

## Tools for Advocating on Campus

---

Universities are marketplaces of ideas and change -- many major political and social movements have originated on the college campus. One of the major issues that has become the center of many heated – and intensifying -- discussion on many college campuses across the United States is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Pro-Israel advocacy is a particularly challenging task in today's college and university campus environment. Many high profile academics, charismatic speakers, and influential student leaders present the Israeli-Palestinian situation in a one-sided manner, blaming the conflict on Israel and largely ignoring Palestinian responsibilities.

In addition, the great majority of students (including many Jews) are disinterested, feeling no personal connection to or stake in Israel's future. To many, the Israeli-Palestinian situation is another far-off, seemingly endless conflict.

In sum, those who want to make the case for and defend Israel on campus must contend with an activated hostile minority, and a potentially friendly, but generally unengaged and uninformed majority.

### **THE ANTI-ISRAEL CAMPAIGN ON CAMPUS**

While the majority of U.S. campuses do not experience harsh [anti-Israel activism](#), there has been an increase in anti-Israel activity in the last decade. Self-proclaimed anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic speakers are invited to campus and appear at events, including those related to annual "Israeli Apartheid Week" and

“Palestine Awareness Week “events. On some campuses, anti-Israel groups have attempted to intimidate Israeli and pro-Israel speakers through heckling and disruptions. Student governments have considered anti-Israel [divestment](#) initiatives promoted by anti-Israel student groups. In a number of instances, anti-Israel activity has crossed the line into anti-Semitism.

Anti-Israel activity on campus is not a new phenomenon. Such activism was widespread on campuses throughout the 1970s and 1980s, especially during the [First Intifada](#). With the dawn of Arab-Israeli negotiations at the 1991 [Madrid Conference](#), and particularly with the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian [Oslo agreement](#), anti-Israel campaigning on campus receded, although it never entirely ceased. While there were periodic flare-ups of anti-Israel activity, such as those countering the celebration of Israel’s 50th anniversary in 1998, themes of peace and reconciliation symbolized by the establishment of Jewish-Arab dialogue groups on some campuses received more attention. The outbreak of the [Second Intifada](#) in 2000 led to a resurgence of anti-Israel and anti-Zionist campus activity, with some events crossing the line into overt anti-Semitism, a trend continuing until today.

## **BEING POSITIVE: MAKING THE CASE FOR ISRAEL ON CAMPUS**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complicated issue that cannot be easily explained through one-line talking points. Making the case for Israel requires a strong background on the conflict, current information, and a nuanced perspective.

The best strategy for students who support Israel is to be proactive rather than merely reactive on campus. Your job is to make a positive case for Israel, instead of focusing solely on refuting and counteracting anti-Israel agitation. The latter puts you in the position of always playing catch-up and acting within the parameters of an agenda that is set by others. When you move first, with positive programming, you get to set the tone and the agenda.

The people you most want to educate are not anti-Israel activists, who may never agree with you. Rather, seek to educate campus opinion leaders, student groups that may be potential allies and the general campus population who are amenable to hearing the case for Israel. Indeed, a number of your peers may become important public and private sector decision makers in the years to come after they graduate. This outreach is particularly important as anti-Israel student groups are actively seeking to engage other campus organizations.

In making an affirmative case, you will need a long-term, though flexible, plan of action in which you identify your target audiences and come to know them well. You need to educate yourself and know your facts. Most of all, you will need to communicate to others what Israel stands for and what it means to the Jewish people.

Here are some specific actions to consider:

- Bring credible and effective speakers and programs to campus to make a positive case for Israel, at least once each semester. In addition to speakers and programs focusing on current political events, consider bringing in nonpolitical speakers and programs such as artists, musicians, entrepreneurs and environmentalists. Israeli academics on sabbatical in the United States are often available for speaking engagements. When on campus, these academics should not only be used for evening, extracurricular events but also as guest lecturers in appropriate courses. In addition, set up an interview for speakers with a reporter from the campus newspaper and schedule an appearance on campus radio or television. Always reach out to the campus media and invite them to cover your events.
- Provide concise, well-written and researched letters, op-eds and longer articles to the [campus media](#). Submit items on a regular basis, but do not overdo it. These submissions should not always come from the same person or small group.

- Have a supply of literature on Israel on hand and seek to distribute it widely. Download and post such material on your group's Web site.
- Present an image of Israel beyond the conflict. Engage students through music, literature, films, scientific research, business development, high-tech and other elements of Israeli society.
- Take the lead on campus-wide campaigns that connect Israel to the mutual interests of other student groups. For example, Israel has a long history of providing equipment, financial resources and volunteer assistance to countries and people in crisis. By working on a campaign to help victims of natural disasters, environmental initiatives, or promoting awareness about HIV/AIDS, you can find common ground and potential allies.
- Utilize web sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and popular campus blogs to distribute positive messages about Israel to your peers.
- Be in regular contact with local and national Jewish organizations and your local Israeli consulate, which can be a source of timely information, literature, speakers and programs.

## **RESPONDING TO ANTI-ISRAEL CAMPAIGNS**

While positive programming and proactive, long-term goals are preferable, there are situations where it is essential to react directly to anti-Israel incidents and rhetoric. Certainly, when anti-Israel events or speakers cross the line into anti-Semitism, the incident cannot be ignored. When reacting to such situations it is also imperative to think strategically.

It is important to consider the following:

- Jewish groups on campus should maintain routine contact with appropriate personnel in the university administration (i.e., Student Affairs) and campus security. Keep them informed on a regular basis of national trends in anti-Israel activity (e.g., divestment campaigns, interruption of Israeli speakers, harassment, etc.) that should concern them. If an emergency situation

arises, an already established relationship will provide you with easier access to the administration. Consider appointing one individual or a small group to serve as designated liaisons.

- While anti-Israel protests may be protected by free speech rights, the protests cannot disrupt normal school functions, obstruct student access to school buildings, create pervasive, severe, or persistent harassment of students, or physically intimidate or threaten individual students. When the protests violate these parameters, alert the university and ask administrators to take action. ADL's publication, [Fighting Back: A Handbook for Responding to Anti-Israel Campaigns on College and University Campuses](#) can provide guidelines to dealing with these scenarios.
- Respond with accurate information in a succinct fashion to specific anti-Israel sentiments in the campus media. It is most effective to do so in the form of op-eds or letters to the editor. Generally submit a response once, as continued back and forth gets tiresome to most readers and can prove to be counterproductive.
- If called upon to present Israel's case publicly on campus during a time of intense anti-Israel activity (an anti-Israel event; divestment initiative etc), always be civil and come prepared. Have a supply of literature that refutes the accusations/arguments you are speaking out against. Be sure to frequently cite unbiased sources in your arguments; using only overtly pro-Israel sources invites criticism and allows readers to easily dismiss your arguments. It is appropriate to speak personally about what Israel means to you, how these accusations make you feel.
- When an on-campus panel discussion features speakers who have a record of hostility towards Israel, make the case to the administration and to the general campus community that this event contravenes accepted standards of fairness and balance. This point is especially vital when such events are sponsored/co-sponsored by academic departments or by the university itself, a growing trend. Urge the administration and academic department to

ensure that other voices are heard. Research anti-Israel speakers before they arrive on campus. Come prepared with pointed questions and to challenge inaccuracies. Contact your [local ADL office](#) or [ADL's U.S. Anti-Israel Activity resource site](#) for more information about specific speakers and their arguments.

- When anti-Semitic materials and/or rhetoric appear, you should publicly condemn them and seek to educate the administration and the general campus community to the dangers of hate on campus. Campus administrators and leaders should be urged to strongly denounce such bigotry.
- If you feel intimidated or discriminated against by your professor in your classroom because of your viewpoints or beliefs, you should follow established academic procedures and discuss the matter first with your instructor. Do so in a calm and non-polemical fashion. If this does not lead to a satisfactory solution, you should next bring your concerns to the department chair, dean, or whoever is the appropriate follow-up at your university. If such appeals are mounted, be sure to have documentation of your claims: include statements from other students, detailed class notes, the course syllabus and assigned readings. If you need guidance, approach a sympathetic professor, or contact Hillel or an off-campus Jewish organization, such as ADL.
- Always remember that whatever is happening on your campus, you are not alone. There are numerous on-and-off campus organizations available to advise, assist and support your pro-Israel initiatives on campus.

### **SOME LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS: BUILDING COALITIONS, PARTNERS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

- Become a leader on your campus. Get involved in student government elections and represent students on issues that are important to all students.

- Find common ground outside of the Israel and Israeli-Palestinian conflict 'boxes' - - issues like social welfare, environmental sustainability, immigration, domestic concerns - - with other student groups on campus and work to build personal relationships with their membership on issues of mutual concern. These may include College Democrats and Republicans, religious groups, African American, Asian American, LGBT and Latina/o student groups. Often, when pro-Israel groups publicly support issues of common concern with other groups, those groups will, in turn, be more approachable when building support to counter anti-Israel activity on campus.
- Encourage pro-Israel students to be active in key areas of student life such as student government, public affairs forums, campus newspapers and other media. Get many students involved in your events and campaigns and pay attention to developing leaders who can continue the effort when students graduate and leave the campus.
- Encourage Jewish and non-Jewish students to travel to Israel to gain a firsthand perspective. Once they return, encourage them to share their experiences with their peers. There are numerous opportunities for students to travel to Israel at little to no cost, including [ADL's Campus Leaders Mission](#).