

Report from the

University of Pittsburgh Working Group on Antisemitism

July 20, 2026



University of
Pittsburgh®

Background

The University of Pittsburgh Working Group on Antisemitism was established in March 2025 with the rare distinction of reporting directly to both the University's Chancellor Joan Gabel and the University's Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor Joe McCarthy. The group was tasked with making actionable recommendations to prevent and respond to antisemitism through a review of institutional areas and systemic approaches to addressing the complexities of antisemitism.

The Working Group considered the dangers of antisemitism in a time in which antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and physical assaults are rising nationally and locally¹ and the circulation of antisemitic messages and harassment on digital platforms is expanding.² Pittsburgh's contemporary antisemitism environment is also shaped by the 2018 massacre of eleven Jewish worshippers — the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history — at the Tree of Life synagogue in Squirrel Hill, a short distance from the University. This tragedy continues to affect public consciousness, communal security practices, and expectations of institutional vigilance on and off campus.

In addition, like many institutions of higher learning, the University of Pittsburgh experienced multiple reports of antisemitic activity after October 7, 2023. This ranged from graffiti on campus buildings to images and messages circulated in a digital chat used for academic coordination; damage to University property; and physical assaults of three visibly Jewish students in separate incidents on or near the Pittsburgh campus. Members of the University's Jewish community also reported being confronted by protest activity and expressions of anti-Israel and/or anti-Zionist bias in academic settings and elsewhere on and near campus. (Although beyond the scope of our examination, news reports indicate that antisemitism did not first appear on the University campus in 2023 but has a longer history in University life, as it does in the larger society.)

The Working Group was tasked with examining University responses to recent reports of antisemitism within a set of institutional arenas, but we note that there have been other significant University responses to antisemitism. These include its 2021 foundational efforts to establish the Eradicate Hate Summit, an international gathering in Pittsburgh focused on dismantling hate and extremism, and its continuing support of this important annual meeting; the 2021 establishment of the Collaboratory Against Hate (now the Center for Applied Research on Targeted Violence, or CARVt) in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University as a translational research center to leverage academic research to impede the spread of extremist hate; and, in 2025, hosting the JCC Maccabi Games, the world's largest Jewish youth event.

Recommendations

The Working Group was asked to examine University procedures, programs, and support systems related to combating antisemitism and explore options for improving their development, implementation, or enforcement, if necessary. We present our recommendations in five areas:

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118469/documents/HHRG-119-ED00-20250715-SD005.pdf>.

² <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/online-hate-and-harassment-american-experience-2024>.

institutional capacity to respond to antisemitism; institutional policies; training, education, and contextual understanding; incident response and enforcement mechanisms; and external events and off-campus influences.

1. Institutional Capacity to Respond to Antisemitism

The Working Group was asked to analyze how current University systems — including academic and administrative contexts — can better address incidents and patterns of antisemitism; to examine how national and local events may shape the experiences of Pitt community members; and to evaluate the University's internal preparedness to support affected individuals and maintain a supportive campus climate in their aftermath.

Our recommendations build on systems that are already in place at Pitt as well as on recent initiatives by University leadership:

- a. Launch a unified bias and misconduct portal for reporting incidents, including but not limited to antisemitism, with case tracking capabilities. Use this system to issue annual public summaries of reported antisemitic incidents and to share data on reported antisemitic incidents with relevant University units on a regular basis, including frequency and types of reported incidents, whether and when complainants are notified, and time frames of investigations and their outcomes. When possible, hire staff with expertise in dealing with antisemitism for positions responsible for handling reporting and responses and train staff who receive reports on antisemitic incidents on appropriate response protocols.
- b. Evaluate reporting processes and outcomes of reported antisemitic incidents on a yearly basis, assessing trends and developing mitigation approaches where appropriate.
- c. Address social media harassment of University of Pittsburgh faculty, staff, and students by clarifying that University policies regarding antisemitic harassment and discrimination also apply to actions that occur via social media and other forms of electronic communication. Develop and disseminate clear examples of when social media posts would and would not violate University policies.
- d. Survey antisemitism in the campus environment regularly, either by adding questions to the yearly campuswide climate survey and/or developing a separate annual survey. Surveys should query respondents about both on-campus and off-campus climate and incidents.
- e. Formalize the University's practice of consultation with external local Jewish leaders by creating an advisory council that includes Hillel, Chabad, the Jewish Federation, and other appropriate Jewish institutions and groups. The advisory council should meet with members of the University administration regularly, at varying frequencies depending on need — for example, quarterly during times of heightened concern and semiannually otherwise. On a regular basis, the advisory council should meet with the University administration and Jewish-identified campus units and groups to strengthen partnerships on issues such as student support and security coordination. On at least an annual basis, the advisory council should work with the University administration to identify representatives from relevant national organizations and

- other appropriate bodies, including those doing relevant research, outreach, education, or advocacy, for a meeting of national experts to brief University leaders on the broader status of antisemitism, especially on university campuses.
- f. Increase the visibility of religious life accommodations for Jewish students through heightened messaging about the University's religious accommodation policy, the availability of care managers to support students working with faculty on religious life accommodations, and the annual campuswide memo on religious observances. Increase awareness of the availability of kosher food options in campus dining halls and encourage the inclusion of kosher options at all campus conferences, meetings, and events where food is served.

2. Institutional Policies

The Working Group was asked to review and recommend improvements to University policies and procedures related to antisemitism, as well as to identify gaps or ambiguities that may hinder timely and effective responses.

Our recommendations focus on policy areas and enforcement mechanisms that would be prudent for the University to review in light of antisemitic incidents nationally and locally; the need for more effective messaging about “time, place, and manner” rules and consequences; and further development of the unit responsible for the University's compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin) through processes of compliance, communication, reporting, education, and training:

- a. University of Pittsburgh leadership should continue to make clear that antisemitism has no place at our University and that antisemitic acts that violate the law will be vigorously addressed.
- b. All relevant documents should include a clear statement that antisemitism has no place at the University of Pittsburgh.
- c. Assess relevant existing policies, re-examine the infrastructure for enforcing such policies, and re-evaluate the training and education of faculty and staff regarding such policies to ensure that antisemitism will not be tolerated at the University of Pittsburgh and that antisemitism is addressed with at least the same high level of importance and priority afforded to other forms of discrimination.
- d. Further develop the website freespeech.pitt.edu/policies-guidelines/demonstration-and-protest-guidelines to be a comprehensive source of education and information on freedom of speech and expression rights, including the robust protections for controversial viewpoints and peaceful protest. The website should clearly explain “time, place, and manner” policies that govern online and offline demonstrations and forums; distinguish protected expression from unprotected conduct (such as true threats, targeted harassment, and incitement); detail enforcement responsibilities and consequences for violations; and provide concrete examples to illustrate these principles in practice.
- e. Build out a Title VI unit independent of the Office of Institutional Engagement and Wellbeing, following national best practices of robust expertise and capacity in

- compliance, education, reporting, communication, and training to accompany its enforcement function and ongoing evaluation of its processes.
- f. Continue to create new and support existing partnerships and exchanges with Israeli faculty and Israeli universities.
- g. While vigorously fighting and addressing antisemitism, adhere to laws and regulations supporting freedom of speech and due process.

3. Training, Education, and Contextual Understanding

The Working Group was asked to evaluate the availability and effectiveness of current University training and educational resources addressing antisemitism and Jewish identity; propose programming for students, faculty, and staff that increases awareness, fosters respectful dialogue, and promotes historical and cultural literacy; and consider how to support both proactive learning and responsive education following incidents.

Our recommendations focus on increasing scholarly excellence and educational offerings about antisemitism and Jewish history and thought, continuing partnerships with Israeli scholars and institutions, and expanding programming and understanding of the importance of dialogue and respectful disagreements at the University. In our recommendations, it is understood that antisemitism may be expressed as anti-Israel or anti-Zionist bias.³

- a. Integrate antisemitism awareness and anti-harassment training into all mandatory anti-discrimination training for faculty, staff, TAs, resident assistants, and students.
- b. Support the expansion of course offerings at Pitt on topics such as antisemitism, Israel, Zionism, and Jewish political thought, and facilitate the opportunity for students to register for relevant courses at partner universities.
- c. Identify resources for developing scholarly excellence on campus regarding contemporary antisemitism by such actions as recruiting faculty in this specialty area, creating an antisemitism research unit, and developing a program of faculty fellows.
- d. Provide robust, evidence-based training opportunities across campus on antisemitism for students, faculty, and staff, building on the Preventing Discrimination and Harassment training on Title VI requirements and protected categories provided to faculty and staff during their onboarding process.
- e. Adopt language on the pedagogical expectations for all relevant faculty modeled after the University of Pittsburgh's Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement that "Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom to discuss their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce controversial material that has no relation to the subject and should provide an atmosphere conducive to learning."
- f. Adopt language for all relevant faculty modeled after the University of Pittsburgh's Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement that: "Faculty members are entitled to speak and write as private citizens, free from institutional censorship or discipline, but as scholars and educators they should at all times be accurate, exercise appropriate restraint, and show respect for the opinions of others," with the understanding that

³ Criticism of individual actions of the Israeli government are not in their own right antisemitic.

faculty with clinical responsibilities may have professional guidelines that require different language.

- g. Expand offerings of workshops and programs that promote academic freedom, respect for diverse viewpoints, pluralism, intellectual humility, respectful disagreement, and civil discourse for faculty and students, building on the University's 2023-24 and 2024-25 Years of Discourse and Dialogue.
- h. Enhance multifaith and intergroup programming on campus to strengthen communal ties.

4. Incident Response and Enforcement Mechanisms

The Working Group was asked to examine how antisemitic incidents are currently reported, investigated, and addressed, including barriers to access and confidence in existing processes; review enforcement tools and recommend ways to improve transparency, consistency, and follow-through; and ensure that all responses are both timely and trauma-informed, and that impacted individuals receive appropriate support.

Our recommendations focus on continual review and evaluation of University responses to and communications about antisemitic incidents and threats:

- a. Continually review processes to evaluate and improve the University's response to antisemitic incidents and enforcement of policies related to antisemitism and ensure closed-loop communication with complainants, clear documentation of punitive and educative actions after violations (while respecting personal privacy), and that any verified violation of University policy is followed by appropriate and timely action.
- b. Develop multi-tiered guidelines that can be referenced as events unfold when communicating with the University community in response to incidents or threats. Depending on the severity of the event, the antisemitism advisory council could be consulted.
- c. Ensuring the safety and security of the University's Jewish faculty, staff, and students is of the utmost priority and requires continual and comprehensive reviews of safety and security on campus and adjacent neighborhoods.
 - 1. Particular attention should be paid to areas in which Jewish faculty and students cluster, including Hillel, Chabad, and the offices, classrooms, and events associated with the Jewish Studies Program, as well as other centers, programs, or initiatives engaging in Jewish- or Israel-related programming.
 - 2. It is important that the University continue to work on and build upon the strong collaboration between the University's public safety team and the expert community security staff at the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh to review security protocols in changing threat environments.
 - 3. It is important that the University identify opportunities to improve the safety and security of its Jewish population by seeking regular input from campus units engaged in Jewish- or Israel-related courses and programming and the aforementioned advisory council.

4. It is also important that the University's strong commitment to public safety and protection of its Jewish community against physical threats be communicated to the campus community and that, when necessary, University policies and processes are adjusted to meet that commitment.

5. External Events and Off-Campus Influences

The Working Group was asked to develop strategies for how the University should engage with antisemitic incidents in the broader Pittsburgh area or nationally, including when such incidents occur off campus but impact campus life, and recommend approaches for timely and effective institutional communication, public positioning, and collaboration with local and national Jewish organizations in response to these events.

Our recommendations focus on developing formal campus-Jewish community partnerships, communication with Jewish students and their parents, and increased messaging about antisemitism on social media:

- a. Maintain regular, proactive communication with students, parents, and community members during non-crisis times to lay the groundwork for helpful and effective communication during antisemitic crises.
- b. Maintain regular outreach with Hillel, Chabad, and the Jewish Studies Program to enhance transparent, consistent, and effective communication with Jewish students.
- c. Maintain communication with parents of Jewish students as an important opportunity for developing transparent and effective relationships and a supportive community.

Conclusion

Incidents of antisemitism have been on the rise in the United States over the last several years, and antisemitism has been part of the experience of Jewish students on college campuses nationally and at the University of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh's engagement with antisemitism must be understood within a national and an historical context that both predates current dynamics and will extend beyond any single University administration. Recognizing this continuity is essential to acknowledging past missed opportunities, and both ongoing and future concerns within our community.

The University has a responsibility to address antisemitism proactively and transparently, to respond substantively when problems are raised, and to ensure that policies and practices meaningfully protect affected students, faculty, and staff. This includes cultivating an environment in which all members of the community feel welcome and safe to voice concerns, share experiences, and feel confident that the institution will live up to its commitments. Fortunately, the current leadership of the University of Pittsburgh has demonstrated its recognition of the seriousness of antisemitism through the implementation of procedures, programs, and activities to address it. The creation of this Working Group is part of the current University administration's effort to strengthen those measures. We recommend that this work continue.

The Working Group on Antisemitism has identified opportunities for enhancing the University's response to antisemitism, recommending expanding some existing programs and creating others. For example, the University could expand and refine approaches to messaging, training, and incident reporting to increase their visibility and effectiveness. Also recommended is the development of formal campus and campus-community consultative boards to advise on preventing and responding to incidents of antisemitism and on enhancing knowledge and awareness of antisemitism across the University by augmenting training, scholarship, curricular offerings, workshops, and campus surveys.

Working Group on Antisemitism

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