



ANNUAL REPORT 2021- 2022

A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Dear friends,

Students arrived on campus last fall craving connection and community following a difficult year of social distance and remote learning. The American University Hillel staff and student leadership were challenged to rebuild Jewish life on campus while, at the same time, supporting students as they dealt with the lingering social and emotional impact of the pandemic.

We couldn't be more proud of how our students, staff and supporters rose to the challenge.

At AU Hillel, the “new normal” to which we returned looks a lot like the old normal. Multiple student cohorts meet each week for deep Jewish learning. Jewish student affinity groups come together for activities on a near daily basis, and energetic crowds socialize over delicious Shabbat dinners each Friday night. The campus coffee shops are dotted with Hillel interns and staff getting to know Jewish students over lattes or hot chocolate.

In the pages that follow, you will meet several of our extraordinary students and learn about some of the ways that AU Hillel helps them to grow and learn, find community, navigate the challenges of early adulthood, and take ownership of their Jewish journeys. We are inspired by these students – and so many others! – and we're grateful for your support, without which we could not do this sacred work. Thank you.



Jason Benkendorf

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Eli Engelbourg

BOARD PRESIDENT



THE POWER OF A CUP OF COFFEE

When Spencer arrived at AU as a new student last fall, he didn't immediately find people with whom he connected. He shared this with Hillel Executive Director Jason Benkendorf over coffee on a Friday morning in late September. Spencer had been quick to accept the invitation to meet, and he openly expressed his frustration. Why, he wondered, were things not clicking?

During their conversation that day Spencer shared about his family, time he'd spent in Israel, and his hobbies. When he mentioned his love of singing, Jason asked if he knew about Hillel's Jewish a cappella group, TenLi Tunes. Spencer immediately perked up. He didn't know, but he was interested.

Fast forward five months and Spencer wasn't just a member of TenLi Tunes – he'd become a board member and frequent soloist. **Through his participation in TenLi Tunes, Spencer deepened his involvement with the broader Hillel community.** He joined the planning committee for our annual Holocaust Remembrance Week and participated in the Jewish Learning Fellowship.

“Looking back several months later,” Spencer reflected, “I realize how significant and influential that one conversation was. Not only did it lead me to a cherished activity, but it helped me feel supported and welcome on campus at a time when I felt neither.”

While Spencer is an extraordinary young man, his story isn't unusual. Hillel staff conduct hundreds of these conversations, meeting students where they are and helping them connect with meaningful Jewish experiences and peers who share their passions and identities.

746

**ONE-ON-ONE
CONVERSATIONS
WITH STUDENTS**



HILLEL INSPIRES

Our remarkable students inspire us every day, and each day we work to inspire our students as they explore and express their Jewish identities in personally meaningful ways.

24-hour name reading



SARA '24

"I first learned about the Holocaust Remembrance Week (HRW) committee through one of the Hillel staff. I wanted to get involved because of what HRW represents and what it does, not only for the Jewish community, but for the rest of AU. **As the years go on, Holocaust education – and especially first-hand accounts from survivors – will not be as easily accessible, and it's important that we honor the lives lost.** AU itself is not immune from antisemitism. Hate in general is something that plagues every college campus, regardless of size or location, and keeping these programs and making education on the Holocaust accessible is imperative to creating a more empathetic and welcoming student body."



SARAH '24

"The Jewish community is so diverse, but there often isn't space for Jews of Color like me to find connections and embrace our identities. **The opportunity I've had at Hillel to build space for that community is amazing, and I appreciate all of the wonderful support I've received from the Hillel staff and my fellow students.** AU Hillel truly believes in the power of our multicultural Jewish community and gives every Jewish student opportunities to grow, learn, and lead."



TIKKUN OLAM ON CAMPUS

Many AU students connect to their Judaism through social justice, and Hillel offers consistent opportunities for students to live out the value of *tikkun olam*. Two students led Hillel's efforts in this area last year as members of the Repair the World Campus Corps, a national initiative that empowers students to organize service projects in their local communities and beyond.



I'm grateful that AU Hillel and Repair the World provide an opportunity for me to make connections with friends and local volunteer organizations. This experience has made me see my Jewish identity and my volunteer work as related, rather than separate things.

-Alyssa '25



One favorite project from the year involved creating bags of the Passover "plagues" for members of the Jewish deaf/blind community around the world. Students designed and assembled sets of tactile objects representing each of the ten plagues and shipped them out before the holiday so that deaf/blind Jews could enjoy a more interactive seder experience.



Bradley serves as a Gift of Life Campus Ambassador and works with AU Hillel to get students into the bone marrow donor registry.



SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS AT AU HILLEL



My freshman year, I went to the first Shabbat of the semester. A senior asked me if I wanted to help lead with him on the second Shabbat. That opened up an avenue for leading Shabbat services almost every week. Now, as a senior, I get to be the resource to help other students learn how to lead services.

-Itai '22



1490

**Shabbat meals
served**

503

**holiday meals
served**





HILLEL GOES TO ISRAEL

Students enjoyed numerous opportunities to engage with Israel on campus last year, including a series of falafel dinners featuring dynamic student-led educational activities. Another highlight was Israel Fest on the Quad, hosted by Hillel's Israel Culture Committee. Attendees perused an Israeli-style *shuk* (market), ate Israeli foods, played Israeli games, and more.

In May, after more than two years with no trips to Israel, AU Hillel sent a full bus of students on the trip of lifetime. One participant reflected:



Birthright Israel had a profound impact on me. The trip made me think more deeply about myself, my Jewish identity, and what I want to prioritize in my life. I am so grateful that I got to have this experience.

-Zoe '23



JEWISH LEARNING AT HILLEL

Throughout the year, Hillel provides many opportunities for students to engage in meaningful Jewish learning. One key program is the Jewish Learning Fellowship (JLF), which allows students to explore their connection to Judaism on their own terms as part of a semester-long cohort experience.



LANE '25

"I participated in the Jewish Learning Fellowship my freshman year, and it really had an impact on me. I was converting to Judaism at the time, and JLF became a huge part of that process. **Those were the first serious conversations I was having with Jews my own age.** It was such an easy way to find community, and I feel like some of the people I shared the experience with will be lifelong friends. Having that Jewish space that was so free of judgment was foundational for me."

During the 2021-2022 school year, we ran 6 fellowships:

- Life's Big Questions (fall & spring)
- Kol Yisrael: Exploring Pluralism in Israel
- Lilith: A Jewish Feminist Fellowship
- Pursuing Justice (fall & spring)

75

students
participated
in learning
fellowships





75

student leaders
mentored

1012

students involved

Shelby '22 was involved with Hillel's Jewish queer programming since his freshman year. He played a lead role in rebooting these activities last year, following an extended period during which in-person gatherings were not possible. Shelby shared:



Finding a space where I could express both my queer and Jewish identities honestly helped me to feel at home at AU and has led me to make some of my closest friends in college. It's given me a sense of connection with others like me and pride in my unique Jewish identity.



100

**new students
received peer
mentorship
through the FYSH
(first year
students of Hillel)
program**



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