



TRACHTENBACHS
HILLEL HOUSE

4th Eagleville Road

Hillel

University of Connecticut

2023-2024

IMPACT

REPORT

A NOTE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Recently, I have found myself reflecting on the power relationships have on our ability to sustain our faith. The last few years have been some of the most challenging we have experienced personally and within the Jewish community. I am continuously inspired by the resilience, strength and unity of the Jewish Campus community and our work at UConn Hillel.

When our campus experienced protests and encampments, **our students knew that Hillel was the place they could go for belonging and purpose.** Whether joining with our Jewish Federation partners to travel to DC for the March for Israel, participating in a Town Hall forum with senior administration to address policy concerns, or combating myths about Israel through our Huskies for Israel advocacy group, **our students found their renewed of strength, meaning, and connection here at the Trachten-Zachs Hillel House.**

Immediately after the October 7th tragedy, our community was touched by the outpouring of support from parents, alumni, and community members. From heartfelt gifts of support and uplifting notes of encouragement, to the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford delivering lunch and cookies, and even homemade treats lovingly baked by our next-door neighbors at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, our friends came together in the most beautiful ways to show their love. **These relationships with University and community partners were critical in ensuring that our students felt safe, supported, and empowered no matter what.**

At UConn Hillel, we provide tremendous opportunities for Jewish Huskies to **celebrate Jewish joy** through student-led musical Shabbat services, challah baking with University President Maric, our ever-popular Parsha and Pours where we study the weekly Torah portion, and so much more! With a record number of students engaging with Hillel this past year, it affirms that the **relationships students create, whether with each other, caring staff, community members or even their Judaism, are what's essential for a more hopeful and peaceful future.**



Edina Oestreicher
Edina Oestreicher
Executive Director



Lori Baden
Lori Baden
Board President

2023-2024 BY THE NUMBERS

Check Out the Amazing Moments and Milestones UConn Hillel Achieved This Year!

During our 2023-2024 academic year, UConn Hillel was bustling with Jewish life, providing students a lively, supportive environment rich in tradition and friendship. With over 100 gatherings - including Shabbat dinners, leadership opportunities, holiday celebrations, social events, and learning sessions - **UConn Hillel was the go-to place for Jewish students and friends to connect, celebrate, and grow.** At the Trachten-Zachs House, we've created spaces where students are empowered to build lasting friendships and explore what their Jewish identity means to them.

Nearly 900 students took part in our Jewish and Israel Learning opportunities, immersive trips, and hands-on programs. This programming includes events like baking workshops with Israel Fellow Shirly, where Jewish Huskies not only baked challah for Shabbat and sufganiyot for Hanukkah but also connected with age-old traditions in a fun, interactive way. We encouraged student leaders to organize events where they could relax and celebrate the joy of Jewish life on campus. **UConn Hillel is proud to be a vibrant home where students can embrace their heritage in meaningful, exciting ways!**



945
SHABBAT
MEALS
SERVED



890
STUDENTS
ENGAGED

360
COFFEE
CHATS



100
ENGAGED
LEARNERS

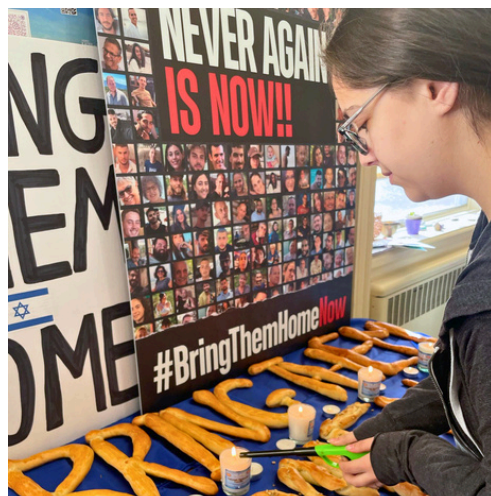


ANTISEMITISM RESPONSE

Our students are never alone. UConn Hillel is a home for Jewish students, and our doors are always open for them in times of joy and challenge. This year, in the aftermath of the October 7th terrorist attacks in Israel and through the war in the Middle East, **our role as a support system to our Huskies became even more crucial.** We are proud to serve as a space for comfort and connection while uplifting students in moments of Jewish celebration.

Our most important priority is keeping Jewish students feeling supported — first, foremost, and always. We worked, and continue to work, diligently alongside the UConn Administration and local police to ensure a secure campus environment. Jewish students at UConn, and everywhere, should have the right to express their full Jewish identities and support for the Jewish state without fear, and in a learning environment that is free of hostility.

UConn Hillel spent countless hours with students, helping them become educated advocates for Jews and Israel. This included memorial vigils and solidarity marches, Bring Them Home Now Shabbat, a trip to the Israel Summit in Atlanta, and many other engagement opportunities. We want to **ensure students feel empowered, seen, and valued,** and maintain a welcoming home-away-from-home where students can just be themselves in the midst of a challenging world.



YANIV BOWMAN '25

"As an Israeli-American student here at UConn, life has been crazy since the October 7th terrorist attacks. **I'm thankful to have Hillel as an open place to come to, especially since I have family in Israel.** Sometimes I need like-minded people to talk to, and here, my peers understand what I'm going through without judgment.

UConn Hillel has provided me and my friends with a lot of opportunities to engage and feel at home. I look forward to the weekly visits at Hillel with UConn PD's Companion Dog Officer Tildy, Shabbat programs, and **I love that the staff is always available to lend an ear, no matter what."**

EDUCATION & RITUAL



HOLIDAYS WITH UCONN HILLEL

are designed to give students an authentic and engaging way to experience their Judaism. Each holiday offers a distinct opportunity to explore unique traditions, old and new. This year, we had over 450 attendees at our Jewish holiday observances, including many who marked Rosh Hashanah with reflective services and festive meals, **creating an atmosphere of *hatikvah* - hope - for 5784**. For Chanukah, students gathered to spin dreidels and **enjoyed an evening filled with warmth and light when it was needed most**.

HUSKY SHABBAT

is a special weekly tradition, as **students come together each Friday to connect, unwind, and find meaning in Jewish ritual**. Our Shabbat is filled with musical services and a delicious kosher dinner. As an additional Shabbat experience, our **Shabbat Across Storrs** program is a fan-favorite and empowers students to bring Shabbat into their own lives and homes. With resources and tips from Hillel, over 300 students enjoyed creating more than 20 memorable gatherings and exploring diverse traditions with one another.



JEWISH LEARNING

is at the heart of our goal to deepen students' connection to their Jewish selves. This year, Huskies engaged in vibrant discussions and classes, tackling topics ranging from Jewish philosophy to the history of Israel. Whether through weekly Parsha & Pours sessions or Israel and Jewish Learning Fellowships, **UConn Hillel is where students shape their lives and explore their Jewish identities in ways that will leave a lasting impact long after their time on campus**.

FINDING JEWISH JOY

UConn Hillel serves as **a vibrant hub of Jewish joy, where students could unwind, connect, and simply enjoy being together**. The Trachten-Zachs House operates as a home-away-from-home, buzzing with energy as students hung out in the game room, grabbed free coffee and snacks, and shared laughter with friends and mentors alike. **Our dedicated staff and mentors are always there to offer support, guidance, or just a friendly chat!**



JEWISH LIFE & VALUES

At UConn Hillel, *tzedek* – justice – and *tikkun olam* – repairing the world – are more than just buzzwords.

UConn Hillel created powerful avenues to advocacy, remembrance, and Jewish pride. From DC's March for Israel to meaningful Holocaust learning experiences, Jewish Huskies grew as advocates and leaders.

Our staff traveled with students and joined hundreds of thousands of others at the **March for Israel in Washington, DC**. There, it was clear that now more than ever, Jewish community is important for our students.

In recognition of **Holocaust Remembrance Day**, students and staff took an educational day trip to Boston. During the trip, we met Mona Wiener, a daughter of Holocaust survivors, who was born in a displaced persons camp. After visiting the Holocaust Memorial, students also spoke with Holocaust survivor Janet Applefield. Thanks to the efforts of second-year student Emily Dubin, this trip moved our students in powerful ways, **encouraging Jewish pride, renewed understanding of history, and connections rooted in shared reflection**.

SPOTLIGHT: BUILDING KEHILLAH (COMMUNITY)

UConn Hillel's annual FYSH (First Year Students of Hillel) program pairs first-year students with an upper-class mentor through Hillel to help acclimate them to college life. Our second annual **FYSH Fest** was a huge success and we welcomed over 20 new students to campus before the semester began. Besides the fun at Six Flags, roller skating, and a scavenger hunt, students dove into deep discussions on Judaism, academic goals, and life in general. We're so excited that we could give them a taste of the **fun, warm, and welcoming community Hillel has to offer, and most importantly, introduce them to their home away from home in Storrs**.



A year of student advocacy, empowerment, and leadership

ISRAEL ENGAGEMENT

At UConn Hillel, fostering a connection to Israel is essential to our work. Through diverse Israel engagement programs, like Birthright and Maccabee Discovery trips, educational workshops and speakers, and student-led discussions, we create opportunities for students to explore and engage with their relationship to Israel.

Our Israel-focused programming allows students to connect with Israel's vibrant heritage, deepen their understanding of the land's complexities, and engage in nuanced conversations about its past, present, and future. In addition to Hebrew classes, students participated in a Kol Yisrael course focused on Zionism and the responsibility of the Jewish diaspora. Finally, students celebrated Israel culturally during Israel Fest Week, and learned from influencers like **Ashager Araro** (Instagram @blackjewishmagic), Nova Festival Survivor and *Beyond the Supernova* Photographic Journalist **Shye Klein**, and International Senior Educator at StandWithUs **Charlotte Korchak**.

"AS A FORMER PRESIDENT AND CURRENT GRADUATE ADVISOR FOR HUSKIES FOR ISRAEL, UCONN HILLEL HAS BEEN MY STEADFAST PARTNER IN ADVOCATING FOR ISRAEL, FOSTERING DIALOGUE, AND ENSURING JEWISH VOICES ARE HEARD ON CAMPUS." – LEO GOLD '24



SPOTLIGHT: ISRAEL PROGRAMMING

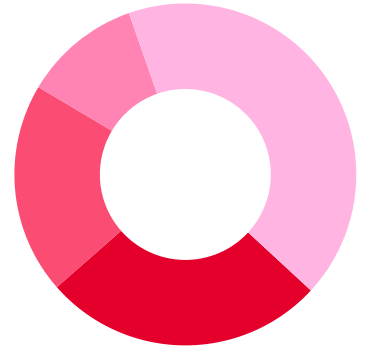
UConn Hillel hosted **Israel Fest**: an exciting four-day celebration of Israeli culture, drawing in hundreds of students, both Jewish and non-Jewish, together for learning, food, and fun. From Israeli cooking workshops to arts and crafts, each day brought fresh opportunities for students to connect, celebrate, and experience Israel's vibrant heritage across campus.

Despite some early disruptions, our students' resilient spirit carried the celebration forward, showcasing the strength and pride of Am Yisrael within the UConn community. This week-long event highlighted UConn Hillel's mission to create inclusive, joyful spaces where Jewish life and culture thrive.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

- **10%** came from parents
- **32%** came from alumni
- **23%** came from community members
- **35%** came from board members



625

INDIVIDUAL
SUPPORTERS DURING
THE 2023-24
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