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## The Avi Schaefer Fund 2014-2015 Innovation Grantees

**Goal of innovation grants: The ASF Innovation Grant program's goal is to promote creative and visionary concepts that focus on one of the three areas of interest as listed below**

- **Promoting open and respectful discourse within the Jewish community, specifically surrounding conversations about Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.**
- **Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**
- **Engaging with students on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

### **Ohio State University**

#### **Ask Big Questions Israel**

##### **Area of interest: Engaging with Students on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

Utilizing the OSU Hillel "Ask Big Questions" model of interactive discussions based on the International Hillel Ask Big Questions initiative, this project will be staffed by the OSU Hillel Israel Fellow, and will bring together approximately 10-12 Jewish and non-Jewish students for a weekly conversation revolving around Israel in some way. Each conversation will begin with a "Big" question and a "text" that helps to give direction to the discussion. One example would be "Where do you feel at home?" which can help generate a conversation about belonging, identity, community, and the broader sense of a homeland. The conversations will happen at lunchtime and each week a student, with the help from OSU Hillel staff, will lead the conversation. We are looking to hold the conversation in a public place to support the idea that the conversation should be very public, raise awareness, and are open and welcoming. Lastly, when the conversation is completed all participants will be asked to "take the conversation with them" and ask five more people to answer the Big Question of the week.

### **University of Oregon's Jewish Student Union**

#### **Manzil Midrash (house of study in Arabic & Hebrew)**

##### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

Our students often find themselves asking "Do my efforts really make a difference?" or "What can I do to ensure a just society?"—these questions that cross cultural divides and religious theologies. Following our Avi Shabbat (intended to be one of our 160+ student attended Shabbat on Campus dinners [February 6, 2015], we would like to host a series of student-created and facilitated campus conversations (Manzil Midrash, "house of study") with the goal of fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters. These conversations would be co-sponsored by Oregon Hillel (at the University of Oregon), the University of Oregon's Jewish Student Union, and the University of Oregon's Muslim Student Association and supervised by Oregon Hillel's Director of Jewish Leadership and Learning. . While the topics may change, we aim to pick subjects interesting to the students at hand—issues that they are dealing with today. Most likely these sessions will revolve around Relationships (Sexual Relations, Intermarriage), Medical Ethics (Stem-Cell Research, Euthanasia), Legal Ethics (Imprisonment, Business Ethics), and Assimilation (What It Means to Be Jewish/Muslim in America). Through this series, we will engage and encourage our students to discuss and debate their civic responsibilities while making each other more aware of the specific options that are available to all.

### **Temple University Hillel**

#### **Support for staff attending the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom Retreat**

##### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

The sisterhood of Salaam Shalom retreat is an interfaith experience for Jewish and Muslim woman. The retreat is to train our students and student leaders about the importance of building interfaith relationships, and



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presents us with tools on how we can build these relationships on campus. We then are going to partner with the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom to host two events at Temple University to promote relationships between the Jewish and Muslim communities here on campus.

### **New York University Annual Bridges Crash Course**

#### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

This is a round robin style program in which we set up five discussion groups, each facilitated by one Muslim and one Jew and each focusing on one topic that is relevant to both religions and cultures. This years our topics include food, gender roles, prayer, holiday and text study. Although we have facilitators stationed at each group, the discussions are extremely open ended and we encourage students to participate and even direct the conversations to the extent that they feel comfortable. This event has been extremely successful in the past as it is an opportunity to learn about and understand the differences, and often shockingly, the many similarities between the two faiths. Additionally, we like to provide a fully catered dinner, which allows for more of an opportunity for students to mingle and socialize with people they may never otherwise meet. One goal of this event is to encourage students of different faiths to discuss their beliefs and compare their own religious practices with those of other religions. There is so much overlap in both practice and belief among various religions, similarities that are often overlooked and disregarded. Another goal is to encourage and facilitate friendships between students of different faiths and students with the same faith who both value interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural experiences.

### **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Illini Students Discussing Israel**

#### **Area of interest: Promoting open and respectful discourse within the Jewish community, specifically surrounding conversations about Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.**

The Illini Students Discussing Israel program aims to reform the education of students concerning Israel and Israeli policy and politics. Through the program, we are looking to increase students' diversity of opinions and bring forward current issues involving Israel that students are interested in. Diversity is a key component in the program as it generates discussion and involvement and promotes free speech and respect for the opinions of others. The program consists of eight discussions sessions planned and led by four student leaders with support from Hillel's staff. Each session will focus on an Israel-related topic based on the group's interest and the leaders' curricular vision. The materials for the sessions include articles that promote different views of each topic. The wide spectrum of opinions represented in the articles will help the students discuss their opinions in a safe space that would give them the verbal tools and the informational infrastructure to form their own opinion about different topics relating Israel. The program is open to all students who are looking to gain insight towards current issues, such as Israeli history, the Israeli political system, the relationship between Israel and its neighbors, the relationship between Israel and the United States and more. By the completion of this program, students will achieve the confidence and tools they need to informatively discuss Israel related topics in future settings.

### **Vanderbilt University Hillel-MSA Cooperative**

#### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

Hillel and MSA will partner to create programs that build connections and create community between our two students groups. The first event will be a trivia night at a local pizza restaurant where the Hillel and MSA students will play together on multiple teams. The second event will be a potluck dinner where we share food



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recipes from our various cultures, with icebreaker type team-building games. The third event will be a video scavenger hunt, culminating in a dinner where Hillel and MSA talk about our shared interests and ideas for projects we can work on together in the future. The leadership of all of the partnering organizations reviewed this plan. Each organization has dedicated students to creating programs that are mutually beneficial and interesting to their constituencies. With some advertising buzz and a theme (yet to be determined) to unite all three events, we believe this will be an attractive opportunity for students from our groups.

### **University of California Los Angeles**

#### **Olive Tree Initiative**

#### **Gaza Reconstruction Simulation and Alternative BDS Forum**

#### **Area of interest: Engaging with students on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

We are looking to provide educational opportunities for students interested in or involved with the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. These programs are designed to illicit constructive discussion between students of all political affiliations (often opposing viewpoints) and to ensure that anyone interested in discussion has a safe place to do so. Furthermore, we hope to shed light on flashpoint issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in a calm, respectful, and academic fashion.

### **University of Southern California Hillel**

#### **Freedom Seder Honoring Dean Varun Soni**

#### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

This is a multi-pronged programmatic approach to bringing together an interfaith and cross-cultural response to the question "What is Freedom?" The first element of the program is an art exhibit at the USC Hillel Art Gallery featuring work from students of all faiths and cultures on campus. The Office of Religious Life's network of religious Directors has already been invited to help us promote the concept to their students. The show will be hung March-May, 2015. The second approach will be a Seder inspired meal, honoring Dean Varun Soni of the Office of Religious Life and all members of all of the religious and cultural groups on campus will be invited.

### **Binghamton University Hillel/MSA**

#### **Visit a Mosque/Visit a Synagogue \*\*Second year funding**

#### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

15 Hillel Students and 15 students from the Muslim Student Association will go on a field trip together to visit a Mosque and a Synagogue in one day. At the Mosque, they will speak with an Imam about the day-to day activities of an Imam, holidays on Islam and the unique aspects of the service and then students will be able to watch a service take place. Then, at the Synagogue, students will speak with a Rabbi about Judaism, day-to-day activities of a rabbi, Jewish holidays, and they will look through a Siddur, and discuss some of the rituals of praying. Afterwards, everyone will return to campus and have an early dinner together to discuss what they just learned, and any similarities they noticed between Islam and Judaism. Also, assuming we have an equal number of students from each group, everyone will get a "buddy" assigned to them to encourage dialogue during the trip. For many Jewish and Muslim students, this field trip will be a unique, eye-opening opportunity that invites them to understand and celebrate each other's differences. We hope the friendships fostered on this trip will encourage further discussions between Jewish and Muslim students outside the confines of the program.

### **George Washington University Hillel**

#### **Freedom Seder \*\*Second year funding**

#### **Area of Interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**



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This will be our 6th annual Freedom Seder, an event that extracts the themes of freedom and equality inherent in the ancient story of Passover and applies them to a relevant social justice issue facing our world today. We do this through partnering with other multicultural (and hopefully interfaith) organizations who have also been experienced histories of oppression. As Jews, one of our most important roles is to do Tikkun Olam, which includes working to ensure equality and justice for all people. We are writing our own Haggadah for our Freedom Seder, which will include the traditional Passover prayers, readings, songs, and stories, as well as culturally relative narratives of African Americans facing injustices worldwide. Along with asking the traditional Four Questions, we will ask Four Questions relating to modern day struggles for freedom. GW's Freedom Seder will inform students from many communities across campus and DC about issues still facing the world today with regard to oppression and the importance of multicultural groups working together to ensure basic freedoms for all. As the event is being organized by a wide array of organizations, we hope it will be inclusive of students from many different sectors across campus. Our event will also be open to alumni, local young professionals, and community members.

#### **University of Virginia Brody Jewish Center Interfaith Dinner Series**

##### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

The Brody Jewish Center aspires to create a space in which students are able to explore their connections to Judaism, as well as understand and respect differing faith traditions. To deepen cross-cultural encounters, we intend to create an interfaith dinner series using the Ask Big Questions model to incite meaningful conversation. Effective conversations do not require participants have any prior knowledge or expertise, allowing all individuals to participate fully. Furthermore, these questions create a frame through which students can consider their impact on their university, in addition to their obligation to the larger community. The Brody Jewish Center hopes the interfaith dinner series demonstrates the ways in which religion can be a vehicle for social change, rather than a divisive force among university students. We intend that, through conversations and shared experiences, students will affirm the value of their own faith tradition, and while also recognizes meaning in others' religious beliefs. Participants will also obtain a better understanding of what motivates them to act and, as a result, perceive themselves as influential members of the UVA community. Dinners and conversation will occur four times throughout the semester, enabling students to continually build relationships with one another and recognize themselves as agents for change. Exposure to diverse cultures inspires more tolerant individuals and, in turn, enriches the campus community.

#### **Brown/RISD Hillel**

##### **A Scholar in Residence Shabbat with Yavilah McCoy and the Brown RISD Hillel Initiative on Racial Awareness and Justice (HIRAJ)**

##### **Area of interest: Fostering interfaith understanding and cross-cultural encounters**

This two-part program will include student leaders from groups and organizations across campus to join Yavilah McCoy to explore the roles that student leaders can play in advancing identity-group/ faith-based action toward racial justice and the power and pitfalls of intergroup/interfaith alliances in this realm. Content includes- "Preparing for Action: A Black-Jewish Journey Toward Activism with Scholar in Residence, Yavilah McCoy". Lunch and Workshop with Yavilah McCoy - "Stronger Together? How Faith & Identity Meet Action in the Civil Rights Movement, Current Fight for Racial Justice and #BLM"

#### **Goucher College/ Goucher Hillel**

##### **Hadag Nahash - How Hip Hop Can Teach Us How to Talk..**



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**Area of interest: Promoting open and respectful discourse within the Jewish community, specifically surrounding conversations about Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.**

Goucher Hillel is bringing the Israeli Hip Hop super group Hadag Nahash to campus on April 27, in a program that will be shared with the other Hillels in town. Each campus co-sponsoring (Currently Towson and Goucher, potentially UMBC and Hopkins) will host lead up and follow up programming utilizing music to explore how we relate to and talk about Israel. HaDag Nahash's music provides the perfect material to explore how Israelis "hug and wrestle" with their state, and gives Americans an opportunity to do the same.