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## Introduction: The Avi Schaefer Fellowship

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[http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/introduction\\_the\\_avi\\_schaefer\\_fellowship\\_20100524/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/introduction_the_avi_schaefer_fellowship_20100524/)

This week, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren will give the commencement address to graduating students at America's preeminent historic Jewish university, Brandeis. The selection of Oren sparked a massive outcry by hundreds of the school's 3,000 plus students, claiming the Israeli ambassador does not represent the university's values (despite the school's founding by an ardent Zionist) and is a "rogue-state apologist".

The anti-Israel feeling on Brandeis' campus is a direct result of the increasingly influential global "delegitimization" campaign against Israel's right to exist occurring most prominently on campuses. Recently, UC Berkley's Student Government passed a bill to divest from Israel (which the Student President vetoed) and the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at UC Irvine meticulously organized the heckling and disruption of Ambassador Oren's talk at the University. In the last decade, episodes of divestment and incitement against Israeli officials have occurred on many prominent American campuses including Harvard, Yale, Duke and the University of Chicago.

The North American Jewish Community needs a new Hasbara model to level off the rising anti-Israeli sentiment on campuses. The effectiveness of sending Israeli shlichim, or emissaries, to campus Hillels coupled with the work of student advocacy groups is limited to increasing the Diaspora's affiliation with Israel through programming and Birthright recruitment.

The Avi Schaefer Fund (ASF), founded to further the legacy of Avi Schaefer, a 21-year-old Brown University Freshman and former volunteer soldier in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed by a drunk driver this past February, has established a fellowship program to send a new type of shaliach to North American campuses, based on Avi's experience at Brown.

THROUGH AVI'S intellectual gifts, engaging personality, and credibility to both defend Israel on campus and reach out to the other side because of his army experience serving in Judea and Samaria one day while attending peace rallies in Tel Aviv the next, he successfully changed the climate regarding Israel on Brown's campus in just a semester and a half. Avi wrote a widely acclaimed opinion/editorial piece – To Those Interested in Creating Peace in the Middle East—to the Brown Daily Herald regarding the biases against Israel on campus and his desire for understanding between both sides. He organized a student fundraising party for Haiti attended by 500 students, raising nearly \$4,000 for Israid, an Israeli organization on the ground in the disaster-stricken country. He developed a close and intimate relationship with a Palestinian student and president-elect of Common Ground: Justice and Equality in Palestine/Israel. They planned to travel to Israel and the West Bank this summer to develop a course with a Brown professor on Israeli/Palestinian narratives. Following Avi's tragic death, Israeli flags were raised all over campus in his honor.

The Avi Fellowship follows the model Avi left for us—having a bright, engaging and committed former IDF soldier within the student population defending and advocating for Israel through words and actions, developing personal relationships with campus leaders and opponents of Israel, and initiating programming exposing Israel's positive attributes to the entire student body.

The fellowship (commencing the 2011-2012 academic year) involves an intricate screening and training process, recruiting from the brightest, most articulate and committed prospective students matriculating into North American universities following their IDF service. Former Israeli soldiers (whether born in Israel or in the Diaspora) are our best emissaries on campus because they provide a human face to the conflict, providing first-hand accounts of their service in the Middle East. Their time in the IDF gives them the credibility to be both supportive and realistic about Israel and the situation with Palestinians without being cast as anti-Israel or left wing.

These potential advocates, through intense training sessions and weekends during their freshman year, will develop a network with fellows from other universities to brainstorm and share ideas, while at the same time harness their innate skills and develop into leading campus emissaries for Israel. While providing these students financial support for their studies in return for their invaluable work, the fellowship hopes to advance Avi's success at Brown to campuses all over North America. As Avi's Palestinian friend said following his death, "He was the first Israeli that I allowed myself to un-clutch my fist to." DEFENDING THROUGH words. Engaging through action. Out of the box leadership and programming. Avi's legacy provides us with an innovative and proven direction to soften the increasing anti-Israeli sentiment and change the climate regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on North American campuses. By establishing the Avi Fellowship, the ASF hopes to implement

the change on college campuses Avi achieved so successfully in his short time at Brown.

*The writer is a new immigrant from Los Angeles who will be joining the IDF in October. For more information on the Avi Schaefer Foundation (ASF), please visit <http://www.avischaeferfund.org>.*

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