



AEN Announces Support for Pilot Program on Antisemitism at UC Berkeley

Washington, DC/ Berkeley, CA—September 10, 2020: The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) is excited to announce a \$25,000 grant in support of the Antisemitism Education Initiative, a pilot program at the University of California, Berkeley, which will bring together multiple campus stakeholders to inform about, discuss, and develop the resources to respond to antisemitism.

This innovative program, which was initiated by Steven Davidoff Solomon, Professor of Law, Ethan Katz, Professor of History and Jewish Studies, and Rabbi Adam Naftalin-Kelman, Executive Director of Berkeley Hillel, will feature trainings, expert speakers and panels, and multimedia presentations to be given to students, campus staff, and faculty at UC Berkeley over a two-to-three year period.

Professor Katz further described the program’s long-term strategy. “In tackling the issue of antisemitism on the Berkeley campus, our approach has been to bring together upper- and mid-level administrators, Jewish Studies-affiliated and other Jewish faculty, and leaders of the campus Jewish community to cooperate in a common, coordinated endeavor and to try to transmit knowledge and training to as many groups across campus as possible, through varied modes of communication.”

AEN is particularly pleased that the program includes training, presentations, and resources for staff members who work in the offices of Student Affairs and of Equity & Inclusion. Through its work, AEN has observed that more campus officials are today seeking guidance about how to better educate and train their staff to be effective partners in the continued vigilance against antisemitism. Contemporary antisemitism is complex and nuanced, yet many university administrators and staff may not be fully aware of or understand the new threats of antisemitism on their campuses and, in some instances, may not even see the needs and concerns of Jewish students as directly within their primary purview.

In an environment of increasing antisemitism on many college campuses, initiatives and training of the type that Berkeley is developing are sorely lacking. AEN finds it essential that key campus stakeholders have the requisite knowledge and tools to better address the problems and challenges.

AEN intends the pilot program at Berkeley to be among a number of programs and projects that it will support through its recently launched Improving the Campus Climate Initiative. The initiative will engage senior officials in Student and Academic Affairs, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and related offices on campuses throughout the country, providing expert, customized guidance on understanding, identifying, and countering manifestations of antisemitism on campus.

“Our new initiative aims to creatively engage an important subset of university administrators and staff members who have an outsized role in addressing the issues that directly impact Jewish student life on campuses, particularly in better identifying and responding to situations where a critique of Israel or Zionism goes well beyond a heated political disagreement and is in fact a dangerous form of antisemitism,” said Miriam F. Elman, AEN’s Executive Director. “The challenges facing Jewish students on campus today are best addressed not by criticism from the sidelines but by offering support, resources and guidance to those campus officials charged with protecting the rights of all students.”

Recognizing the need for a collaborative and comprehensive effort to meet this challenge, AEN will be collaborating on its new initiative with other organizations which, like AEN, also have established relationships with key campus administrators, faculty, and students. For example, AEN plans to coordinate and work closely with Hillel, the primary organization working to promote Jewish life on campus. “Hillel can speak authoritatively about how Jewish students are experiencing specific instances of harassment, marginalization and exclusion on their campuses,” said Elman. “Hillel has an important role to play, and by acting jointly on campuses we will be able to better leverage our respective strengths.”

Rabbi Naftalin-Kelman agreed. “What has made this initiative so powerful has been the true collaboration between Hillel and the University. The collaboration has allowed the initiative to address issues in the classroom as well as on the campus quad, offering staff in the offices of student life an opportunity to hear how antisemitism is sometimes manifested outside the classroom. We are enthusiastic and optimistic about this model of partnership between student life and the university. We believe this can be a model for other initiatives to effectively work with students and administrators to better address students’ experiences both inside and outside the classroom.”

The Berkeley program is already well underway. The speaker series, which launched in Fall 2019, has so far included a panel on the roots and resurgence of antisemitism by four faculty experts at Berkeley; a talk about Protestants and Catholics who saved Jews in Western Europe during the Holocaust; a discussion with acclaimed journalist Marc Weitzmann, who discussed the parallels and even convergences between Far Right and Islamist antisemitism in France and more globally; a panel on the Internet and hate speech; and, in February of this year, a talk by

internationally acclaimed Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt on her new book *Antisemitism Here and Now*, which drew some 400 people from across the campus and community. In addition, in Fall 2019, Professor Katz and Rabbi Naftalin-Kelman facilitated the first of several in-person trainings to probe more deeply the central themes of a module that they have created on antisemitism. In the 2019-2020 academic year, this module also was included for the first time in the series of online trainings in diversity and cultural sensitivity that first-year students are asked to complete as they enter UC-Berkeley.

Despite the fact that COVID-19 has forced Berkeley to move all of its events online for fall 2020, the initiative's efforts are continuing unabated, while being adjusted for both the format of Zoom and the changing political realities of the past several months. "In light of the simmering ongoing debates around racial justice and Blacks and Jews that are heavily impacting conversations around antisemitism today at Berkeley and far beyond, we are helping to coordinate a group of student-focused speaker events this fall on the theme of 'Jews and Race,'" Professor Katz explained. "We plan to bring together experts like Marc Dollinger, Ilana Kaufman, Yavilah McCoy, and Paul Nahme to discuss issues like the past and present of Black-Jewish relations, the particular and neglected challenges facing Jews of color, and the crucial intersection between antisemitism and anti-Black racism in White Nationalist ideology."

Likewise, Professor Katz and Rabbi Naftalin-Kalman have made important revisions to their PowerPoint module to remain current with changing understandings of race in contemporary America. Despite significant challenges around the planning for Golden Bear Orientation this fall, they managed to secure a place for their module among a handful of resources on specific issues of hatred and discrimination that new students will be encouraged to explore.

Meanwhile, they have enlarged substantially the initiative's online presence through an excellent page on Antisemitism Education, housed on the website of the Berkeley Center for Jewish studies (it can be found at <https://jewishstudies.berkeley.edu/general/antisemitism-education/>). This page includes recordings of a number of events in the speaker series, op-eds and interviews with faculty related to this topic, and other valuable resources for students, staff, and educators. During the fall semester, the leaders of the initiative will also be producing a powerful short film on antisemitism that presents cinematically many of the key ideas from the training module they have developed.

Professor Katz is confident that their efforts will have a broad impact. "The challenges we face defy easy answers but we can see that our work is already spreading greater awareness, and we regard that as a crucial first step. We are gratified that the AEN has recognized the promise in our initiative and its approach. We look forward to working with them to take our efforts to the next level." Added Professor Solomon, "We believe that implementation of antisemitism training at Berkeley will lead to wider understanding of this issue among the general populace and

greater recognition of the unique issues that face the Jewish community. We look forward to creating materials that can be used nationwide.”

AEN is optimistic about the prospects for the Antisemitism Education Initiative, its goal of engaging diverse constituencies toward understanding and countering antisemitism through innovative programming, and its potential to serve as an educational model for campuses across the country.

“There are no quick fixes when it comes to combating campus antisemitism and addressing a hostile academic environment,” said Elman. “The Berkeley model is exceptional because it recognizes that doing this work effectively requires a sustained, long-term effort.”

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