Jewish Agency Israel Fellows to Hillel

2013-14: A year of Israel education, engagement and experience
Israel Fellows are informal Israeli-Jewish educators, promoting connection with and commitment to Israel as a multidimensional entity and concept.

**VISION**

**MISSION**

- Israel Engagement (In concentric circles: students/staff/faculty/community)
- Israel Education (Hebrew, advocacy, history, culture, current affairs, and more)
- Israel Experience (In Israel and with Israelis: Taglit- Birthright Israel, Masa Israel Journey, Onward, etc.)
Throughout their college experience, students open up to a range of new opinions and ideas, shaping their values and worldview. The Jewish Agency Israel Fellows to Hillel Program strengthens the standing of Israel on university campuses throughout North America, as students are most likely to connect with Israel and to develop a sense of pride and passion surrounding their Jewish identity when they are exposed to the vitality and appeal of young Israeli peers — individuals just like themselves. Israel Fellows provide firsthand accounts of Israel, bring together versatile student groups, and act as a vital resource with a wealth of knowledge for college students.

Approaching the Bat Mitzvah year of collaboration between the Jewish Agency for Israel and Hillel International, Amitei Yisrael / Israel Fellows have become an integral part of Hillel professional teams across the United States and Canada. They are a select group of young professionals, holding BA and MA degrees, and bring experience in areas relevant to their role — and a passion for Israel as a catalyst of Jewish identity and peoplehood.

“Being an Israeli representative has strengthened my pride in my country. I see how many people appreciate its many contributions to the world. I’m proud to be Israeli. I’m proud to be a Jew. I’m proud to be an Israel Fellow.”

— Lital Pendler, Israel Fellow at Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach
During 2013-14 academic year 58 Israel Fellows have:
Established & maintained 8,311 relationships with students

Mentored & tracked 1,100 students’ Jewish Journeys

Recruited 3,420 students for Taglit-Birthright Israel programs

Sent 782 students to Israel through non-Birthright programs

Initiated 349 new Israel engagement programs

Strengthened & formed 75 Pro-Israel student groups on campus

Held large Israel celebrations on 37 campuses, engaging 6,500 students
Israel Engagement

Israel Fellows engaged 8,311 students on college campuses. Below are some examples of the 349 engagement initiatives:

- **University of Maryland Hillel:**
  More than 70 students enjoyed a unique cultural experience with Israeli Pop Idol winner **Hagit Yaso**. During the event, students heard about Yaso’s family’s journey to Israel as Ethiopian immigrants, as well as her experience on the Israeli Idol TV show, “Kochav Nolad.”

- **University of Florida Hillel:**
  Together with Florida State University Hillel, UF Hillel created the **FU/FSU Maccabi Games**, engaging with Israel through sports. The schools competed in flag football, soccer and kickball. Through the event, students met weekly, generating relationships that led to some applying for internships at Hillel next year. The event was sponsored by Maccabi USA.

- **Lester and Jewell Morris Hillel Jewish Center:**
  Every other week, the Israel Fellow created a mix of Israeli news and culture through an online newsletter called **“Evyatar Talks Israel.”** Every issue included something political, social, a song for the week, technology, culture, a recipe of the week, and programs for students in Israel. The newsletter was read by 400-550 people each week.

“My work here is a journey to my Judaism. I learn something new in every conversation, every event and every interaction. I came here as an Israeli, but I’m coming back home as a proud Jewish woman who cares about tradition and Jewish identity.”

— Keren Cohen, Israel Fellow at Ohio State University Hillel
• **Hillel of Greater Toronto:**
As part of the need to reach a broader audience (Hillel of GTA touches only 1% of the volume potential), the Israel Fellow decided to go more technological and modern. Therefore, he began working on an **app** that exposes everything Israel at Hillel. 60 people attended the app’s launch (a casino night fundraiser for the Philippines), during which 130 people started using it. The app offers all the essential info about Hillel, Israeli news, Israel travel experiences, pro-Israel and Jewish student group updates and events, and assists with better communication on a daily basis between students and GTA Hillel.

• **Western Hillel:**
*Israel Talk* - Eight Western students were paired with eight students from Kinneret Academic College in Israel, holding weekly meetings via skype and engaging in deep and meaningful conversations about Judaism, Jewish identity, Israel-Diaspora relationship, differences, and the future. Next year the program will serve as a Taglit-Birthright Israel follow up program with alumni from summer trips.

• **American University:**
*“Laila Talk,”* a weekly educational program for students who want to learn more about Israel in an informal way, was an immediate, growing success. Held outside the Hillel building, the Israel Fellow initiated and lead programing that engaged a lot of new students who usually wouldn’t attend other Jewish or Israel-related events.

• **Hillel at Davis and Sacramento:**
*“Hookah Wednesday”* happened once a week when weather permitted. This simple, easy program enabled students to stop and say hello as they walked by, reaching a new target audience and enabling a gateway for them to be engaged with different aspects of Hillel and Israel on campus.
• UC Berkeley:
130 attended a “Brave Miss World” film screening and discussion panel with director, Cecilia Peck. An event hosted by “Miriam the IV,” the feminist community of Berkeley Hillel, was part of the Panhellenic Risk Management requirement as well as the Empower U program at Genq!.
Also sponsored by the Gender Equity Resource Center, UHS Tang Center, AEPi, Panhellenic Council, the ASUC Office of the President Sexual Assault Task Force, Berkeley Institute for Jewish Law and Israeli Law, Economy and Society, and the Consulate General of Israel to the Pacific Northwest.

• University of Arizona Hillel Foundation:
IsraelPalooza, a big annual Israel festival on campus, included activities like: make a wish at the western wall, the dead sea experience, Israel trivia, Israeli games, experience Israel (Masa), and more.

• Hillel at Stanford:
Yom HaAtzmaut event reached mostly newcomers (non-Hillel regulars, non-Jewish students, and faculty members) who engaged and were educated about Israel.

• Princeton University:
The Israel Fellow organized an Israel week of some 14 events, with more than 2000 students participating.

• Hillel 818:
Attended by over 200 students, both Jewish and non-Jewish, “Celebrate Israel at CSUN” – was the highlight of iFest 2014 and Hillel’s biggest event of the year, hosted together with Matadors for Israel. The big festival on campus included Israeli food, fun and educational Jewish and Israeli activities (arts and crafts with hamsas and Hebrew beads, write a note for the Kotel, photo booth with Israeli props, etc.), informational posters about Israel, a Taglit-Birthright Israel table, Masa table, Stand with Us Israel advocacy table, and more).
Israel Education

This year, Israel Fellows played a vital role in educating students about Israel, helping them advocate for Israel on campus. Israel Fellows also organized and formed numerous pro-Israel student groups while collaborating with other student organizations, professors, and academic departments.

BDS Action

- **University of Washington Hillel:**
  The Israel Fellow helped initiate “Huskies against Divestment,” a group including students across the pro-Israel spectrum, working towards defeating the BDS resolution. The group included supporters of SWU, AIPAC and JSTREET. Huskies against divestment were mentored by the UW Israel Fellow in planning their strategy, writing educational materials and preparing speeches for student senate. In addition, the Israel Fellow provided emotional support. The vote was won in senate: 59 voted against BDS, 8 for, and 11 abstained.

- **PDX Hillel:**
  initiating a diversity of Israel week events, the Israel Fellow was able to reach out to different student groups holding a range of interests, including partnering with the kickboxing club on Krav Maga night. As a result, the kickboxing club has now published an anti-BDS letter on their Facebook group and are supporting Hillel in this cause.

- **Hillel at Davis and Sacramento:**
  An ASUCD Senate Resolution urged the Board of Regents of the University of California (UC Regents) to undertake practices of corporate social responsibility through divesting from corporations that benefit from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Working tirelessly, the Israel Fellow led students through five long senate discussions and many sleepless nights, lobbying senators and working tirelessly writing speeches and strategizing. BDS was defeated once again.
Pro-Israel Groups

- **University of Buffalo:**
The Israel Fellow established a pro-Israel group – **UB for Israel.** Their first event was in collaboration with the LGBT group on campus and was well attended. He recruited two students from this group to attend the AIPAC policy conference. In addition, he hosted an “Israel week” in which students celebrated Israeli culture.

- **Hillel Montreal:**
At the beginning of the second semester, after two Israel groups on campus had done nothing on ground, and after talking to a number of students who were frustrated with this reality, the Israel Fellow started a **Multi-campus Pro-Israel committee.** The students needed this group to serve as a think tank/social/educational group, and enabled the Israel Fellow to create a leadership that will, hopefully, turn the pro-Israel groups at both McGill University and Concordia University into successful, operating groups on the ground next year.

- **Penn State University:**
Under the Israel Fellow’s guidance, Penn State Hillel saw the **creation of three new student groups: Penn Tamid, Latet, and InnovationAfrica.** Penn Tamid is a business-oriented group that invests, consults, and helps develop new small Israeli businesses. Latet finds ways for American students to volunteer for Israel both from America and in Israel. InnovationAfrica raises awareness of the extent of Israeli philanthropic endeavors in Africa, such as bringing technological advances to the continent.

“Over the past 3 years, I have learned a lot about my own country by looking at it through the eyes of my students. I have a newfound appreciation for it.”

— Assaf Levinton, Israel Fellow at Penn State University
Collaborations across campus

- Princeton University:
The Israel Fellow initiated many new projects this year. One of them was the Israel Fellowship. This Fellowship educated 12 students on high resolution topics about Israel, and included guest speakers, educational sessions, and a visit to the UN. Another endeavor he tackled this year was to send a few Princeton students on sought-after internships in Israel. Ten students were matched with well-known Israeli companies and worked with them during the summer.

- University of Michigan:
The Israel Fellow led a co-sponsored Peace week with United People for Peace (a group led by Palestinians). They stood together on stage with flags from both countries and urged people to be active for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

- Cornell Hillel:
A celebration of Middle Eastern culture, Mid East Fest is a big event held on campus, featuring Middle Eastern food, music, dancing and performances of various cultures, including Persian, Armenian, Israeli, Arab, and Greek. In a great example of tolerance and partnership between Muslim, Jewish and other groups, the Palestinian flag was raised there alongside the Israeli flag and those of other countries in the Middle East. 300 students attended.

- Hillel at Stanford:
The Israel Fellow organized joint events with other campus communities: with the Sanskriti (a South Asian student group) and the Jewish community, celebrating Chanukah and the Hindu Diwali festival of lights; and Martin Luther King Shabbat, right after the MLK Memorial Day, collaborating with the Black Student Union. There, several representatives spoke about Martin Luther King, Jr., his friend Rabbi A. J. Heschel, and their common goals.

- Hillel at San Francisco:
Sharing diversity in Israel with the Moroccan culture, the 2nd Annual MimounaFest, had over 100 students in attendance, some from ASI (the student government board), and professors and board members.
• **Hillel at USC:**
The **GlobeFest** event brought together no less than 10 of the biggest cultural groups on campus including the Latino, Chinese, Japanese, black and Indian student groups. The different cultures were celebrated by a showcase of dance, art, and food. it was very well attended, with over 650 students and **absolutely priceless relationships built with the international students on campus.**

• **Hillel at Virginia Tech:**
The Israel Fellow invested time in developing **good relations with the faculty and the administration** of the University, helping them prevent anti-Israel efforts and open doors to new initiatives and cooperation between the Hillel and the University.

• **University of Florida Hillel:**
Building a relationship with **Hebrew Teaching Faculty** and with the **head of the Political Science department**, Prof. Ido Oren.

• **American University:**
Creating collaboration with the **head of entrepreneurship in AU’s Business School**, and arranging a meeting and activity in Israel between the AU business school delegation and a group of entrepreneur students from the **College of Management**. A few months later, the delegations met again in the United States at American University.

• **University of Arizona Hillel Foundation:**
A relationship developed between the Israel Fellow and the Judaic studies faculty members helped with promoting Israel activities on campus. **The professors informed their students about Hillel Israel events** and even make some of them **mandatory** for students. Also, **they have invited the Israel Fellow to speak with their classes**, which is something that helps reaching out to more students, especially those not involved with Hillel at all.
Israel Experience

Taglit Birthright Israel

- **Stony Brook College:**
  The Israel Fellow recruited 21 students *(double the numbers of the last six years)* and almost all of them are new faces at Hillel. Many of them started to come to Hillel’s activities, as part of the pre-trip educational activities.

- **Texas Hillel Foundation:**
  took the **biggest Taglit-Birthright Israel group ever** from Texas Hillel to Israel. A successful trip, resulting in many students showing interest in getting more involved at Hillel and with Israel, as well as returning to Israel on an educational program.

- **Hillel at The George Washington University:**
  The Israel Fellow has been meeting with **TBI alums on weekly basis** and engaging them with different topics. The alums have been helping recruit record numbers for the summer TBI, with **2 buses for the first time**.

- **Towson and Goucher:**
  A new, shared Israel Fellow recruited a **whole bus for the first time**. The Israel Fellow created a **trip extension with the partner city of Ashkelon** which was a great success.

“The most powerful experience for me this year was traveling on Taglit-Birthright Israel with 40 USC students. The trip opened my eyes not only to what it means to be Jewish but also what it means to be Israeli. Seeing Israel through their eyes has taught me not to take for granted living in a Jewish state where being Jewish is not being different.”

— Tsuri Schoffman, Israel Fellow at University of Southern California Hillel
Tikkun Olam
Israel Fellows brought a different side of Israel to campuses through social action.

• Towson and Goucher:
The Israel Fellow initiated Save’s a child’s heart presentations and fundraising events, Zumba dancing for SACH and more. Both campuses raised more than $500.

• Penn State:
The Israel Fellow brought Bike for the Fight to Penn State. A group of bikers that ride from coast to coast in order to raise money and bring awareness to cancer and cancer research, both in Israel and the U.S. They met with students and talked about their own personal journeys and the fundraising they are doing for Israeli research for cancer. In this program, the Israel Fellow collaborated with THON, the biggest student run philanthropy in the world, and also worked with Tikkun Olam and Lions for Israel. The event was covered by three of the university/local newspapers and helped showcase a different side of Israel.

• Hillel 818:  
Caring for our community near and far - a Purim event: In partnership with the Jewish sorority Sigma AEPi, the students made gift-baskets (mishloach manot) both for the residents of the local Jewish old-age home (personally delivered), and for IDF soldiers (sent by mail). The gift baskets all included personal letters from the Sigma sisters. The Israel Fellow shared stories of the IDF unit in which her brother serves receiving the baskets.

“The opportunity to tell my Israel story, to share my Jewishness with the students, and to represent the Jewish people in this journey was really incredible. It strengthened my sense of connection to and love for the Jewish state as the cornerstones of my personal Jewish identity.”

— Amir Sagron, Israel Fellow at The Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale University
• **Tulane University:**
  Chocolates for Charity – This Initiative was started by Taglit-Birthright Israel alumni to make and sell Israeli chocolate balls, to support Israeli non-profits including Power to Succeed, an Ethiopian Jewish organization founded by the paramedic of the Tulane TBI winter trip from 2012. Chocolate balls sale for Valentine’s Day raised money for Save a Child’s Heart, partnering with Stand with Us, SDT, TJL, and TBI alumni.

• **Hillel 818:**
  The Israel Fellow helped the pro-Israel student group organize and execute a cookie-sale fundraiser for victims of typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. The money raised was donated to IsraAid, an Israeli organization providing medical aid in the Philippines. Over the two days of the fundraiser, hundreds of students were exposed to the initiative, as the group positioned itself in a central location on campus, including many Filipino students who expressed their appreciation for our efforts. Matadors for Israel were seen on campus doing Tikun Olam, the wonderful work that Israel does around the world for other nations in need was exposed, and raised and donated quite a bit of money, which made the group members feel really good and proud of themselves.
As the program moves into our bat mitzvah year, it is evident that Jewish Agency Israel Fellows to Hillel have orchestrated a sea of change in both the scale and the impact of Israel engagement on North American campuses. As we expand the program on more campuses, its long-term effects are already apparent. Fellows open positive avenues of connection to Israel for vast audiences who would otherwise remain untouched. Fellows inspire and encourage Jewish students to learn about Israel, talk about Israel, encounter Israel from abroad and in person, and explore the place of the Jewish State within personal and collective Jewish identity. We are committed to the growth of this program, especially as Hillel and the Jewish Agency for Israel pilot the exciting, deep, and broad-scoped “Israel Engaged Campus” initiative in 2014-15, and 67 Israel Fellows begin their first, second and third years of service.

“I think that after three years as a shlichah, my whole work culture is changed, which is a quality I would like to bring back with me to my future jobs in Israel. I learned a lot about my complicated views about Israel. I was exposed to outside perspective on Israel and Israelis and I feel that today I have a larger understanding of my country and how the decisions the government makes affect Diaspora Jewry. I can’t wait to go back home and bring all of those experiences and understandings back to my society.”

— Maayan Zyskrot, Israel Fellow at Western Hillel