Enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.
While 2020 has been a challenging year, Virginia Tech Hokies are known for finding family and strength within the Hillel community through hard times; this year has been no different. The Virginia Tech Hillel Board of Directors started the year by updating our short and long term strategies to ensure we continue our alignment with Hillel International and the Virginia Tech Hillel Student’s Missions and Visions. While our focus quickly shifted to COVID-19 response and planning for the year ahead, we are proud to continue our program’s strength into next year as students return to campus and the new normal. Your Board of Directors will remain committed to providing resources to enrich the lives of VT Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

-Rochelle Friedman, ’09

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Every member of our community has felt the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In the face of an unprecedented set of challenges, Hillel at Virginia Tech rapidly convened relevant programs that students and staff were able to identify as the most critical issues for our community. By bringing together voices from across the campus, along with our alumni and friends, we were able to join in collaborative discussion, strategic thinking, information sharing and thoughtful decision making.

The work is continuing even today.

Together with generous donors and kindhearted leadership, and our community partners, Hillel at Virginia Tech continues to meet critical community needs. We are supporting the social and co-curricular educational needs of the students. We continue Jewish learning fellowships, internships and leadership opportunities. We continue to execute fun, interactive programs in a safe and supportive way.

~Sue Kurtz, Executive Director

STAFF

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

WWW.HILLELATVIRGINIATECH.ORG
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/HILLELHOKIES
I joined Hillel because I wanted a place in Blacksburg that felt like home. Little did I know that I would have more than I could have imagined and have a home that would be there beyond my college years. Hillel at Virginia Tech is a safe place for students to feel appreciated, supported, and respected. It is because of Hillel that I am the leader I have always strived to be. I have found my true passion of helping others and improving organizational and student life which I am making into a career because of my experiences within Hillel.

When Hillel at Virginia Tech hosted our “Class of 2025 Open House“ on Zoom last fall, I was asked the question of what makes our Hillel special. Hillel at Virginia Tech is so special because of the people that make up our mishpacha, meaning family in Hebrew. The Hillel at Virginia Tech staff are the glue that holds our community together and empowers students. This year, our Hillel staff have been there for students more than ever before by personally reaching out and asking how our families are doing and checking in regularly. The students and staff in Hillel are the reason that we have such a strong support system that became a mishpacha.

This past year has brought challenges yet also new light to our Hillel community. We learned to find new ways to keep supporting students while also providing a safe setting. Zoom programming, Shabbat to Go, and outdoor Board meetings helped us adapt and keep pushing forward. The Hillel leadership Board had to navigate through programming and leading committees while never physically see each other for two months. Being in isolation and deprived of social interaction took a toll on students’ well-being, myself included. Together, we learned to be resilient and appreciate the little things. I truly am proud and appreciative of every single one of our student leaders and staff. Their commitment to our community and helping cater to each individual’s needs during this time exemplify the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, giving back and helping repair our community. While all of the other organizations I am involved with on campus stopped programming this year because of COVID, Hillel did quite the opposite. Hillel did not just provide programs and Shabbats, but much more that helped us focus on our mental and physical health. Furthermore, we partnered with Jewish Family Services to provide external resources for students to ensure their needs were met.

The Hillel leadership team this year is striving to build a more diverse, inclusive environment and not only impact our Hillel community, but more. Our student leaders are using their voices and are serving as a resource to strengthen the Greater Virginia Tech community. For example, our student leaders created and passed a Virginia Tech resolution to excuse not only Jewish students, but any student of any religion, from class for religious observances.

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- Briana Schwam, ’21 Psychology and Human Development

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Charlotte Haber
Samantha Levy
Jacob Rojas
Ezra Silverburg

JNET 21
Danielle Lombardozzi

FROM THE
STUDENT
PRESIDENT

PAGE 2
As a New Yorker, I had few expectations for the Jewish community in Virginia. However, this couldn't have proved further from reality. At Hillel at VT, I met my closest friends, went on an indelible Birthright trip, and served on the inspiring Student Board, among many other enduring memories. Because of all this, I'm proud to be a Hillel Hokie.

- Mitchell Gerhardt ‘20 (December)  
  Electrical Engineering
PEER NETWORK ENGAGEMENT INTERNSHIP
Interns venture into every VT campus community and extend a welcoming invitation to anyone interested in Jewish life all year long.

"My PNEI experience was great, I learned a lot about Israel, the cultural experience of Judaism along with its interactions with modern day society. The coolest thing I learned doing it was that there are Jewish people everywhere that all come from different backgrounds and we tend to have a bond that allows us to easily get along and get to know each other."
-Julien Cohen, '22

BY THE NUMBERS

76 STUDENT INTERNS

166 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN ONGOING JEWISH LEARNING

6,765 STUDENT INTERACTIONS

JEWISH LEARNING FELLOWSHIP
Fellows participate in an eight-week curriculum exploring Jewish topics in a modern day context.

"My favorite topic was called "I'm not religious, im spiritual." This one hit home for me since I'm someone who always had a hard time connecting to Judaism religiously. I learned that I don't need to be religious to identify with the Jewish community."
-Julie Blitz, '23

SABABA
A ten-week curriculum exploring Israel's history as it relates to other countries in the world.

"I liked the session where we explored the geography and demographics of Israel. I liked watching everyone's presentations on their selected region of Israel. Each region had each unique features. I felt that this class was engaging because we were able to connect our research with each other."-Evan Arovas, '24
In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hillel at Virginia Tech redefined the Passover experience. It was a socially-distant Seder under our beautiful tent, with livestreaming options and meal pick up for students and their families. We also did other fun programs throughout the week of Passover, including a Chocolate Seder (virtual and in-person), Campus-wide Afikomen Scavenger Hunt, Maztah House Building, a Liberation Learning Event, and daily "K4P Lunches Under the Canopy".

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When we celebrate holidays at Hillel, we create a welcoming environment for all Jewish students, regardless of practice, knowledge, or affiliation. Jewish holidays are one of the most important times for students to connect to Jewish life on campus. The students can join the broader Jewish community, including alumni, university faculty and staff, and local community members in celebration. This year students and alumni celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center and Zoom by joining in a community holiday meal with traditional Jewish food followed by services and discussions.
SUKKOT

This Sukkot I was fortunate to be invited back to Blacksburg to teach about the agricultural roots of the holiday and do some harvest activities with the students from Hillel. We sat together in front of Squires Student Center amidst the hubub of campus life, learning to make pickled green beans and sauerkraut using fresh vegetables from the Blacksburg farmers market. Jewish and non-Jewish students alike wandered into the Sukkah to learn how to preserve fresh vegetables and connect the harvest to the week-long festival of Sukkot. It was incredible to see the massive Sukkah right in the middle of Tech’s campus, open to all students, welcoming, and full of life.

-Amanda Herring, ’12

CHANUKAH CELEBRATION FOR COMMONWEALTH KIDDUSH CUP

This past December was the first time we included a point related to Judaism for the our annual Commonwealth Kiddush Cup. Alumni, Parents, and students were able to celebrate the holiday with us by submitting photos related to Chanukah showing off their Hokie spirit and love for donuts, candle lighting, and latkes. We hope to continue this tradition again for our 9th annual fundraising event. We had over 115 photos submitted in the spirit of the holiday (and we beat UVA!)
Israel is beyond anything I could have imagined despite feeling a deep connection to it for most of my life. I have never felt so at home despite being thousands of miles away.  
- Ethan Myers, '23
RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE AN IMPACT

PIPELINE PROJECT

The Pipeline Project connects current students and Jewish Hokie alumni with one another to create a community network that can assist each other in finding Jewish resources and career leads.

“I am excited by Pipeline Project because it supports current students and alumni by creating a network of many individuals with different skills and interests that come together for a common purpose. I feel proud to cultivate a community that can lean on each other and create a strong connection between Hokie alumni and current students.”

- Marnie Adelkopf, '22

The Pipeline Project completed 30 senior interviews and 35 alumni interviews. These interviews were used to pair students with alumni mentors to help them transition from students into professionals in their fields of study.

The Pipeline Project was able to employ six student interns and created a Pipeline Project Task Force to assist in connecting alumni and students to each other and Jewish resources.

Conducted several virtual professional development events with Jewish Virginia Tech alumni and other professionals in online workshops, online career panels, virtual socials, and one-on-one mentorship meetings.

WHAT ARE THE NUMBERS?

The Pipeline Project created a foundation that Hillel at Virginia Tech’s alumni, students, and staff will continue to build off!

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Daniel Pearl World Music Day is an international network of concerts that use the power of music to embrace tolerance and humanity. This year, we virtually brought John Mulaney "to campus"!

As a Freshman, I joined the DPMD committee to get more involved. It's been an incredible experience for not only myself and becoming a leader, but it showed me the power of Hillel's ability to create community.

-Lindsey Brilliant, '24

In order to honor Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, Hillel at Virginia Tech annually organizes Reading of the Names. Over 65 individuals, including students, staff, professors, and community members read the names of children murdered during the Holocaust, totaling over 6,720 names. For the first time, Reading of the Names occurred at the Pylons. This allowed for increased visibility of the program on campus. This is also the first time we livestreamed the in-person reading. Students walking by were able to pick up roses and talk about the importance of remembering the Holocaust.

Shabbat at the Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center included an average of 100 students a week. As Hillel programming was transitioned online due to COVID-19, Shabbat continued to be an impactful experience.

Coming in as a new professional staff person, I was thrilled to see that Shabbat continued to be an impactful, in-person experience for the students in a safe manner. Seeing the Senior Celebration Shabbat in May gave me a great opportunity to know the students, but to also give the Seniors a well deserved sendoff from both the students and the staff. This was one of my first highlighted experiences as a professional that I won’t forget.

- Jacob Krzysiak, Community Engager
HILLEL EXTENDS BEYOND STUDENT LIFE

Alumni join together for a beautiful Shabbat experiences in DC and NOVA

Richmond Alumni get-together for Top Golf!

WE ARE INCREDIBLY THANKFUL FOR ALL THOSE THAT PARTICIPATED IN THIS YEAR’S COMMONWEALTH KIDDUSH CUP!

Together we raised over $82,009.11 for programs impacting over 1,300 students. We were able to pivot to virtual programming and continue to supply students with Jewish connections.

HELP US BEAT UVA AGAIN NEXT YEAR!

New Babies, New Homes, New Jobs, Engagements, Weddings? We celebrate them all!

DID WE MISS YOU? SEND US YOUR MAZELS, SO WE CAN SEND YOU ONE!

PUP PRIDE
ONESIES
BOTTOMS UP
TOO COOL FOR DROOL

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PUP PRIDE
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Family Circle members play a vital role in providing transformative Jewish community for their child and all the Jewish students at Virginia Tech. Please join and make an impact.

You receive:
- A copy of our Annual Impact Report
- Quarterly newsletter
- Invites to Parents & Family weekend events
- Regular photos of Hillel Hokies in action
- Personal thank you call

Family Committee $2,500 or $208/month:
Join the Family Committee and you will be invited to exclusive hosted events to share vision and updates of our program.
INCLUDES: Below + Join for 4 years and receive an engraved brick in the Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center fire pit!

Visionary Circle $1,800 or $150/month:
Your gift sponsors 1 Shabbat with 100 students on average.
INCLUDES: Below + Full Shabbat dedicated in your name

Mensch Circle $1,000 or $83/month:
Your gift sponsors Jewish learning for 30 students for a year.
INCLUDES: Below + Homemade Holiday Meals

Mitzvah $540 or $45/month:
Your gift supports our Jewish leadership program with over 20 leaders.
FOR YOUR HOKIE: Below + Parking at Hillel Center

Proud Circle $360 or $30/month:
Your gift enables 12 student interns to meet peers over coffee to engage new students.
INCLUDES: Below + Wellness Check-In every semester

Sustainer Circle $180 or $15/month:
Your gift sponsors a one time program for 10 students.
FOR YOUR HOKIE: 1 year access to Monday Munch, priority access to chicken soup hotline, exclusive invitations to upcoming programs, and Hillel Face Mask

YOUR INVESTMENT IN EACH STUDENT

Hillel at VT spends* $84 less than the national average per student, based on our size. A future goal is to increase Hillel's budget to be able to invest more in each student, which will yield a greater impact in each student's experience.

*Investment per student based on FY19 figures provided
You are the reason all this and more is possible.

THANK YOU!
As an entering freshman (Rat) at Virginia Tech (1951) not knowing one person, I soon learned self-discipline and to “stand up” when I saw something that was not right. One of my accomplishments was to start Hillel in 1954. There were only 8 identifiable Jews in our first gathering. It makes me proud how Hillel has evolved into the viable organization it is today. Supporting Hillel reinforces my legacy. In my Army career I used this experience to serve as Jewish Lay Leader in addition to my normal duties. I remember when an upperclassman would lock my heels as a “rat”- My response would be “when you flunk out, I will be here.” In some, not all cases I was right.

-Ben Abramowitz, ’54

Julianna loved her time at Hillel as an undergraduate and did not have a very strong Jewish identity before college. She says that Hillel helped her identity as a Jewish person as well as help her realize that she loves to volunteer. She put these two passions together by helping lead the Hillel’s New Orleans Volunteering Trip after Hurricane Katrina. She says that it was very important that she went to help because she had different connections and wanted to help during the time. Julianna said that Hillel at Virginia Tech brought 30-40 students on each ASB she led to New Orleans an they rebuilt houses and painted schools. This trip helped Julianna feel that she had a purpose in the world and impacted her life. Julianna’s inception of service allows us to continue to build and do service every year since New Orleans.

- Briana Schwam’s (’21) interview with Julianna Kirtz, ’08

I donate to the Commonwealth Kiddush Cup so that students can continue to take part in programming and the benefits that Hillel at Virginia Tech has to offer. Hillel at Virginia Tech opened doors that I did not know existed and introduced me to my best friends. I donate in hopes that other students discover their Jewish identities, find a home away from home, and of course, to help beat the University of Virginia!

- Samantha Zucker, ’19
Hillel at VT is a phenomenal organization and the relatively new physical space is mind blowing. I am part of four generations of Jewish Hokies (1926, '55, '87, '92, 2018). The evolution of the Jewish life experience at VT is a wonderful story. Having recently joined the Board of Directors, I was exposed to a passionate and capable group of professional leaders and alumni, but more importantly, the Jewish student leadership is beyond my imagination. The Jewish student leaders delivered presentations on a variety of topics, which revealed a truly impressive level of composure and effective activism. None of this would exist without our professional leadership and alumni support. If nurturing, promoting, and perpetuating Jewish life at VT is important to you, there is no better investment than Hillel at VT.

-Guy Levy, '84

Hillel was my safe place on campus. It was my home away from home. It was the place I met some of my closest friends and there was something special about our little community. Sue always encouraged me and gave me the extra push I needed to step out of my comfort zone and to be a leader. My senior year, VT Hillel hired their first Jewish Engagement Fellow - the first paid employee, in addition to Sue. I had no idea there was such a thing as a professional Jew, and this opened my eyes to what I wanted to do after college. I applied to become an engagement fellow my spring semester at a different university, and it went on to change my life. Through the foundation I had at Hillel at VT, I was able to carve the path for my future. As a Board Member, Service Leader, and Hebrew school teacher at Hillel at VT, I went on to become a Jewish professional, which led me to make aliyah to Israel and become a professional tour guide/Jewish educator. I’m forever thankful for those opportunities and experiences at Hillel at VT!

- Mara Apelstein, '06

Our Organizational Donors

- The Sam & Marion Golden Helping Hand Foundation
- Maccabee Project
- Richmond Jewish Foundation
- UJC
- Alpha Epsilon Pi
- Blacksburg Jewish Community Center
- Lynchburg Community Council
- Hillel International
- NJOP
- Virginia Tech Foundation
- Israel on Campus Coalition
- CJP
- Tidewater Jewish Foundation
- IFYC
- TAGLIT
- BICEP
- The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington
- StandWithUs
- National Center to Encourage Judaism
- Roanoke Jewish Federation

Thank you friends and donors!
The Malcolm Rosenberg Hillel Center implements passive house technology. It is a low-energy building reducing heating and cooling costs by 90%, and overall energy use by 70%. The building self regulates oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, maintaining the highest level of air sanitation.