



The Jewish Challenges for Colleges Today
A White Paper for the Suncoast Jewish Alliance, July 2025
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Executive Summary: Over the last two years, a crisis has developed in American higher education. New College of Florida, in Sarasota, foreshadowed the divides developing across the country between confronting antisemitism and university autonomy. The Suncoast Jewish Alliance rejects the divide, supporting rooting out antisemitism from university campuses and supporting academic freedom.

...and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children

The line Deuteronomy 6:7 comes after the Shema:

Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD, the God of thy fathers, hath promised unto thee--a land flowing with milk and honey

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart

(translation from <https://mechon-mamre.org/>)

Teach Torah to your children so ye *may increase mightily*. Education is an action word in Judaism, with study and learning being central to faith and practice.

In the United States, many Jews sought the best schools for their children, the prestige that could lead to life-long success. But quotas at the Protestant created elite universities were a challenge, and few could attend until the aftermath of the Second World War when universities opened admissions to Jews. Assimilation might have been the expectation but the expansion of Hillel across campuses accelerating after the 1960s and coming into its own in the 1990s as Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, Jewish students had a place on campus. Similarly, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson sent rabbinical students to college campuses starting in the 1950s and Chabad on Campus offers more opportunities for Jewish students. Valuing education, Jewish families could send their children to a wide range of colleges and universities, gaining the best higher education in the world. Those degrees lead to success in professions and in academia, with Jewish professors and administrators becoming commonplace. Financial success led Jewish alums to donate funds for named buildings, programs, and endowed chairs.

But slowly in the last two decades there were reports from students and faculty that campus life and classrooms were becoming uncomfortable, something was wrong and getting worse. Some of the concerns were heard but others were silenced as donors wanted to believe that their memories of their alma mater matched current experiences for students.

Then on October 8th, 2023 the day after thousands of Hamas militants crossed into Israel and murdered 1200, raped and wounded even more, and took 251 into captivity in the Gaza Strip, campus antisemitism exploded into popular consciousness. Seemingly suddenly, a flood of green tents for encampments appeared, Jewish students and faculty were prevented from accessing classrooms and libraries, vile slogans hurled at those with opposing views, and Jewish and Zionist students were no longer feeling safe at their campuses. The expansion of attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions include the attempted burning of the Pennsylvania Governor's Mansion on Passover 2025, the murders at the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington DC, and the attack on Run for Their Lives in Boulder as well as continuing harassment of Jewish and Zionist students and faculty at elite universities, antisemitic protesters shutting down of public presentations, and a toxic polarization on any Jewish issue on social media raised the old fears among many American Jews.

Colleges and universities were supposed to facilitate diversity, having safe spaces and programming to include all within the campus community. With the Jewish experience with quotas, generally Jewish faculty and administrators have supported diversifying their campuses. Colleges' experiments in diversity after the massive Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020 becoming DEI (Diversity Equity Inclusion) with offices, mandatory programs on campuses, and new policies and procedures. The presidents of Columbia University, Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania were hired to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion at their institutions yet in December 2023, when they sat before Congressional hearings, each showed they could not meet the challenge of antisemitism and ensure equal protection for their Jewish and Zionist students, faculty, and staff; as the

House Committee on Education and the Workforce brought more college presidents to Congress, the result was the same public fiascos. As a result of failure to uphold Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Trump Administration has withdrawn federal funding from those universities, demanded oversight of specific academic programs, the end of DEI, and withdrawal of visas for international students. Many academic organizations are raising alarms over academic freedom and authoritarian pressure on university autonomy.

A divide is developing and hardening over confronting antisemitism and university autonomy. Watching New College of Florida, in Sarasota, foreshadowed the divides across the country.

New College, a liberal arts college where several buildings are named for Jewish funders - Sudakoff Conference Center, Goldstein Dormitory, and the Pritzker Marine Biology Research Center – was created in 1960 with a progressive liberal arts curriculum and attracted Jewish students. But there was a strand of antisemitism that the administration allowed to go unabated. In January 2023, the Florida Governor announced the transformation of New College into a more conservative institution. The Board of Trustees dismantled the recently created DEI office, discontinued the Gender Studies program and removed the books from the Gender and Diversity Center, created for the first time sports teams, and hired faculty with an explicitly conservative political orientation in their public-facing research. The shift negatively impacted students and faculty, as multiple news accounts and public pronouncements across the region made clear. Yet in a time of campus upheavals, remarkably since October 2023 there were no encampments or harassment of Jewish and Zionist faculty and students at New College. The College President sent a message after the October 7th Hamas pogrom and the resulting upheaval at elite universities to the campus community titled: *Protection for Jewish Students, Employees and Communities*. For the first time in campus history, the college president stated: “We will aggressively uphold our legal obligation to ensure Jewish members of our campus community are protected during this time. As a member of the State University System, New College faithfully executes its responsibility under state law to ensure that all education programs, activities and opportunities are offered free from discrimination.” The shift for the college included respect for civil rights including for Jewish students even as some in the Sarasota community continue to condemn the New College of Florida administration for financial, programmatic, and academic freedom concerns.

At the Suncoast Jewish Alliance, we wish American higher education to be successful and academic freedom to flourish and will confront and combat Jew Hatred in all its guises including antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and neo-fascism on college campuses. The Suncoast Jewish Alliance supports rooting out Jew Hatred and supports academic freedom. From the Jewish tradition, the Suncoast Jewish Alliance speaks out for university life in America to be places flowing with knowledge and study, for American universities to be the best in the world and include Jews and a wide diversity of people and viewpoints including Zionism.

Suncoast Jewish Alliance Mission

The Suncoast Jewish Alliance is an organization that is motivated by our shared Jewish values. Our values embrace *tzedek* (the pursuit of justice), *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and *derekh eretz* (treating all people with dignity and respect).

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