



ADL's Words to Action® on Vassar College Campus

Strategic Approach

The challenges that Jewish students at Vassar face in terms of anti-Israel bias and anti-Semitism are replicated by other forms on campus as well. All students face a culture that encourages inclusivity and acceptance of others, as long as that is in line with a specific liberal belief. Many students feel stifled in class and are verbally attacked for expressing dissenting opinions.

Naturally, when the discussion turns to Israel it is an uncomfortable situation for Jewish students. Therefore, we have decided to address this problem at its roots and forge alliances within the greater campus community. The programing being offered this year aims to tackle these issues and set the foundation for students to feel safe and secure in their ability to express their opinions.

This will be achieved by empowering student leaders, both Jewish and non-Jewish to realize what is bias, understand the difference between freedom of speech and hate speech, how to deal with bias and hate speech in the classroom, and finally, inviting a panel of experts on Israel to debunk falsity. We hope that once students understand what bias and hate speech is, they will view how Israel is presented on campus entirely differently.

We are confident that this tactic will be successful in creating a campus environment where students will feel confident to voice their positive opinion about Israel and voice their non-approval of anti-Israel bias and anti-Semitism.

Program #2

On October 22, 2015, Chabad on Fulton hosted the second ADL workshop at Vassar. 12 Jewish and non-Jewish leaders came together to discuss personal identity, bias, and discrimination. The goal of the workshop was to create an intimate setting for students to safely discuss the climate on campus with regard to inclusivity and acceptance of others.

Many of our discussions focused on the theme of diversity. Students shared their experiences about feeling stereotyped on campus and times they wanted to speak up, but didn't. We began to deconstruct why Vassar's current climate prevents many students from feeling free to express their beliefs and points of view.

We closed the program by asking students the question: "What is one thing you would like to change about Vassar College?" Students all echoed similar ideas, saying they want to feel safer to think "*outside of the box*". One student said, "*I would like students to be able to talk about certain issues without being labeled or placed into a definitive group*".

The program was successful because it broke down barriers that usually exist between students of different races, religions, and social groups. Jewish students were able to openly talk about feeling judged for being pro-Israel with members of the non-Jewish community.

Before leaving, one student expressed gratitude for being able to participate in this unique program at Vassar. She said "*It felt like in the beginning of the workshop, students didn't really feel comfortable opening up and being honest. But towards the end when everyone started talking I could see some getting more comfortable. I think as we have more of these programs, we can start having very honest conversations.*"