

# Campus Israel Advocacy Needs a Network, Not Nodes

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by *Stephen Kuperberg*

I deeply admire and respect Tzvi Raviv and Isaac Yerushalmi, two professionals with whom I am delighted to work and support in my role as executive director of the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC). Tzvi and Isaac formed their personal experience in campus Israel advocacy at the University of California-Irvine, where Tzvi served as the campus Jewish Agency Israel Fellow and Isaac led the student Anteaters for Israel group in the face of anti-Israel activity that received significant attention from the national pro-Israel community. Now serving respectively as director of Rutgers Hillel's Center for Israel Engagement and program manager for the Rose Project of the Jewish Federation of Orange County, Tzvi and Isaac continue to apply their experience to addressing the needs of two campuses in the campus Israel network that continue to face anti-Israel activity.

Yet when reading Tzvi and Isaac's [proposal](#) here in *eJP* on where our community ought to devote resources to address the needs of Israel on campus, I can't help but be reminded of Rufus J. Miles, the advisor to three American presidents from FDR to LBJ, who famously coined what has come to be known as Miles's Law: "where you stand depends on where you sit." Miles's Law is a reminder that perception tends to be colored by the institutional interests that individuals carry with them by virtue of their position.

In this case, Tzvi and Isaac's experiences of and connections to two campuses lead them to the conclusion that only six campuses in North America serve as the "hubs" of anti-Israel activity – and of those, the only two that Tzvi and Isaac mention by name are the two that they serve – and they propose that the national community concentrate resources on those campuses. That's an understandable perception based on the view from where Tzvi and Isaac sit. But the data, and the campus dynamics, support a very different conclusion.

First, the data on anti-Israel activity on campuses indicates that significant anti-Israel activity is not concentrated on two, six, or even sixteen campuses, and does not reflect a geographic bias. ICC and its partner organizations, such as the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), StandWithUs, and others, take note of and share information regarding anti-Israel activity in North America as much as possible. What emerges from that data is that core anti-Israel activity, such as active efforts to support boycotts, divestment, or sanctions (BDS) efforts or calls for the elimination or delegitimization of Israel, are not isolated to a handful of campuses in the Northeast, California, or Canada, but in fact occur distributed throughout the North American campus network. Indeed, as activity this academic year alone indicates, anti-Israel activity can and will occur precisely where the campus Israel network does not concentrate its attention, precisely because campus Israel detractors are opportunistic: to paraphrase the famous bank robber John Dillinger, we have to guard every bank; they only need to rob one. As a result, prominent anti-Israel conferences this Fall and Winter occurred not at Rutgers or Irvine but at schools including Penn, Harvard, and Columbia; last Spring's anti-Israel divestment efforts appeared at schools including Vermont, Michigan, and Stanford; and prominent anti-Israel events – which Rutgers and Irvine have experienced, to be sure – occurred on well over 100 campuses during that time.

Second, the "hub" theory fails to account for the tremendous diversity and independence among colleges and universities. The community and experience of NYU is remarkably different than that of CUNY-Baruch College, despite the few city blocks that separate them. So, too, the experiences and cultures of San Francisco State University, Berkeley, and Stanford are as different among them despite geography as are the experiences and cultures of the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Wayne State University, and Kalamazoo College. More to the point, events on one such campus, whether positive or negative, will barely make a ripple on another. Campus communities

experience their environments entirely separately from one another; and, while it may be extremely worthwhile to invest in improving the environment at Rutgers and Irvine, there is no evidence from any prior experience that such improvements would have any effect beyond the campus limits. In reality, utilizing network-weaving terminology that the [NetWORKS initiative](#) has promoted, the campuses themselves serve as “nodes,” not “hubs,” in the campus environment.

It is absolutely true that our community must address the scarcity of its resources by concentrating on those initiatives that will do the most good. And there are lessons to be learned. For example, a recent [concept paper](#) by The David Project outlines some of the strategic, pro-active approaches that ICC and its partners have learned, experienced, and taught throughout the campus Israel network. The answers are out there; the difficulty is connecting those in need with the information and resources to meet their needs. The key to promoting positive campus environments regarding Israel is not to concentrate resources in a handful of locations but rather to invest in sharing and disseminating the lessons of experience and best practices across campuses – in short, to invest in the campus Israel network.

That’s why ICC invests in creating vehicles for members of the campus Israel network – students, Hillel campus professionals, Jewish Agency Israel Fellows, faculty members, administrators, and others – to share their experiences, to learn from one another, and to expand the pool of confident, empowered campus Israel supporters throughout the campus environment. Combining this free flow of information with resources that can equally flow to meet unmet and emerging needs promotes a healthy, vibrant network that best meets the campus needs. Successful initiatives such as reinstating study abroad at the California State University, or the national Real Partners. Real Peace. campaign of this past Fall, are the proof of what a strong campus Israel network can deliver. Investing in campuses like Rutgers and Irvine is necessary – but it will not be sufficient until we invest in the infrastructure to communicate the accumulated wisdom, experience, successes and challenges to the campus Israel network as a whole.

*Stephen Kuperberg is executive director of the [Israel on Campus Coalition](#), a national organization dedicated to empowering the network of campus Israel supporters to promote a positive environment regarding Israel on campus.*