student leaders who are promoting constructive dialogue on campus about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other contentious issues.
 - An award for student, faculty or staff innovation around combating antisemitism;
 - Provision of incentives and funding for undergraduate collaborative research, dialogue groups, and events on resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. FAS' Intellectual Vitality Initiative should encourage the joint participation of Israeli, pro-Israeli, Palestinian, and pro-Palestinian students in such opportunities.

Support Jewish life on campus

- L) The University must ensure a welcoming environment for religiously observant Jewish students, faculty, and staff. To that end,
- Kosher hot lunches should be made available by the start of next term at Hillel or at least one of the River Houses and, due to its distance from the Yard, the Radcliffe Quad. Hot kosher dinners, which are currently available at Hillel, should also be available at the Quad.
 - In all dining facilities, pork products should be clearly marked.
 - Instructional staff must provide reasonable accommodation for observant students who miss class or examinations due to Jewish holidays or the Sabbath. The University should circulate guidance including a calendar of religious observances (Appendix A), the text and a plain English description of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 151C: § 2B, and a reminder that the law

sets the lower bounds of accommodation for religion that instructors can exceed but not fail to meet.

- The University should explore allowing newly hired staff to “pull forward” yet-unearned vacation or personal leave days as necessary for religious observance, to assist observant Jewish new hires who lack the vacation time they need to blend their religious observance with their new role at Harvard University.
- The University should create a simple web address (e.g., www.harvard.edu/jewishcalendar) that will provide information on Jewish holidays for members of the community. Appendix A contains information on Jewish observance as well as dates of Jewish holidays. The list should be updated annually to allow academic units to *simply, easily and reliably* determine the days on which they should try to avoid scheduling events.

M) Students at the Longwood Campus discussed difficulty building relationships and connections across siloed schools and the rest of the University. We recommend allowing, at least in some cases, equal membership rights for students in the Chan School of Public Health to clubs shared between the other health schools, such as the Maimonides Society, which is the joint club for Jewish students in the Medical and Dental Schools.

Appendix A: **SELECTED JEWISH RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS AND OBSERVANCES** (With dates for 2024-2025)

A note on Jewish holidays: Jewish holidays follow the Jewish (lunar) calendar, so appear on different days of the Gregorian calendar in every year. Some holidays are observed as one sacred day; others two days. Some liberal Jews only observe holidays for one day. The Jewish reckoning of a day starts at sundown and ends at nightfall the following day. This brief guide only includes the Jewish holidays that come with work restrictions, which would interfere with the ability of observant Jewish students, faculty, and staff to participate in University events, take exams, or go to class.

Shabbat - The core of Jewish observance is the observance of the Jewish Sabbath, which begins Friday evening 18 minutes before Sunset and lasts until nightfall on Saturday night. During this time, many observant Jews will refrain from engaging in work or even actively using electricity.

Rosh HaShanah —The start of the New Year of the Jewish Calendar. This two-day holiday is observed as a sabbath (see above). (In 2024, Rosh HaShanah runs from the evening of October 2 until nightfall on October 4)

Yom Kippur — The 'Day of Atonement,' a day of fasting, prayer, reflection, penitence, and forgiveness. This one-day holiday is observed as a sabbath. (In 2024, Yom Kippur runs from the evening of October 11 until nightfall on October 12)

Sukkot — The 'Festival of Booths,' of dwelling in temporary outdoor pavilions built specially each year for the holiday. The festival extends for seven days, but only the first two days of the holiday are observed like a sabbath. (In 2024, Sukkot runs from the evening of October 16 until nightfall on October 24, with the sabbath-like period beginning on the evening of October 16 until nightfall on October 18)

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah — The 'Eighth Day Convocation' concluding the biblical autumn period of pilgrimage, followed by Simchat Torah — The 'Rejoicing of the Torah,' concluding and starting anew the yearly cycle of scriptural readings in the synagogue. This two-day holiday is observed as a sabbath. (In 2024 Shemini Atzeret runs from the evening of October 24 through nightfall on October 26).

Passover (Pesach)— Passover, celebrating the Israelite exodus from slavery in Egypt and the start of the homeward journey to the Promised Land. The first two and last two days are holy days and observed as a sabbath. (In 2025 Pesach runs from the evening of April 12 until nightfall on April 20, with the first two-day sabbath-like period beginning on the evening of April 12 until nightfall on April 14, and the second two-day sabbath-like period beginning on the evening of April 18 until nightfall on April 20)

Shavuot — The 'Feast of Weeks,' at seven weeks from the Passover festival, marking the time of the barley harvest in the Land of Israel and associated ritual in the Jerusalem Temple. This two-day holiday is observed as a sabbath. (In 2025 Shavuot runs from the evening of June 1 until nightfall on June 3)

In general, many religiously observant Jewish students will refrain from using electricity, taking exams, and attending professional events on all Saturdays, the two days of Rosh Hashanah, the first two days of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, and the first two days and last two days of Pesach. These holidays usually fall within the academic year. Observant Jews will also refrain from work on the two days of Shavuot, which usually fall over the summer.