

BEST PRACTICES ON CAMPUS: PRO-ISRAEL ACTIVISM

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ISRAEL ON CAMPUS COALITION

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In the wake of Operation Cast Lead, there was a marked increase in anti-Israel activity on college campuses across the country. To learn about the variety of ways students were dealing with this challenge, the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) launched the Best Practices Contest, in which students were invited to describe the Israel climate on their campus, explain how it changed after Israel's operations in Gaza, and present the ways they worked to present a positive image of Israel to their campus communities. The contest entries demonstrated that pro-Israel students quickly recognized that one of the most effective ways to defuse anger and combat misinformation was to present to their peers information about an Israel very different from what students were witnessing in the media – an Israel rich in culture, history, technological advances, rights for women and minorities, and more.

The ICC is pleased to present this compilation of outstanding student-written essays. The first two essays, by Stephanie Feit of New York University and Geoffrey Levin of Michigan State University, were selected as the winners of the Best Practices Contest by the ICC's Steering Committee. The other essays were selected as deserving of honorable mention. All the essays presented here are excellent examples of proactive, positive initiatives that served as powerful forces in shaping the campus Israel climate during a very challenging semester.

Stephanie Feit, New York University
Winning Essay, Best Practices Contest

New York City; the home of liberalism; the home to a myriad of people, languages, cultures, and religions. It is the home of an array of opinions on issues that vary from the environment to gay marriage to the best bar to go out to that night. As I entered New York University, I felt ready for the challenge of New York City. I felt ready for the new atmosphere I was entering that would be a huge change from the isolated Jewish environment in which I had grown up. While still possessing some naivety, I was aware that the place I was going to spend the next four years was going to be thriving with liberalism, a view opposite of my own conservative stance. However, I was excited for the challenge.

As I entered college, I knew that I wanted to become involved in the student community, and I knew that a large focus of my efforts would be primarily promoting Israel. However, I was unaware of what was to be the necessary amount of activism. The first few months ran smoothly and brought no shock to me. There was no real anti-Israel sentiment being portrayed around campus. The first anti-Israel event I ran into came with New York City's Israel Apartheid Week. Although having previously been oblivious to the phenomenon around New York City, I was made more than aware by the various flyers promoting the anti-Israel events on campus. Knowing that something had to be done to counter these efforts, Geshet, the Israel group on campus in which I had become involved, decided to organize lectures and information sessions to arm the students on campus with the information to combat false claims. Also, we encouraged students to attend the anti-Israel events and ask questions about their said claims. I left last year with ambivalence as to how I felt about the Israel climate on campus. On the one hand, I was happy about the minimal anti-Israel sentiment, but on the other hand I felt that more could be done to get more students involved to better promote Israel's image.

This year has brought new and more difficult challenges. The fall semester passed, with little excitement. I decided to spend my winter break in Israel on Hasbara Fellowships, a program that brings students to Israel over winter break and trains them to become better Israel advocates on their respective campuses. I came back to school with a strong drive and I was ready for the challenges that would come. The Gaza War had just taken place, and I expected a lot of anti-Israel activity. Sure enough, on my first night back, there was a large anti-Israel rally right outside of my apartment building. While at first taken aback, I was not surprised. This was to be expected. As Apartheid Week approached, Geshet got together and began to brainstorm what would be our plan of action. We decided to organize a pro-Israel rally in Washington Square Park, the crux of the campus. We ordered pro-Israel t-shirts and gave them out to the student body that attended the rally. While it took place on one of the coldest days of February, the NYU campus got a chance to see that there was a strong pro-Israel sentiment on campus. During the rest of Apartheid Week, students attended the various anti-Israel events and gave out their own materials, along with arguing the facts. We also organized a screening of Alan Dershowitz's "The Case For Israel." The event went over extremely well and over 300 people attended, including both students and non-student community members. A message was definitely portrayed to the NYU community that students were pro-Israel and we were more devoted than ever.

In honor of Israel's Independence Day, an Israel week was organized. It began with a lecture given by Colonel Zion Gruber of the Israeli army that focused on morals and the Gaza war. It continued with an Israel themed weekend that involved Israeli food, decoration, songs, and comedy sketches. We invited Oded Feuer, a former paratrooper commander and head of USD Hagshama for a Yom Hazikaron ceremony and reflection. This all built up to Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's 61st birthday. For the celebration, we planned an all night party at the university Hillel. The Hillel turned into an Israeli shuk with celebration, dancing, food, and Bedouin-style decorations. There were trivia games, Krav Maga and a movie showing. Many came out to celebrate the day and it was a major success.

What happened early in the day was a major accomplishment for the NYU Israel Community. A few days prior, I was made aware of a pro-Palestinian rally that was going to take place on Independence Day. Right away planning began. There were less than two days, but it was imperative that something be done. We decided to plan a counter rally. We spent those two days recruiting whomever we could, ordering T-shirts, making signs, chalking sidewalks, and just getting the word out that support was necessary. The result was more than successful. At the same time that the pro-Palestinian students gathered, a significantly larger group formed across the street. This was our group. We brought Israeli flags, massive signs, and songs of peace to our rally. We sang, chanted and danced in the streets to show our love for Israel. As time passed, hundreds gathered to watch both sides and their respective demonstrations. While the pro-Palestinian students were shouting hate slogans, our pro-Israel community chanted messages of peace. "1,2,3,4 Israel doesn't want a war, 5,6,7,8 teach war not hate" was just one of the many slogans that we chanted. Heated debates went on on the side of the street, but the atmosphere was mostly peaceful. Many walked away from the rally with a more positive attitude. We also received positive press around campus. To me, the rally, combined with our Yom Haatzmaut celebration afterwards, made for a successful Independence Day. The most successful part of this rally, along with the rally and events during "Israel Apartheid Week" is that the greater campus community saw our message. They saw the pro-Israel message through the media and through our actions. They saw the great accomplishments of Israel, instead of the lies that the anti-Israel community was attempting to preach.

Geoff Levin, Michigan State University
Winning Essay, Best Practices Contest

Within the Michigan State University student body, feelings toward Israel are mixed; there are many pro-Israel students and many anti-Israel students, while the vast majority of the student population is totally ambivalent and uninvolved. A big problem we have, however, is that many of the pro-Israel students feel they lack the knowledge and experience to take a proactive role in Israel campus advocacy, and many of them do not even feel comfortable enough to talk about the issues and spread their pro-Israel feelings to friends. Many students, including many Birthright alumni, are passionate about Israel but feel that they lack the knowledge to talk in-depth about Israel and the problems it faces today; other students who are educated about Israel do not know how to go about advocating on campus. With that in mind, I worked on a three-pronged approach to increase advocacy on campus and to empower these two types of students to take action on campus Israel advocacy.

Before starting our two initiatives this semester, we had to first focus on countering the intense and inflammatory anti-Israel activities that sprung up in January after the war against Hamas. The pro-Palestinian group, SAFE, held numerous small events, including “die-ins,” weekly street protests, “Gaza Info” speakers, a “Road to Apartheid Night,” and rides to see Norman Finkelstein in Ann Arbor. We held four of our own Gaza info sessions around campus, some with Israeli professors (one cosponsored with other student groups), and designed and distributed “Gaza Fact Flyers.” We also sent students to monitor their events, hand out flyers, and question the inaccuracies of their speakers.

Even before the war in December, I knew that we needed to take a more proactive role on campus. We had to show students that Israel is a real place with real people, and we could do that by planning Israeli cultural events. Along with our Emerson Fellow, I founded Team Israel Programming Committee (TIPC), MSU’s first Israeli culture club. We recruited a twelve-member board, and our first event was a successful Israeli Culture Night featuring Krav Maga lessons, belly dancing lessons, Nargillah, Shesh-Besh, and fresh Israeli kabobs.

To get more students involved, I designed a two-part initiative called ICAT, Israel Campus Advocacy Training. ICAT Aleph was a five-week initiative focused on 20 students who had not taken Israel-related classes before, and had not been in Israel for an extended period of time. Birthright alumni, who often show a lot of passion for Israel and want to be more educated about Israel, were targeted specifically. Aleph taught these students about how to understand and talk about the conflict and included a course about writing letters to newspapers. The goal was to make the students feel comfortable advocating for Israel in formal and informal settings. A stipend granted at the end ensured commitment. Session titles included “Perceptions of Israel,” “The History,” “Politics Today,” “The Case for Israel,” and “The Closing Argument.”

The goal of ICAT Bet was to get students active in Israel leadership and planning. We broke the 15 students into five groups, and each group had to plan at least one Israel event in 2009. The four required training sessions were “Targeting your Audience/Event Brainstorming,” “Applying for Grants and Resources,” “Advocacy Lesson with Max Stettner of Hasbara,” and “Getting the Job Done.” Two groups have already successfully run their events, Israel Shabbat and Tel Aviv 100 Party, while the other three groups, Israel Fest, Israeli Movies and Music, and Israeli Athletics initiative are planning events next semester. This semester, we succeeded in countering anti-Israel activity, trained a new generation of pro-Israel leaders, and taught MSU the beauty of Israeli culture.

Molly Bloom, Bradley University

Honorable Mention

Making sure that Israel is being shown in the most positive way possible is a cause for which every Jewish person should be fighting. People all around the world are constantly being fed anti-Israel propaganda, and many are being persuaded by the distortions and outright lies comprising this misinformation. While we cannot stop the anti-Semitic sentiment at its core, we can at least counter it by promoting the truth about Israel and revealing Israel's true and just nature through the proactive dissemination of real information whenever and wherever possible.

The general feeling about Israel on my Bradley University campus has been, well, lacking. Apathy best describes the prevailing sense of Israel on my campus when I first came here. Most people, including my own roommate, were unsure about which side they were on and weren't even curious enough to pursue any information on the Middle East. Then, when there would be the presentation of anti-Israel propaganda on campus, students typically wouldn't even care to try to research Israel's point of view.

Recently, in the school's newspaper, there was an article reporting false statements about Israel and why America should not support it. Then there were some articles written by Jewish students in response, including one which I co-authored. Next, some Muslim students wrote letters to the editor in responses to our letters. This all occurred on the heels of a talk given by Anna Baltzer, a Jewish anti-Israel speaker who had appeared at Bradley not long before the newspaper article was written. A few of my friends and I went to her presentations and asked questions designed to disrupt her momentum and shift it back to the truth about Israel. I distributed pamphlets from Honest Reporting and engaged in some calm dialogues with a few audience members after the presentation. My friends and I also wrote a letter to the editor of our newspaper outlining where Anna Baltzer's statements were misleading or just plain false.

Nonie Darwish, a Muslim-born Egyptian, came to Bradley and spoke out against radical Islam and anti-Zionism. Many students came to this event, and it stimulated discussions among students. One student, however, started a Facebook group against Nonie. But, eventually, students on campus started taking more interest in the Middle East conflict and understanding the full picture.

Information about Save A Child's Heart was also shown at Bradley, explaining how Israel has saved the lives of children from all over the world who have heart problems, for free. The movies "The Case For Israel" and "Unsettled" were shown, and that also made a difference here. All of these activities showed the students a real, positive view of Israel. I am pleased to report that students are finally, slowly starting to care more about the Middle East and Israel's point of view. Jewish students still have a long way to go with this fight, at least here at Bradley, but we are off to a good start.

Zachary R. Chertok, McGill University

Honorable Mention

At the beginning of the year at McGill University in downtown Montreal, the climate when dealing in Israel programming was volatile and wrought with both opportunity and risk. Of those opportunities, new venues, dates, and an influx of new students from the combined Jewish communities primarily in the US and Canada provided several chances for new ideas to be presented and carried out to present a more livable, sociable image of Israel. Hillel was rebranding itself as a social organization centered in Jewish student life, Alpha Epsilon Pi was rebuilding itself into the premier fraternity on campus, and Ghetto Shul and Chabad were celebrating a new year with new and refurbished facilities. With these and the new recruits to all organizations flowing in, the air was full of possibilities.

The same opportunities were plentiful with doubt however. The Arabic Student Association was also growing with new clean slates and Israel was branding itself in a precarious position pending the results of the upcoming US election and the results of the pressured leave of Prime Minister Olmert. The horizons looked good but not without the risks involved with building new bridges, exploring avenues not looked down, and creating new regulations at the administrative level.

During the course of the year, anti-Israel sentiment presented itself in the form of Gaza sympathy speaking up for the first time in three years, Gaza rallies occurring in the city around the university, and a demonstration of white flags being planted on the lower field of McGill's campus, one flag for each victim of the Gaza bombings. Additionally, certain new Jewish students were hesitant to get involved with Jewish programming and Israel advocacy because of the sentiment among the general community that Israel currently favored isolating itself from its neighbors and preferred force over negotiation.

To counter anti-Israel activity, talks between Hillel and the Arabic Student Association began in the form of collaboration on articles and events to present the differences between support and agreement in political policy of any kind, while Israel apartheid week was countered successfully by being overshadowed by AEPi Splashbash and Israel fest. Additionally the McGill administration was called into question on more than one account of being misleading in their public appearance by allowing public demonstration of political positions on their campus when they strictly do not endorse them vis á vis the flag demonstration.

By addressing the administration directly on the enforcement of its own campus regulations, a vote was held amongst students in the general assembly of the student society to oppose QPIRG's presence on campus and to prevent administrative endorsement and support of Gaza sympathy. In doing so, politics was relieved to the student level and kept off campus for student organizations to handle.

Through this year's initiatives and pro-Israel campaigns, a more diverse understanding of the political situation in the Arab-Israeli conflict was achieved amongst students from all communities. The main theme on McGill's campus in spite of the bombings occurring in Israel and Gaza focused on getting students to decide for themselves the level to which and how they would take a stand for what they believed in. In this way, all students were successfully targeted and brought into the spotlight, bridges between seemingly different organizations were built, and the administration learned how to better handle themselves when volatile issues request an audience on campus.

The effects of this year's pro-Israel campaigns were highly successful in creating a more stable environment long term for all Jewish students and students of other communities to feel comfortable in their support of Israel and their level of advocacy, better serving to generate a new generation of young leaders in the community.

Brittany Cohen, Indiana University

Honorable Mention

Prior to the current semester the Israel climate on the Indiana University campus had been outwardly positive. Israel groups on campus received a lot of support from the university as well as the surrounding community. University officials spoke at our events and the student union board donated money and volunteers for one of our biggest events. Other campus organizations gladly worked with the Israel groups on campus to promote diversity and acceptance of differences. The community of Bloomington, Indiana supported Israel's mission of peace and understanding. Numerous times they have rallied and worked to help the Jewish community achieve its goals in support of Israel. While there is the occasional anti-Israel opinion article in our university newspaper, the overall support of Israel has been strong on campus.

This semester, Indiana University saw more of what was lurking behind closed doors. While the general student body experienced warmth towards Israel, there were those who disagreed and did so only in private. This semester, due to Israel's war in Gaza, more people began speaking out against Israel, making the environment less than friendly. The weekend before the first week back from spring break an anti-Israel rally occurred. About 50 people were part of this rally and they called for the end of the war in Gaza. In the library a huge wooden cube was built and students were asked to write on it in response to the prompt, "What does democracy mean to you?" Most of the responses to it were mostly anti-Israel statements in both Arabic and English. This massive piece of what should have been art and a testament to the college student's view of democracy was defaced with anti-Israel statements. These statements in no way answered the question other than saying, "To me democracy means I can hate."

In spite of these anti-Israel activities the pro-Israel community stayed strong. As a way to counter the anti-Israel activity on campus we embraced the ideas of peace and coexistence. We didn't want to get into a shouting match with those who were anti-Israel. That wouldn't get us anywhere and could eventually turn students against Israel. In order to help students learn about Israel we used Hasbara's campaigns that showed Israel as a country that values all of its citizens. The first campaign we did was Israel Votes 2009. This event taught students about each of the parties in the Israeli Knesset including the Arab parties. This showed students that minorities in Israel have the same rights as the majority. After they were educated they were able to vote for their favorite party in a mock election. The next two campaigns were Flags for Humanity and Think Green, Think Blue. These educated students both on Israel's humanitarian efforts around the world and Israel's steps towards making itself more environmentally friendly. All three of these campaigns present Israel as a friend to the Arabs, the world and the environment. This is the best way to educate students on Israel's morals and steer them away from negative images of war.

Through these campaigns students began to see what Israel was really about. The anti-Israel articles in the newspaper stopped, there were no more protests and things went back to the way they were last semester. It isn't to say that somewhere deep negative feelings towards Israel don't exist. However, the approach we took towards educating students was one that stayed away from aggressiveness and fighting with the other side. We peacefully presented what Israel really is and that, I believe, stays with students longer.

Michael Feder, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Honorable Mention

Israel has always been a volatile subject at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. A school of social action and social justice, it is unfortunate that the student body often lumps these into the vague mentality of “the state is always the aggressor.” It is a mentality conceived by a lack of information about the subject and a general feeling of apathy on campus (i.e. “I’ll just blame the state in general rather than actually figure out what’s going on”).

But prior to this spring semester, all that this meant was that the word “Israel” would often be included in longwinded diatribes about the “evil of power.” Rarely was there a direct focus on Israel or the Israel group on campus. But the start of this spring semester came with a much more focused and aggressive attack against Israel specifically. Articles were written almost weekly about Israel's so-called “atrocities” in its most recent conflict in Gaza and throughout history. Lectures were held throughout the local five-college community about Israel's “apartheid wall” and how a one state solution is the only solution. Hampshire College (a college only a few miles from UMass) allegedly became the first college in the United States to divest from Israel (although Hampshire College itself published an open letter stating otherwise), and an organization at UMass tried to pass a bill in the Student Government Association to call for divestment as well.

To counter the anti-Israel attacks that were being made on campus, the Student Alliance for Israel (SAFI) started an immediate response on three different fronts. The first and most pressing was to deal with the bill calling for UMass to divest from Israel. SAFI decided to not only attend the senate meeting, but to attend in force. Over 50 students attended in solidarity with Israel, three of whom spoke about Israel, Israel life on campus, and why divestment was a poor choice. The sheer presence of SAFI at the meeting was incredible and the statement it made greater than could have been anticipated.

But dealing with the bill in the Student Government Association only affected a small group of students, and even though the event was published in the school newspaper, it remained a fairly isolated event. The second front SAFI focused on was the political-public. SAFI organized a “Rally for Peace” in the town commons. The rally focused on two levels: first to make sure that Zionists in the area knew that they were not alone and had a community to turn to, and second to show those who vilify Israel that they were not the only voice. SAFI made sure to publicize the event throughout Massachusetts and places in New York and New Jersey. It was important that other communities, even if they couldn't attend, knew that Israel was being taken seriously.

The rally was an enormous success. Over 250 people turned out for it and it lasted three hours. Speakers ranged from Steven Grossman (former director of the DNC and AIPAC) to local students and professors. But there was still one more front to face. Until this point, SAFI had only been responding to those who were calling against Israel, but SAFI decided to make it clear that no matter what the anti-Israel atmosphere might be like, SAFI would continue with its own pro-Israel, pro-peace agenda. In the last week of April, SAFI celebrated Israel's Independence Day with a bang: a giant festival in the middle of campus offering free food, live music, and a mock version of Tel-Aviv's Shenkin Street. The celebration was attended by even more people than attended the rally and was a huge success.

By focusing on these three fronts – political-private, political-public, and apolitical enjoyment – SAFI was able to create a multifaceted presence. SAFI proved to the campus and the community that it is better to be an educated advocate than a radical activist. SAFI's presence on these three fronts led to an increase in attention to the subject of Israel and an increase in membership. Students at UMass have started attending more SAFI events not because they are pro-Israel as much as they are in favor of how SAFI conducted itself: with pride, with confidence, and in true democratic fashion.

Brandon Glantz, University of Florida***Honorable Mention***

With a Jewish population of over 7,000 students, many people would believe that anti-Semitism and anti-Israel beliefs are far from reality at the University of Florida. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Throughout the year, there has been an increasing amount of anti-Israel activities within and around our campus.

Before this semester, there was a large amount of indifference in regards to the political situation surrounding Israel. Most people would believe that this would not be a bad characteristic, but that is not true when it comes to the Jewish students. Even the Jewish student leadership on campus was mostly concerned with only the social aspect rather than political issues. This semester, however, the anti-Israel population, both on and around campus, began to form a stronger and more vocal movement, especially with the occurrence of Operation Cast Lead. For example, I sat on a panel where I spoke on behalf of Israel about the conflict in Gaza; I was attacked left and right only to have a few people in the crowd support what I was saying. While standing outside our Hillel, I have heard anti-Semitic remarks yelled at me only for being Jewish. Worst of all, when we had an anti-Hamas rally, there were some Jewish students opposing their own homeland.

In order to counter the anti-Israel sentiment, we choose to literally bring Israel to the students. The main idea was to show Israel's contributions to society. We chose to do this through the environmental movement which many students can relate to. The first step was creating a multifaceted approach to engage all students on campus. An initiative was formulated by bringing in a prominent speaker, having professors talk about Israel's contribution to the environmental movement, working with the environmental groups on campus, and finally creating an Israeli technology garden to show students firsthand how the technology can contribute to our every day uses.

The initiative began with a recycling party. All of the decorations were created from recycled materials and the students' admission tickets were one recyclable item. The next step was bringing in Michael Granoff from BetterPlace. After that we built the garden. The garden includes drip irrigation and signage explaining Israel's part. The final event was participating in Earth Day with every environmental organization on campus. We provided information and handed out energy efficient lightbulbs. Before each event, we tabled and handed out information on Israel's environmental contributions, with material supplied by organizations such as Hasbara Fellowships, the David Project, BlueStar PR, and StandWithUs.

Each event's goal was to teach students about Israel's contributions through different forms of engagement. The party focused on the social aspect, while the speaker and professors brought in a more professional and educational side. The creation of the garden and tabling during Earth Day had the two most profound effects on the initiative. The garden, which is located across from the football and basketball stadium, has major foot traffic and showcases Israel's contributions to every passerby. In addition, tabling with the environmental organizations has given these individuals a new, more positive image of Israel.

Overall, I believe the attitude towards Israel has shifted on our campus. Many students are now aware of the numerous contributions Israel has made to our world and have a different, more positive view of Israel.

Leo Nayfeld, Miami University (Ohio)

Honorable Mention

As President of Miami Students for Israel, it has been my honor and pleasure to witness first-hand the tremendous improvements that our secular, bi-partisan, student-run organization has made on campus. Miami University (OH) is a historic, mid-sized campus that for many years had very little interest in world dealings that took place outside city limits. I was fortunate enough to take a month-long trip to Israel and Poland, and this experience changed my life. Touring the two countries with 30 teenagers from Cincinnati, and 40 from Netanya, reshaped my knowledge and understanding of Israel, and lit a fire whose flame continues to burn strongly inside me. Upon entering my freshman year, I immediately became active in Miami Students for Israel (MSI). MSI, unfortunately, was a very disorganized and apathetic group consisting of a few members. The executive board was very pleased when my friends and I suggested that we revamp the organization and start fresh. Elections were immediately called, and I was honored to be elected the Vice President of Programming halfway through my first semester of college. It was during this time that not only did I make national connections with groups such as StandWithUs, Hasbara Fellowships, and the Zionist Organization of America, but I also learned the importance of networking and on-campus coalitions. This was never more evident than when MSI decided to invite Ms. Nonie Darwish to campus.

We as an organization knew that this event was to be the biggest of our semester, and had the potential to erase the painful memories of programs that only a year before had attracted 20 guests. After several meetings that revolved around how we would approach groups, it was decided that we would ask anybody and everybody that could potentially be interested in the program. One-on-one meetings between myself and other organization heads took place, and in the end, we had a list of cosponsors that included: College Republicans, College Democrats, College Libertarians, Campus Crusade for Christ, Association of Jewish Students, Jewish Studies Department, Diversity Affairs Council, StandWithUs, Hasbara Fellowships, and the Zionist Organization of America. This wide-ranging list of partnering organizations made it clear to the rest of campus that Israel is a bi-partisan issue, which is something that we had already known, but were working to convince others. These partners, as well as the attendance of over 350 staff and students, confirmed the fact that we as an organization had grown tremendously, and it was due to our hard-work and the key values that we held as an organization. Because we are nearly as committed to being bi-partisan and secular as we are to Israel, we do not limit ourselves when it comes to relationship building. The success of this practice is clearly exhibited by the growth of our organization in terms of visibility on campus and increased attendance at meetings and programs, but most importantly in the strength of our networking. As we have grown, we have given a platform for anti-Israel students to speak out on. The anti-Israel movement was at its peak immediately after Operation Cast Lead, and a rally was held calling Israel an apartheid state, accusing of Israel of war crimes, etc. Fortunately for us, we managed to quickly reach out to all the groups we had ever worked with (which are the largest and most active groups on campus), and not a single group attended the anti-Israel event. The anti-Israel rally only drew about 20 protestors, and every protestor was a Muslim or a known ultra-liberal professor.

Our goal as a pro-Israel organization is to educate the Miami community about Israel and the Middle East in a factual and pro-active manner. While our mission is far from being completed, we have made large strides in the past year which are evidenced not only by an extreme increase in program attendance, but also by our increased visibility on campus. Our commitment has only grown with our success, and with the continued help of ICC organizations such as StandWithUs, Hasbara Fellowships, and the ZOA, I am confident our fundamental principles will lead us to long-term success on campus.

Jordan D. Soffer, University of Wisconsin

Honorable Mention

A Simple Guide on Improving Everything Israel on Campus

Since the 1960s, the University of Wisconsin-Madison has taken pride in its reputation as a hub of liberalism and free thought, regardless of the country's general political direction. Amidst the presidential election, the past two semesters have served to forge this reputation. Pro-Palestinian groups used the politically charged season as a means to consolidate their forces and further promulgate their incendiary anti-Israel rhetoric on campus. Clearly, their efforts did not come to a halt on November 4th. With the election of a new president, the Gaza conflict, and Israeli elections, many saw a renewed opportunity to stridently publicize their position, with the hope of changing US foreign policy. They scheduled multiple events, ranging from bringing in the virulent anti-Semite Noam Chomsky as a guest speaker, to launching a weeklong campus program called "Eyes on Palestine." They have actively seized every opportunity to bash Israel. As I have often publicly asserted in my Badger-Herald articles, they seem more interested in besmirching Israel than aiding their brethren.

Combating this sentiment proved difficult, as it became apparent that this attitude was no longer confined to the pro-Palestinian groups on campus. Noticeably, several student organizations and unaffiliated students began to echo the uninformed rhetoric of these bigoted organizations. It is tragic that those who genuinely wish to fight for the rights of Palestinian civilians (whose plight is undeniable, though its origin is not what many would have us believe) cannot do so, because their cause has been hijacked by the muck and mire of dogmatic dialogue, the objective of which remains highly questionable.

While one may allege that I am portraying their efforts in an unfair light simply because of my own personal biases, ironically, the groups themselves do an excellent job of dispelling this assertion. This semester they convened a (so-called) panel to ostensibly evaluate the situation, a panel which was disingenuously co-chaired by Jihad Agrabali, a student who organized and led the protest against our "Israel at 60" celebration last spring, and Jennifer Lowenstein, a professor who has described Israel as a "westernized colony for white supremacists seeking ways to discreetly dispose of its n***er population... the most well-funded terrorist organization outside the mainland United States." Other events scheduled by these groups included screening the films "Checkpoint" and "Peace, Propaganda, and the Promised Land." None of their events focused on coexistence, or on how to move forward with a vision of peace, but only to chastise Israel.

In the past, attempts to combat such narrow-mindedness have been passive at best, and paradoxically, geared to an advocate population. The pro-Israel groups had chosen not to divisively protest, but rather to simply respond with events that emphasized less controversial cultural elements of Israeli life. While this may have been a nice, non-confrontational approach, it proved to be completely ineffective in mitigating the impact of pro-Palestinian assaults. This year we have been successful in bucking that trend by initiating programs that are less defensive, and spotlight the more personal impact Palestinian intransigence and hostility have upon their own people, on Israeli victims, and on the peace process at large. No longer shall we fall into the trap of enabling pro-Palestinian factions to set the agenda by contrasting the isolated Palestinian citizen with the larger, more convenient target, namely the "country" of Israel.

As a prelude to revitalization efforts, on January 26th I wrote an article in the Badger Herald supporting Israel's right to defend herself. Admittedly, it was a gentle call, but it was simply meant to alert the student body that the pro-Israel community still existed and would not simply roll over and allow others to make baseless allegations about our homeland. Thankfully, it led to a semester filled with pro-Israel activities that helped change attitudes around campus. We are now in a place where, not only it is ok, but actually cool to wear Israel regalia and attend pro-Israel events. Throughout the course of the semester, we have written more articles and brought in speakers like Khaled Abu Toameh, a prominent Palestinian journalist. We have shown documentaries such as "The Case for

Israel” and “A Hero in Heaven” and have continued our lighthearted Israeli events with Blue and White bar night and a Yom Ha’aztmaut barbecue.

Previously, we struggled to get people to attend events because the pro-Israel community was generally apathetic and not concerned about getting their voice heard. As the semester has progressed, however, we have seen numbers jump drastically as hundreds of students showed up to the Blue and White Bar night, and many showed up for “The Case for Israel.” We are building a captive audience. The strategy for success ultimately proved to be extraordinarily simple: if you build it, they will come. This semester has proven to be one of the greatest achievements of our pro-Israel community as we have come out of hibernation and into the limelight with our unyielding support to the haven of democracy, equality, and freedom in the Middle East: Israel.

Samuel L. Spector, UC San Diego

Honorable Mention

This year has been a tough one for the pro-Israel community on campus. This past year we have been attacked by statements from academic departments at the University of California, San Diego saying that Israel was practicing “systematic racial extermination on Muslims and brown people.” Resolutions to the Associated Student Body (AS) have been submitted condemning Israel’s recent Operation Cast Lead. The Pro-Israel Tritons Association (PITA) has not stood idly by and let the country which we so proudly represent be slandered. Our members went to each of the resolution hearings and were able to convince the AS not to pass these resolutions. The first one failed by a vote of 14-13, the second by a vote of 20-6. The PITA members also met with the heads of the academic departments which slandered Israel and were able to get them to cease all further actions, cancelling forums that misrepresented the purpose of Operation Cast Lead. With the threat of future resolutions, we elected four representatives from our community to try and negotiate a deal with the Students for Justice in Palestine for a resolution not to be passed. After 40 hours of negotiations, the PITA members involved refused to agree to any of the conditions which would have led to complete condemnation of Israel and not a single condemnation of Hamas, and told the members of SJP that they would never allow them to pass a resolution without a fight.

PITA has taken it upon itself to start meeting with other student organizations, such as the Black Student Union, the LGBTQIA, College Democrats, College Republicans, etc. to explain why these resolutions do not reflect the voice of the student body and why the State of Israel is important to the way that we live our lives as Americans. A petition was also started by the members of PITA, which has gathered over 300 signatures, asking AS not to pass any resolution which condemns the State of Israel. Prior to the recent AS elections, PITA lobbied practically every AS candidate at UC San Diego and explained to them how these resolutions are not representative of the student body, compiled a list as to whether or not each candidate would vote for a resolution which condemned Israel, and sent the list out to the pro-Israel community. PITA saw the AIPAC Policy Conference as an opportunity to educate members of the community about the importance of the US-Israel relationship and is sending a total of 21 UCSD affiliated students to the Policy Conference, a record for our school. This number includes four members of AS, including the current AS President, Donna Bean, and the President-elect Utsav Gupta.

In addition, PITA was awarded the Legacy Heritage Fund’s grant of \$3000 to have a dinner in celebration of Israel’s contributions to the world. Guest speakers are already booked for the May 14th event, and an attendance of approximately 125 people is expected for the dinner, in which student organization leaders and AS members will learn the contributions that Israel has made to society and why it is important that the United States and Israel have a strong relationship.

Though this year has been tough, our group PITA has grown from three to about 15 members. These members have strongly defended Israel; volunteered at AIPAC’s San Diego brunch; attended the SABAN conference, the Young Zionist Leadership Conference in Miami, and Policy Conference; and worked hard to educate others about why the State of Israel is important and why we should not condemn its recent actions of self defense. As president of PITA, I am so proud of the work of my group. It has assured me that even after I graduate in 2010, the pro-Israel voice on this campus will remain strong and dedicated.

ICC Member Organizations

[Aish HaTorah / Hasbara Fellowships](#)
[Alpha Epsilon Pi \(AEPi\)](#)
[Alpha Epsilon Phi \(AEPHi\)](#)
[American Israel Public Affairs Committee \(AIPAC\)](#)
[American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise \(AICE\)](#)
[American Jewish Committee \(AJC\)](#)
[The American Jewish Congress](#)
[Americans for Peace Now \(APN\)](#)
[Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#)
[CAMERA](#)
[Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation](#)
[Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations](#)
[The David Project](#)
[Fuel for Truth](#)
[Hillel - The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life](#)
[Israel University Consortium \(IUC\)](#)
[Jewish Council for Public Affairs \(JCPA\)](#)
[Jewish National Fund \(JNF\)](#)
[KESHER - Union for Reform Judaism \(URJ\)](#)
[KOACH - United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism \(USCJ\)](#)
[Media Watch International \(MWI\)](#)
[Stand With Us](#)
[Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America \(OU\)](#)
[Union of Progressive Zionists \(UPZ\)](#)
[United Jewish Communities \(UJC\)](#)
[USD - Hagshama of the World Zionist Organization](#)
[Yavneh Olami](#)
[YJ Impact!, sponsored by Hadassah](#)
[Zeta Beta Tau \(ZBT\)](#)
[Zionist Organization of America \(ZOA\)](#)

Affiliate Members

[BlueStar PR](#)
[The Israel Project](#)
[MASA Israel Journey](#)
[Simon Wiesenthal Center Campus Outreach](#)

The Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) is a partnership of the [Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation](#) and [Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life](#), in cooperation with a network of national organizations committed to promoting Israel education and advocacy on campus. The ICC's 34 member organizations are dedicated to working collaboratively to assist students in fostering support for Israel on the college campus.

