

**Coexistence at Brandeis:
Reflections and Recommendations
April 2002**

by

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Executive Summary

Coexistence at Brandeis: Reflections and Recommendations is a preliminary report from the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence (BIIC) to the Brandeis community. It is intended to illuminate issues of coexistence at the university and to encourage conversation about them. The BIIC intends to present a more complete report to the community in the fall of 2002. We are offering this preliminary report now because we feel that the community is at a critical moment in its grappling with issues of inter-group relations. The report is based on analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The specific sources of data are enumerated in the body of the report.

This report focuses on *coexistence* at Brandeis. Specifically, the data are interpreted through the lens of “majority/minority relations” — a common framework used in the coexistence field to understand inter-group relations in a community. Unlike other reports, statements, and meetings that focus on *diversity* at Brandeis, this report is not solely about “minority issues” or demographics. Coexistence, by definition, is about the *entire community* and we attempt, in this report, to highlight the experiences, perceptions, roles, and responsibilities of both the various minorities on campus *and* the majorities. Although not all members of the Brandeis community are comfortable with the majority/minority framework, we use it because it acknowledges and raises questions about power, privilege, and responsibility — issues that must be addressed in any community that seeks to nurture healthy inter-group relations.

Brandeis must address its commitment to its Jewish roots and its commitment to pluralism simultaneously. We believe that there will be a higher quality of community and coexistence at Brandeis if these two commitments are fully, explicitly, and creatively embraced.

Organization of the Report. Following this executive summary, the report is organized as follows: 1) Introduction, 2) Drawing on Our Resources, 3) Indications of Challenges, 4) Discussion, 5) Recommendations, 6) Appendices.

Drawing on Our Resources. While the report focuses primarily on some of the challenges Brandeis faces as an institution and as a community, we note at the outset the many positive elements already enabling coexistence within the university community. These include: 1) Core values, such as inclusion, a commitment to social justice, and recognition of the importance of developing and celebrating our *particular* communities

and cultures as well as our common humanity; 2) Norms of tolerance; 3) Interest in diversity; 4) Existing programs and initiatives; 5) The diverse Brandeis Jewish community, which is a resource for both Jewish *intra*-communal work and also *intercommunal* coexistence work.

Indications of Challenges. In spite of the values, initiatives, clubs, and offices that support coexistence and community on campus, there are indicators that Brandeis faces challenges in these areas.

1) Indicators of Differential Rates of Student Satisfaction

- On the class of 2001 senior survey, students were asked how satisfied they were with twelve different aspects of campus life. Over half of Jewish students, compared with 37% of non-Jewish students, were “very” or “generally” satisfied with the sense of community at Brandeis. Overall, less than half of the respondents (44%) were satisfied with the sense of community.
- Many more white and Jewish students reported feeling treated equally and being comfortable expressing their identities than did their non-white and non-Jewish counterparts.
- In the area of satisfaction with religious life on campus, 81% of Jewish seniors, but only 49% of non-Jewish seniors expressed satisfaction.
- On the senior survey for the class of 2000, 39% of Jewish students compared with 27% of non-Jewish students reported that it was “very true” that they felt invited and welcome to events regardless of who sponsored them.
- We discovered similar patterns in the responses to an end-of-the-year survey given in the spring of 2001 to students who will graduate in 2004. 82% of Jewish (compared to only 42% of non-Jewish) respondents, and 70% of white (compared to only 44% of non-white) respondents, reported that it was “very true” that they felt comfortable expressing their true religious identity.

2) Concerns Expressed by Members of Brandeis’ Minority Communities

Students of color expressed the following concerns. Many were also echoed by minority members of the faculty and staff:

- Lack of awareness of the extent of Jewish culture in Brandeis undergraduate life prior to arriving here
- Lack of orientation to Jewish culture and traditions once here
- Feelings of exclusion from Jewish religious and cultural events
- Inadequate opportunities for academic inquiry into their own cultures
- Absence of role models and mentors from similar backgrounds
- Burden of “representing” their group on campus
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Stereotypes and judgments from members of the majority
- Lack of interest in issues of diversity and incidents of harassment on the part of many members of the majority

- Religious observances not acknowledged through calendar, worship spaces, or clergy

3) Concerns Expressed by Members of Brandeis' Majority Communities.

Although members of the Jewish and white majorities at Brandeis indicate greater overall satisfaction with their Brandeis experience than do minority members, in focus groups and conversations they raise significant issues and concerns in relation to coexistence at Brandeis.

- Jewish members of the Brandeis community express a range of views about the significance of the Jewish aspect of Brandeis' identity, ranging from pride to discomfort.
- Many Jewish members of the Brandeis community express concerns and fears about being judged by other Jewish members of the community.
- Jewish members of the community sometimes feel excluded from Brandeis events that conflict with Sabbath observances and do not serve kosher food.
- Members of the Orthodox community experience themselves, in many ways, as a minority, and find conflicts between the requirements of their religious observance and their responsibilities as students.
- One graduate student expressed the concern that her non-Jewish peers seemed not to have sufficient knowledge of Jewish history to understand how important it is to her and to others that there is an institution of higher learning rooted in the Jewish community and committed to scholarship regarding Jewish life.
- A large majority of the Jewish students, faculty, and staff who participated in dialogues and conversations, including those who direct major centers of Jewish religious life and scholarship, expressed a desire to see Brandeis become more racially and ethnically diverse.

Discussion. The report highlights four major areas for further discussion:

- 1) Confusion about Brandeis' Identity. Brandeis University, as an institution, appears to send confusing and contradictory signals about its identity—particularly the nature and meaning of its commitments to its Jewish roots and to pluralism— to its various constituencies. While Brandeis can and always will mean different things to different people, these different experiences and visions need to be acknowledged, discussed, and to some extent managed or reconciled, so that they do not collide with each other in harmful ways. It is critical that Brandeis address these commitments—to its Jewish roots and to pluralism—*simultaneously* and that it begin to ask key questions about how these two commitments can reinforce each other, but also, realistically, how they shape and constrain each other. How can they be calibrated to create the strongest possible educational environment and allow for Brandeis to accomplish its educational mission?
- 2) Need for Deeper Understanding of “Others.” Members of the Brandeis community often reveal themselves to be unaware of the complexities and

sensitivities that are central to (and often taken as “givens” by) those who are different from them. These complexities include the image a group has of itself and the fears it has about how it is perceived by others, the vocabulary it uses to describe itself, the meanings it gives to the historical injustices (and privileges) that have shaped its evolution, and the different sub-communities that make up the group. In the absence of understanding these aspects of another group’s identity, it is likely that people unintentionally hurt each other, through words or silences, actions or omissions. Why are there so few deeper conversations about issues of difference? We propose several possible explanation, including insufficient skills to support constructive engagement with difficult issues.

- 3) Ambivalence about Majority Status, Majority/Minority Dynamics, and Responsibilities of Power. However ‘majority’ is defined, there is a general reluctance among students, members of the faculty, and administrators to associate themselves with the majority and to discuss and embrace the responsibilities that may come along with the corresponding privileges. What are the responsibilities of the majority in a given community—*even if they are a minority in other communities*—if the intention is to create a pluralistic, welcoming, and dynamic educational environment? This is one of a number of questions pertaining to the responsibilities associated with power that warrant further discussion among members of the Brandeis community. These discussions will help members of the community to better understand the expectations that they do and can have of one another.
- 4) Coordination, Leadership, and Institutional Learning on Coexistence Issues. Brandeis benefits from a plethora of diversity initiatives, publications, fellowships, and programs, most designed to provide opportunities for particular cultural, religious, national, sexual, and gender identity groups to develop themselves and to create places where members of particular communities might feel “at home”. Some of these initiatives— such as dialogue groups and retreats— also create opportunities for people to construct relationships and enjoy meaningful conversations across differences. There is currently no office, committee, or person, however, with the authority or capacity to coordinate such efforts, facilitate collaborations among them, ensure that disparate programs are working toward consistent ends, monitor effectiveness, or assess gaps. By devoting insufficient resources to institutional research and coordination of multiple efforts, Brandeis loses opportunities to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of its initiatives and to improve them.

Recommendations. The BIIC offers the following recommendations to the community for discussion and to the president and the university’s leadership for action:

- 1) Articulate a vision for the university that embraces Brandeis’ dual commitments to its Jewish roots and to pluralism— a vision to which institutional leaders are prepared to commit.

- 2) Once the vision is articulated, work with every unit of the university to assess or “audit” its current relationship to and implementation of the vision. Support each unit in outlining a future direction for implementing this vision.
- 3) Create and staff an office with the authority and resources to coordinate coexistence efforts across the university community.
- 4) Invest resources in building capacities and skills for coexistence leadership, with a particular emphasis on members of the faculty, staff, and administration.
- 5) Encourage leaders of both majority and minority groups to have *intra*-communal conversations and dialogues to explore how they, *as* members of the majority and members of various minorities, can and do contribute to the realization of the university’s vision.

I. Introduction

Coexistence at Brandeis: Reflections and Recommendations is a preliminary report from the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence (BIIC).¹ It is intended to illuminate issues of coexistence at Brandeis University and to encourage conversation about them. This report is a mirror; based on the BIIC's two and a half years of studying, analyzing, and working to enrich inter-group relations on campus, it will reflect back to the Brandeis community an integrated and complex picture of itself.

How do we describe the nature and quality of coexistence that characterizes this community? Such a report should include: the attitudes that members of one group hold about members of other groups, the quality and quantity of interaction between groups, the extent and limits of individuals' understanding of each other's history and culture, and their awareness of each other's concerns and sensitivities. It should also highlight the extent to which members of various groups enjoy the freedom and opportunity to develop and express their individual and collective identities. It should include the processes undertaken by the community to strengthen relationships between groups, and finally, it should describe both the institutional factors that enable positive intra- and inter-group relations, and those that frustrate them.

The picture we are presenting here includes many of these elements. Yet it is still incomplete. While it reflects the experiences, attitudes, and values that emerged in our surveys, facilitated dialogues, focus groups, and conversations, the perspectives of significant segments of the Brandeis community (notably graduate students and white, non-Jewish students) are not represented. We intend to gather additional data this spring, conclude a comprehensive analysis of new and already-collected data, and issue a more complete report to the Brandeis community next fall. (The final report will include, among other new data, findings from a survey that will be given to all Brandeis staff this spring and, in general, more information about demographics.)²

We are offering this preliminary report now, however, because we feel that the community is at a critical moment in its grappling with issues of inter-group relations. After an incident last fall in which the student hosts of a campus radio program made explicit and derogatory remarks about Asian women, many people of color within the community (as well as some white students, faculty, and staff) emphasized the need to address this incident in the larger context of diversity and inter-group relations on

¹ The Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence (BIIC) has worked since 1999 to strengthen capacities for coexistence among students, faculty, and staff at Brandeis. In addition, it has contributed to the development of coexistence theory and practice, through local as well as international projects. The BIIC is funded by the Alan B. Slifka Foundation and is housed within Brandeis' International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life. The Slifka Foundation has recently funded a permanent program in coexistence which, building on the BIIC's work, will offer a Master's degree, an undergraduate degree, and various outreach programs in coexistence. For more information about the BIIC, please visit www.brandeis.edu/ethics/coexistence_initiative/.

² It is important to note from the outset that this analysis emphasizes factors other than demographics. We recognize the importance of demographics and acknowledge that they are an important part of the picture of coexistence in our community. But we believe that *only* changing numbers—without grappling with the kinds of issues raised in this report— will not improve coexistence or sufficiently address diversity issues at Brandeis. We plan to devote more attention to questions of demographics in the final report we will issue in the fall.

campus.³ This sparked renewed energy for addressing issues of coexistence and diversity. We hope that the information, ideas, and questions raised in this preliminary report will be useful to the community as it grapples with these complex issues and searches for creative and constructive ways to move forward.

A. Sources of Data

The picture we are presenting is based on rigorous inquiry and the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data⁴, including:

- Responses to surveys administered to the graduating classes of 2000 and 2001 and first year classes in the fall of 2000 and 2001 and spring of 2001.⁵
- Analysis of the sessions of a “coexistence team” consisting of sixteen members of the Brandeis community, including undergraduates, graduate students, and members of the staff, faculty, and administration that met regularly for two years.
- Analysis of focus groups: 11 relatively homogeneous groupings of undergraduates; 5 relatively homogeneous groupings of faculty and campus center directors; and a series of 6 conversations with individual graduate students.
- Analysis of two intensive facilitated dialogues, one with a diverse group of undergraduates and one with a diverse group of faculty and administrators.
- Analysis of notes from a student-initiated anti-racism workshop attended by approximately 45 students.
- Review of student-written papers on the experiences of minority students at Brandeis.
- Reflections on community meetings and dozens of informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff.

Our intention is to give the university indicators of where we stand now, so that in three, five, or ten years we can measure the extent of our progress. Whenever possible, we have disaggregated the survey data according to religious, racial, and socio-economic sub-groups, in order to get a “base-line” picture of the status of coexistence at Brandeis.

B. Interpretive Framework

These data can help us understand our community. It is important to note, however, that this report is not a flat or neutral mirror. Our understanding of the stories and statistics

³ The radio show hosts and producers were white, Jewish males.

⁴ The qualitative data consists primarily of the analysis of notes taken during focus groups, facilitated dialogues, community meetings, workshops, and other conversations. In some cases, transcripts were taken from audio recordings. Notes were analyzed by hand. Several readers, including the independent evaluator, reviewed the notes and identified recurring themes and patterns as well as comments that were counter to these patterns.

⁵ See Appendix 1, “Description of Surveys,” for more details about the surveys.

has been refracted through the questions we bring from the field of coexistence: questions about inter-group relations, intra-group relations, and institutional enablers of and barriers to coexistence. We looked through the lens of “majority/minority relations”—a common framework used in the coexistence field to understand inter-group relations in a community.

In our research, we assumed Brandeis to have at least two salient “majorities”: whites, the still-dominant racial group in American society, and Jews, a small minority in America and in the world at large but the demographic majority at Brandeis and the group with relatively more institutional power. Our research focused primarily on Jewish/non-Jewish relations, and the intersection of this dynamic with race, class, and other inter-group dynamics. While we are aware that, in understanding power dynamics in a community, issues of race and class are *as* critical (and sometimes more visible) than issues of religion or culture, we focused on the Jewish/non-Jewish dynamic because we believe it lies at the heart of the complexities of the Brandeis community. The unique nature of a community with a Jewish majority gives rise to both unique tensions and unique possibilities for meaningful coexistence, which are often not openly acknowledged and explored on campus.

Not all members of the Brandeis community are comfortable with the majority/minority framework. In fact, in prior stages of this project, a few people took strong objection to the use of this framework, feeling that it simplifies, and perhaps misrepresents, a very complex community. While there are other possible lenses through which we could view and interpret our community, we use the majority/minority framework here because it acknowledges and raises questions about power, privilege, and responsibility— issues that exist in any diverse community. We have not found that this framework leads to a simplistic understanding of our community. It is flexible enough to allow for multiple and overlapping majorities and minorities, for a specific group (or individual) to be both a majority and a minority depending on the context, and for acknowledgment of the power and responsibility held by *all* groups within the community. The framework is structured enough, however, that it forces us to look at community building in terms of power and responsibility, in terms of collective as well as individual identities, and in terms of our differences as well as our “common humanity”. We invite continued conversation about the applicability of the majority/minority framework to our community and about alternative vocabulary for addressing these issues.⁶

C. Organization of the Report

This report focuses first on the existing resources within the community that support the development of Brandeis’ distinct cultural groups as well as strong inter-group relations. Next, it enumerates the indicators of challenges for coexistence at Brandeis that emerged from our research. It then offers an interpretation of the data and suggests implications. Finally, it recommends to the community several ways to strengthen coexistence at

⁶ In March 2001, the BIIC’s Coexistence Leadership Team issued a “Call to Conversation...an invitation to members of the Brandeis community to listen more deeply to each others’ experiences of majority/minority relationships”. This document was published as an insert to the weekly student newspaper (*The Justice*). The “Call to Conversation” can be accessed at http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/publications_resources/publications/Call_Conversation.pdf.

Brandeis. The recommendations seek to move Brandeis even closer to being an environment in which all members of the community are sufficiently well supported to develop their own identities – as individuals and as members of various collectivities – and to create respectful and meaningful relationships with others who are different from them. Following the body of the report is an Appendix, “Description of Surveys,” that can help readers interpret the quantitative data included in the text.

D. An invitation

We invite you to look into the mirror with us. See what you and some of your friends, colleagues, teachers, students, and administrators have experienced, noticing both what has been said and where there have been silences. We hope you see something of yourself in this report, but if you do not, we would like to understand what we have missed or misunderstood. We welcome your feedback, insights, viewpoints, additions, and corrections.

II. Drawing on Our Resources

While this report focuses primarily on some of the challenges Brandeis faces as an institution and as a community, we wish to note at the outset that there are already many positive elements enabling coexistence within the university community.

A. Core Values

Perhaps most important are the values implicit in the story of the university’s founding: inclusion and a commitment to social justice. Brandeis was founded in 1948 by members of the American Jewish community because a quota system denied Jewish students and scholars full access to other top universities. The founders established Brandeis as an institute of higher education open to people of any race, religion, or ethnicity. Although not every member of the Brandeis community is aware of this legacy, many of those who are— of all religious, racial, ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds— find inspiration in it.

Today Brandeis describes itself as standing on four pillars: Jewish sponsorship, non-sectarianism, excellence, and social justice. Certain tensions arise in Brandeis’ dual commitment to its Jewish sponsorship (sometimes referred to as its Jewish roots) and to non-sectarianism (sometimes taken to mean pluralism or diversity). Much of the rest of this report will focus on those. Yet, many members of the community find these two commitments to be mutually reinforcing and complementary. They find in Brandeis’ ties to its Jewish roots resources for pluralism, especially in *tikkun olam* (heal the world), the Jewish religious and cultural imperative toward social action. In addition, some find that Brandeis’ commitment to its Jewish roots creates a climate in which the development and celebration of *particular* communities and cultures (as opposed to the celebration *only* of our “common humanity”) is valued. Many appreciate this culture of “mosaic” rather than “melting pot” as an enabler of meaningful coexistence and pluralism on campus.

B. Norms of tolerance

In addition, norms of tolerance are strong at Brandeis. Official university policies, including for instance the Student's Rights and Responsibilities and the university sexual harassment policy, set tolerance and respect for others as a standard, which all members of the community are accountable to uphold. High level administrators, including the president, issue timely and compelling statements— in response to local or global incidents— affirming the importance of tolerance in our community.

Although “tolerance” may not represent the more robust and enriching kind of coexistence that many seek, it is a minimum standard to which all members of the community can be held accountable and it is a strong basis upon which coexistence efforts can build.

C. Interest in Diversity

Members of the undergraduate student body do express a desire for engagement across differences. For instance, at the beginning of their first year at Brandeis, 86% of the members of the class of 2004 who responded to a survey anticipated that “being able to make friendships with people from very different backgrounds” was either essential (49%) or very important (37%) in making their Brandeis experience a positive one. Given an array of choices, this was the factor they ranked as most important – more important than expressing their own cultural identity (66%), for instance, or feeling accepted regardless of their family's income level (74%).

D. Existing Programs and Initiatives

Many members of the university community— including undergraduate and graduate students, members of the staff and faculty, and administrators— are committed to coexistence and pluralism, seek relationships with people who are different from them, and invest time and resources in supporting the expression of distinct religious and cultural groups on campus. The clubs and activities of the Inter-cultural Center, the programs of the chaplaincy and Hillel, and the events sponsored by the Women's Resource Center and Triskelion among others have been mentioned by many members of the community as enablers of coexistence at Brandeis. Culture X, first-year orientation, the Religious Pluralism and Spirituality Committee and its community seder, the Posse retreats, and the Arab-Jewish and German-Jewish dialogue groups stand out as examples of efforts to bring people together across differences. The Transitional Year Program, the Posse Scholars Program, the Slifka and Wien Scholarships, the Masters Programs in Sustainable International Development, and the Graduate School of International Economics and Finance are noted by many as initiatives that contribute to the diversity of the student body, in racial, economic, and national terms.

The efforts mentioned here illustrate the range of campus programs intended to promote the well-being of religious and cultural groups, to strengthen relations among them, or to augment understanding of inter-group dynamics; it is by no means an exhaustive list.

E. The Diverse Brandeis Jewish Community

Brandeis University is home to a large and diverse Jewish community. Its members are both secular and religious; Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist; and represent a number of nationalities and a range of opinions on matters political, cultural, and religious. It is in many ways a microcosm of the larger Jewish community in the United States and in the world, and, as such, faces many of the same complex issues and questions. To the extent that Brandeis students, faculty, and staff feel safe discussing their differences, Brandeis is an ideal environment for dialogue within the pluralism of the Jewish community. Creating this environment is a unique contribution that Brandeis can make to the larger Jewish community and to the American and world communities of which it is a part. Klal, a Hillel-sponsored dialogue group for members of the various Jewish denominations on campus, is an excellent example of this *intra*-communal coexistence work.

Centers of Jewish scholarship, service, outreach, and education also facilitate *Intercommunal* coexistence, to the extent that their expertise is made accessible and their resources are made welcoming to non-Jewish members of the community. Many members of the community who are not Jewish express an interest in becoming knowledgeable about Jewish history and culture, and being nourished by Jewish narratives and traditions. The potential of Jewish centers on campus to contribute to meaningful relationships across differences has probably only begun to be tapped.

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As we turn in the next section to focus on the challenges Brandeis faces in relation to coexistence, and as we consider possible steps to take in the future, we would do well to recognize and build on the resources and strengths that already exist within our community.

III. Indications of Challenges

In spite of the values, initiatives, clubs, and offices that support community and coexistence on campus, there are indicators that Brandeis faces challenges in these areas.

Some of the challenges Brandeis faces are unique. Some are similar to those faced by other institutions. We believe strongly, however, that even in cases where similar challenges are prevalent in many other communities, Brandeis has the responsibility to grapple with them and to seek creative ways to address them. As a world-class educational institution with a strong historical commitment to social justice, Brandeis has an opportunity to be a model for others. In that spirit, we turn to focus on the challenges Brandeis faces.

A. Indicators of Differential Rates of Student Satisfaction

On the class of 2001 senior survey, students were asked how satisfied they were with twelve different aspects of campus life. Over half of Jewish students, compared with 37% of non-Jewish students, were “very” or “generally” satisfied with the sense of community at Brandeis. Overall, less than half of the respondents (44%) were satisfied with the sense

of community. In addition, less than half of the respondents were satisfied with the climate for minority students on campus (44%) and with Brandeis' ethnic/racial diversity (46%). Only 32% of non-white students were satisfied with this last factor. Students also reported that their social lives on campus were less than satisfying, with only 40% of non-white students expressing satisfaction, compared with 55% of white students.

On this same survey, we asked students whether they felt that they were treated equally at Brandeis and whether they felt comfortable expressing their 'true' identity. Many more white and Jewish students reported feeling treated equally and being comfortable expressing their identities than did their non-white and non-Jewish counterparts.

In response to the statement "I felt treated equally by others":

- 67% of Jewish seniors but only 39% of non-Jewish seniors responded "very true".
- 58% of white seniors but only 34% of non-white seniors responded "very true".
- At the other end of the spectrum, 9% of non-Jewish seniors (compared to only 3% of Jewish seniors) and 13% of non-white seniors (compared to only 5% of white seniors) indicated it is "not true at all" that they feel treated equally to others.

In response to the statement "I felt comfortable expressing my true identity":

- 67% of Jewish seniors but only 49% of non-Jewish seniors responded "very true".
- 62% of white seniors but only 42% of non-white seniors responded "very true to the same question."

In the area of satisfaction with religious life on campus, 81% of Jewish seniors, but only 49% of non-Jewish seniors expressed satisfaction. In addition, on the senior survey for the class of 2000, 39% of Jewish students compared with 27% of non-Jewish students reported that it was "very true" that they felt invited and welcome to events regardless of who sponsored them. More than a quarter of non-Jewish students (26%) did not feel welcome at all, compared with 14% of Jewish students.

We discovered similar patterns in the responses to an end-of-the-year survey given in the spring of 2001 to students who will graduate in 2004. The response rate was 41%. We note the following not as conclusive, but as indicators of dynamics warranting further attention:

- Only 68% of non-white respondents (compared with 84% of white respondents) were satisfied with their social lives.
- At the end of their first year, less than one-half of non-white (36%), non-Jewish (40%), and non-upper socio-economic status respondents (48%) reported that Brandeis had met or exceeded their expectations. In contrast, approximately two thirds of white, Jewish, and upper socio-economic status respondents reported that their expectations had been met or exceeded.

- 12% of non-Jewish (compared to 2% of Jewish) respondents and 12% of non-white (compared to 5% of white) respondents reported that it was “not at all true” that they felt comfortable expressing their religious identity; whereas 82% of Jewish (compared to only 42% of non-Jewish) respondents, and 70% of white (compared to only 44% of non-white) respondents, reported that it was “very true” that they felt comfortable expressing their true religious identity.

What accounts for these statistics? How are we to make sense of the generally low degree of satisfaction with community life, and the disparities between the reports of those students who belong to the Jewish and white majorities on campus and those who belong to minorities? What are the experiences that lead 13% of non-white seniors to report that it is *not true at all* and another 53% to report that it is only *somewhat true* that they feel equally treated here?⁷

B. Concerns Expressed by Members of Brandeis’ Minority Communities:

Qualitative data from focus groups, dialogues, and conversations can help us imagine the nature of the experiences that give rise to the survey results outlined above. In many different groups, the following themes have emerged as sources of dissatisfaction on the part of minority students at Brandeis:

- Many minority students were not aware, prior to coming to Brandeis, of the extent to which Jewish culture characterizes undergraduate community life. They experienced feelings of confusion and alienation upon arrival. Some felt that they had been misled and perhaps even deceived.
- Many discussed the lack of orientation to Jewish culture and traditions (holidays, kosher eating laws, Sabbath observance) once they are here, and say this has led to embarrassing incidents.
- Many feel excluded from and uninvited to Jewish religious and cultural events. Several non-Jewish students mentioned feelings of resentment about opportunities for free international travel available only to Jewish students. Although these opportunities are not university-sponsored, they are widely advertised on campus.
- Many minority students feel that there are inadequate opportunities for academic inquiry into the culture and history of their own peoples. This leads to a feeling that the university somehow places less value on the academic study of their group than on the study of the majority.
- Many minority students express dissatisfaction with the fact that there are very few (if any) staff and faculty role models and mentors from backgrounds similar to their own.

⁷ See Appendix 1, “Description of Surveys,” for more details about the survey instruments.

- Many feel burdened by pressure to “represent” their entire group because they are often the only member of that group in a given class or social setting.
- Many feel a sense of loneliness and social isolation at Brandeis, including, but not exclusively, in regard to dating.
- Many feel stereotyped, prejudged, or unseen by members of the majority. In many instances this is reinforced by overheard comments or hurtful interactions with students, faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Many feel dismayed by the lack of interest on the part of some majority members of the community in diversity issues and/or incidents of harassment.
- Some feel overlooked because their religious observances are not acknowledged in the Brandeis calendar nor supported by appropriate spaces for worship or clergy.

In addition to these concerns about their relations with the majority and with the campus community as a whole, minority students expressed a number of concerns about tensions *within* minority communities. These include:

- Misunderstandings between international and American students of the same racial or ethnic group, based in part on stereotypes of each other
- Tensions along socio-economic lines
- Conflicts between those members of minority groups that prioritize their group identity (sometimes sacrificing other passions) and those who choose to pursue other passions and explore other aspects of their identity
- Tensions between those who socialize primarily within their own cultural group and those who seek more diverse relationships

In the points above, we refer to “minority students” in general. While it is true that students from different racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, and socio-economic minorities on campus share many of these concerns, not *all* minority students share *all* of them. In reality of course, “minority students” is a very diverse group, and within and across minority groups on campus the issues outlined above are experienced differently.

Here are examples (but by no means all) of the specific concerns we heard from distinct groups on campus:

- Several African-American students felt that others perceive them to be at Brandeis only by virtue of affirmative action programs and therefore, assume that they are less intelligent or less worthy of a Brandeis education.
- Hispanic students felt that other members of the community have a limited and stereotypical view of their roles and identities on campus and in the world.

“People think that we are only either dancers or custodians,” a group of Hispanic students reported during an anti-racism workshop.

- Asian students experience pressures and stereotypes associated with being the “model minority”. In addition, even prior to last semester’s radio program, Asian women expressed concerns about being sexually objectified by men of other races.
- Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are aware of discrepancies between the opportunities available to them and their classmates who do not need to work during college years. They report numerous incidents of others’ insensitive comments and actions. White students from poor and working class backgrounds find that others assume they are wealthy because they are white.
- Homophobic incidents have made gay, lesbian, and bisexual students have fears about the degree to which they are safe and accepted in the community. They also wish that there were academic courses and programs exploring gay and lesbian issues.
- Several Muslim students expressed the fear – reinforced by comments made by classmates – that others at Brandeis assume they are prejudiced against Jews. Most Muslim students we spoke with also wished for a Muslim religious leader on campus.

Minority members of the faculty and staff echo many of the same concerns as those expressed by students. In particular, we heard minority members of faculty and staff express:

- Feelings of exclusion from Jewish religious, cultural, and social events
- Feeling burdened by having to “represent” their group on campus, especially as they are called to serve on many different committees
- The sense of being stereotyped, prejudged, or unseen by the majority. Feelings of invisibility and disrespect appear to be especially strong among those whose labor maintains the physical plant and basic services of the campus.
- The sense that for many members of the Brandeis community, matters pertaining to diversity and the improvement of relationships across differences are simply not a high priority, and that issues related to diversity are not given enough attention and resources
- A sense of uncertainty, among members of the staff and administration who are not Jewish, about whether their opinions are welcomed and valued by the Jewish members of the community

In summary, we can see that some of the frustrations and disappointments experienced by minority members of our community arise from the small numbers of people in their particular group. Other sources of unhappiness, however, emerge from the quality of relationships among the people who are here, a lack of meaningful interaction and understanding across differences, and a sense of exclusion from central aspects of social and cultural life on campus.

C. Concerns Expressed by Members of Brandeis' Majority Communities

Although members of the Jewish and white majorities at Brandeis indicate greater overall satisfaction with their Brandeis experience than do minority members, in focus groups and conversations they raise significant issues and concerns in relation to coexistence at Brandeis.

Range of Views on Jewish Identity of Institution

Among Jewish members of the administration and faculty, there exists a range of views about the nature and extent of Brandeis' identity as a Jewish institution. Like their minority counterparts, some wonder whether Brandeis is candid enough about its Jewish identity and whether non-Jews might feel tokenized here. Other Jewish members of the community have no question that Brandeis is a Jewish institution. They feel a sense of pride in its contributions to scholarship, to American education, and to the larger Jewish community and they celebrate the diverse Jewish community that is unique to Brandeis. Indeed, a number of faculty and staff members spoke with pain and resentment about the efforts undertaken in the 1970s to minimize the Jewish dimension of Brandeis' identity. Some expressed the opinion that the university still suffers from the ramifications of that period today.

On the other hand, some Jewish members of the faculty have stated very strongly that they do not consider Brandeis to be a Jewish institution, and would not choose to work here if it were so defined. They feel that such an identity represents exclusivity and parochialism, and paradoxically, in some cases, violates their own, Jewish-informed values of openness and social justice. Others feel that identification as a Jewish institution infringes on their sense of commitment to scholarship and rational inquiry in a variety of disciplines. Others fear that a more explicit embrace of a Jewish identity will make Brandeis a target of anti-Semitism.

Feelings of Being Judged by or Intimidated by Other Jews

Some Jewish members of the community— including students, faculty, staff, and administrators— expressed concerns about being judged by other members of the Jewish community, which is itself quite diverse. Students report worrying about being unfamiliar with aspects of Jewish ritual, about being scrutinized regarding observance of kosher eating laws, and about being seen as either “too traditional” or “not observant enough”. Members of the faculty and staff reported concerns about being judged by other Jews as well – about their opinions about Israel, about questions of intermarriage and conversion, as well as about religious observance.

Some non-Orthodox Jewish students express feeling intimidated by the solidarity of the Orthodox community, exemplified by their singing in the Sherman Dining Hall at lunchtime on Saturdays.

Feelings about Interacting with “Others” and Majority/Minority Identity

Some Jewish students come to Brandeis from communities where they are in a very small minority. Many of these students revel in coming to a social and intellectual environment where they feel safe and where they are supported to develop their knowledge of their own religion and culture. Some – including some Orthodox students as well as members of other Jewish denominations – find themselves socializing almost exclusively with others like themselves. On the one hand, this can feel comfortable and supportive; on the other hand, some of these students wonder if they are being exclusive and if they are missing the important opportunities for growth that can come with knowing others who are different.

Although they are in the majority, there are some instances in which Jewish students feel excluded—as Jews—here at Brandeis. One student pointed out that the Posse Retreat, a weekend retreat focusing on diversity and pluralism issues, occurs over the Jewish Sabbath; another mentioned that Culture X, an annual multi-cultural celebration and show, began before the end of the Sabbath and did not serve kosher food.

The growing Orthodox community (now approximately 7% of undergraduates) warrants special attention. Members of the Orthodox community experience themselves, in many ways, as a minority. Although they express appreciation for the ways in which Brandeis makes it possible for them to observe their religious traditions here, they also mention challenges, especially professors who appear unsympathetic to their need to leave early on the day before Jewish holidays or to miss classes on the second day of major Jewish holidays when Brandeis is in session.

Within the Orthodox community at Brandeis there is a range of views on matters of coexistence. Some students express little desire to engage with others outside of the community. Others are eager to be asked to join inter-group dialogues, although might feel awkward about reaching out themselves, and sometimes face questions from other members of the community about the value of participating in such groups.

Another issue regarding inter-group relations, is that some members of the Jewish community feel a need to reach out to non-Jewish members of the community more proactively, and to create more accessible ways for people to learn about Jewish history and culture. One graduate student expressed the concern that her non-Jewish peers seemed not to have sufficient knowledge of Jewish history to understand how important it is to her and to others that there is an institution of higher learning rooted in the Jewish community and committed to scholarship regarding Jewish life.

A large majority of the Jewish students, faculty, and staff who participated in dialogues and conversations, including those who direct major centers of Jewish religious life and scholarship, expressed a desire to see Brandeis become more racially and ethnically

diverse. This interest in pluralism resulted in some cases from people's personal interest in enjoying a more diverse social and cultural life, in some instances from a sense of responsibility to learn about others and understand them better, and in some cases from a recognition that a more diverse campus would allow the university to fulfill its educational mission (for all students) more completely.

Concerns of white, non-Jews

We did not do extensive research into how white people, as whites, experience Brandeis and feel about questions of community and coexistence. One group of non-Jewish white students expressed the concern that they were perceived by other students as being wealthy, even though many of them came from families of modest means and were required to work during their college years in order to make ends meet. Our final report will have additional data about the experiences of white, non-Jewish students at Brandeis and the role that they play in campus community life.

IV. Discussion

We have presented to you some of the key findings from the data we have collected about coexistence at Brandeis. Now we would like to highlight four major areas that the data suggest warrant further discussion: confusion about Brandeis' identity; need for deeper understanding of "others"; ambivalence about majority status, majority/minority dynamics, and the responsibilities of power; and concerns about coordination, leadership, and institutional learning on coexistence issues.

This discussion suggests possible causes for the concerns outlined in the sections above, and poses questions that require further exploration. In some cases, we introduce additional data that suggest explanations for the findings above.

A. Confusion about Brandeis' Identity

Brandeis University, as an institution, appears to send confusing and contradictory signals about its identity—particularly the nature and meaning of its commitments to its Jewish roots and to pluralism—to its various constituencies.

In past years, for instance, the viewbook distributed to prospective undergraduates made only minimal references to Jewish social life on campus, while at the same time, the size and cohesiveness of the undergraduate Orthodox community was growing. Similarly, in a recent staff orientation, only brief reference was made to Brandeis' roots in, or commitments to, the Jewish community. On the other hand, it is possible as part of some centers of Jewish scholarship or service on campus and to be only minimally aware of Brandeis as a pluralistic and non-sectarian institution.

Brandeis is a complex institution with accountability to multiple communities and values. Part of its mission is to be of service to and engage in scholarship related to the Jewish community. Part of its mission is to be a world-class research university in a variety of academic fields. It provides an environment in which observant Jewish students can feel

comfortable and practice their religion; yet it also seeks to be welcoming to a student body that is religiously, nationally, and ethnically diverse.

In the absence of proactive preparation, coordination, and communication about these aspects of Brandeis' identity, individuals are left to negotiate the meaning of its dual commitment (to its Jewish roots and to pluralism) on their own. This leads not infrequently to misunderstandings, incorrect assumptions or expectations, embarrassment, feelings of exclusion, and missed opportunities for educational interactions. Information about how the university as a whole, and the various units that comprise it, fulfills (or does not fulfill) these commitments is not readily accessible or widely distributed throughout the community. Thus, "myths" (notions which may or may not be true, but which are not well informed or generally agreed upon) about issues, including resource distribution, demographics, and university practices, are common.

Members of the administration and faculty who are not Jewish become confused by the complex range of feelings and opinions about Brandeis' Jewish identity on the part of Jewish faculty and administrators, discussed above. Several of them have expressed dismay about the ambivalence with which Jewish members of the community embrace the Jewish aspects of the institution's identity. Many non-Jews take pride in supporting Brandeis *as* a Jewish institution, and feel frustrated with Jews who seem less willing to do so. They wonder: "Why say *Jewish-sponsored* rather than *Jewish*?" "Why say *Jewish-sponsored*, and then take it back by saying *non-sectarian*?" Other non-Jewish members of the community have expressed a desire for the Brandeis environment to be *less* dominated by Jewish cultural and religious life.

The various conceptions, and the confusion, among non-Jewish members of the community about Brandeis' Jewish identity and the various conceptions—and confusion—among Jewish members all exist within the same institution. Different members of the Brandeis community are operating within the institution holding very different assumptions about the nature of Brandeis' commitment to the Jewish aspect of its identity. Because distinct units within the institution tend to operate fairly autonomously, these various understandings appear to coexist. But when these different understandings do bump up against each other, they sometimes create friction or tension, as individuals find themselves unprepared for particular encounters, unaware of each other's sensitivities, or disappointed by unmet expectations.

Jewish and non-Jewish community members repeatedly sought some clarification in regard to the institution's Jewish identity. They asked: Is Brandeis Jewish in the way that Howard University is Black? Or the way Haverford College is Quaker? Or the way Boston College is Catholic? Without needing it to fit into one of these models precisely, people were asking for guidance in understanding Brandeis' relationship to its Jewish roots. While Brandeis can and always will mean different things to different people, these different experiences and visions need to be acknowledged, discussed, and to some extent managed or reconciled, so that they do not collide with each other in harmful ways.

Conversations about the nature of Brandeis' commitment to its Jewish roots appear to be rare. Conversations about pluralism and diversity, on the other hand, are frequent but generally take place as if Brandeis did not also have a commitment to its Jewish roots.

It is critical, then, that Brandeis address these commitments—to its Jewish roots and to pluralism—*simultaneously* and that it begin to ask key questions about how these two commitments can reinforce each other, but also, realistically, how they shape, and constrain, each other. How can they be calibrated to create the strongest possible educational environment and allow for Brandeis to accomplish its educational mission?

B. Need for Deeper Understanding of “Others”

In the focus groups, conversations, and dialogues we have facilitated, it has become clear that members of different identity groups on campus often have a relatively minimal and superficial understanding of what comprises the identity of the other. In general, people feel unprepared to discuss sensitive issues constructively, or to engage productively with conflict within the community.

Racial, religious, cultural, gender, class, and sexual identities are extremely complex. They are shaped by socialization, historical events, and personal histories and choices. Members of the Brandeis community often reveal themselves to be unaware of the complexities and sensitivities that are central to (and often taken as “givens” by) those who are different from them. These complexities – what we might refer to as the social psychology of various groups – include the image a group has of itself and the fears it has about how it is perceived by others, the vocabulary it uses to describe itself, the meanings it gives to the historical injustices (and privileges) that have shaped its evolution, and the different sub-communities that make up the group. In the absence of understanding these aspects of another group's identity, it is likely that people unintentionally hurt each other, through words or silences, actions or omissions.

Although there are important exceptions, in general, pluralism and diversity programs at Brandeis tend to focus on learning about each other's customs and rituals through dance, music, food, and celebrations. Less frequently, programs address issues of painful history. Rarely are there opportunities for people to share how they personally relate to the legacies of their own cultures and histories, and how these legacies affect their participation in and feelings about the Brandeis community. Rarely are there opportunities for people to become aware of the range of feelings others have toward their own communities and cultures. What feelings of shame, rage, or fear might people be carrying because of an historical or current injustice? What elements of their own culture are individuals struggling to change, and of which elements are they most proud? How do people imagine others see them, and how can they minimize the chance that such projections will interfere with conversation?

The paucity of constructive conversations about difficult issues such as these is not limited to students. Several members of the faculty, staff, and administration have confided that even around important policy decisions regarding diversity, there were few opportunities for conversations that were exploratory, or helpful to them in reviewing and

revising policies. Participants in faculty, staff, and administrator dialogues and focus groups repeatedly commented on how rarely they engage in conversations about questions of coexistence and diversity – especially about inter-group relations among faculty and staff themselves.

Conversations among faculty and staff are lacking not only between members of different religious and racial groups, but within groups as well. For instance, although there is one group of undergraduate Jewish students devoted to conversation among Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and secular Jews, there is no comparable open forum for Jewish faculty, staff, and administrators. If such conversations take place within departments, the results of such deliberations are not shared with the larger community.

Why are there so few deeper conversations about issues of difference?

Fear of Judgments

One factor that might account for (and also result from) the limited numbers of meaningful conversations on difficult issues is the fear of being judged by members of one's own sub-group. For instance, 58% of seniors in the class of 2001 reported feeling judged or stereotyped by members of their own group, with 19% indicating that this is "very true" for them.

Emphasis on Action Rather than Understanding or Relationships

It has been striking, in our dialogue groups, that people's patience for and willingness to invest time in getting to know each other—in understanding the dynamics beneath the surface of the campus— appears to be quite low. Talking and listening were seen as vehicles for framing action rather than as having intrinsic value. Several people indicated that relationship-building is not, in itself, important enough to warrant an investment of time; dialogue would be seen as worthwhile only if it leads to immediate action.

Emphasis on Individual Achievement Rather than Relationship-Building

One of the four pillars upon which Brandeis stands is a commitment to excellence. Our view of excellence often seems to be interpreted in terms of individual achievement rather than the building of community and strengthening of relationships across difference. Many members of the Brandeis community will recognize the sense of being too busy to engage in conversation with colleagues – even when such conversations are invigorating, insight-producing, and relevant to pressing scholarly or professional concerns. The reward structure for members of the faculty, and to a large extent for staff and students, in many ways favors individual achievement over investment in community.

Fear of Being Seen as Anti-Semitic

Members of the Brandeis community often refrain from raising and dealing with difficult issues, from confronting differences, and from acknowledging hurts. Several non-Jewish members of the community have mentioned that they hesitate to raise criticisms for fear of being seen as anti-Semitic.

Insufficient Skills to Support Constructive Engagement with Difficult Issues

At Brandeis, as in many communities, it seems that when a difficult or hurtful issue arises, students (and perhaps faculty and staff as well) tend not to confront the issue, but rather to withdraw from the relationship or revert to more superficial conversations. In such situations, interactions tend to be characterized by politeness rather than a satisfying give-and-take or genuine learning. On many occasions, students have reported that they overheard a disparaging or insensitive comment, or felt they were the target of a biased attitude, and chose to pull back from a relationship rather than communicating how badly they were hurt, working through the feelings, and perhaps increasing understanding. Several comments indicate that although students desire more intense conversations about challenging issues, they feel unprepared to engage constructively with differences, to explore painful historical legacies, or to resolve a conflict.

C. Ambivalence about Majority Status, Majority/Minority Dynamics, and Responsibilities of Power

In our research, members of the Brandeis community differed in their willingness to acknowledge “majority” and “minority” groups within the university as well as in their definitions of these terms. Students variously defined Brandeis’ majority as white, Jewish, American, heterosexual, and of a high socio-economic status – often in contrast to salient features of their own identities. However it might be defined, however, there is a general reluctance among students, members of the faculty, and administrators alike to associate themselves with the majority and to discuss and embrace the responsibilities that may come along with the corresponding privileges.

In our conversations with students, this was pervasive. If a student was obviously a member of one majority (i.e. white or Jewish) they often mentioned other ways in which they are or have been a minority. For example, some Jewish students have pointed out that they feel like members of a minority because they are not from wealthy families. One Jewish student said she is in the minority as an activist on campus. Orthodox Jews have expressed feeling like a minority because they are easily identifiable on campus and have special needs that are not always met by the university. White students who met as part of an anti-racism workshop emphasized their minority status within the Brandeis community as non-Jews or non-wealthy people.

Other Jewish students – as well as members of the faculty and staff – point out that they *are* in the minority in the “real world”. In facilitated conversations, leaders of Jewish centers on campus began to grapple with the significance of their status as a minority “out there” and a majority here on campus. For instance, one member of the faculty felt that Brandeis should do more to legitimize—and encourage—Jewish students to focus on Jewish studies, issues, and culture during their time here. We need to recognize, this person argued, that many Jewish students come to Brandeis precisely because of the unique access to Jewish religious and cultural programs and the vibrant Jewish social life. At the same time, this faculty member felt that many of these same Jewish students are interested in pluralism and would be happy to see a more diverse campus. What message(s) should the university be sending to such students about the relative

importance of developing their Jewish identities and reaching out to those who are different?

Recently, a Jewish leader of the university, acknowledging Brandeis' commitments to scholarship and service in relation to the Jewish community, argued that all members of the community are free to participate in such centers or free not to do so, as they see fit.

One question is whether this approach is sufficient for enabling the kind of coexistence we would like to see at Brandeis. Should the majority members of the community take more responsibility in engaging the minority members of the community in their cultural and religious centers? Should they be aware of and sensitive to the impact that their centers have on the life of the campus as a whole?

In other words, what are the responsibilities of the majority in a given community—*even if they are a minority in other communities*—if the intention is to create a pluralistic, welcoming, and dynamic educational environment?

This is one of a number of questions pertaining to the responsibilities associated with power that warrant further discussion among members of the Brandeis community. These discussions will help members of the community to better understand the expectations that they do and can have of one another.

D. Coordination, Leadership, and Institutional Learning on Coexistence Issues

Brandeis benefits from a plethora of diversity initiatives, publications, fellowships, and programs, most designed to provide opportunities for particular cultural, religious, national, sexual, and gender identity groups to develop themselves and to create places where members of particular communities might feel “at home”. Some of these initiatives – such as dialogue groups and retreats – also create opportunities for people to construct relationships and enjoy meaningful conversations across differences.

Up until now, Brandeis has left much of the work of creating and implementing such initiatives to the students themselves. This approach has had many positive results, including the opportunities it has created for students to take leadership and to create powerful programs, effective in reaching other students.

At the same time, students are asking for the administration to take more responsibility for coordinating and providing leadership for coexistence work on campus. They want the institution to bear the responsibility for designing and implementing multi-faceted responses to incidents of harassment, so that students are free to play a role but not to shoulder the entire burden. They are also asking for more skills-development so that they can better handle conflicts and difficult conversations.

During their time at Brandeis, students will generally move through stages of identity development, and a coordinated approach to questions of coexistence needs to take that into account. We should work to create an environment in which there are opportunities for them to engage intensively in homogeneous groups when it nourishes them to do so,

and there are also opportunities for them to grapple with issues of difference and to pursue interests other than those directly associated with their group identities.

There is currently no office, committee, or person, however, with the authority or capacity to coordinate such efforts, facilitate collaborations among them, ensure that disparate programs are working toward consistent ends, monitor effectiveness, or assess gaps.

Only recently, and with temporary resources from the Coexistence Initiative, have student surveys included questions about inter-group relations, and have data been disaggregated to understand the different experiences of undergraduates according to race, class, religion, gender, etc.

In addition, the university does not currently conduct exit interviews with students who leave prior to graduation. Such interviews could be a valuable source of information about student experiences and perceptions of the campus community. This information could be used to identify trends of student dissatisfaction and to address them proactively, perhaps reducing the attrition rate.

By devoting insufficient resources to institutional research and coordination of multiple efforts, Brandeis loses opportunities to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of its initiatives and to improve them.

In summary, the data point to the four areas discussed above—confusion about Brandeis’ identity; the need for deeper understanding of “others”; ambivalence about majority status, majority/minority dynamics, and responsibilities of power; and concerns about coordination, leadership, and institutional learning on coexistence issues—as areas that warrant further reflection and discussion within the Brandeis community. Any actions taken toward strengthening coexistence at Brandeis should take these complex issues into account.

V. Recommendations

Based on our analysis of the data we have gathered, and our synthesis of conversations we have facilitated, the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence offers the following five recommendations to the community for discussion and to the president and the university’s leadership for action:

A. Articulate a vision for the university that embraces Brandeis’ dual commitments to its Jewish roots and to pluralism— a vision to which institutional leaders are prepared to commit.

The leadership of Brandeis University, including the president and the administrators who carry primary responsibility for the curriculum, student life, development, public relations, and human resources should articulate a vision for Brandeis that affirms its commitment both to its Jewish roots and to diversity in a way that is mutually reinforcing and nourishing.

The vision should:

- Address both the inherent strength of and the points of tension that exist within Brandeis' dual commitment to diversity and to its Jewish roots;
- Offer ways in which tensions between these two commitments can be minimized and in some cases reconciled;
- Link these commitments to the university's academic mission and to its two other pillars, social justice and excellence;
- Be consistently and proactively articulated to all Brandeis constituencies, in print, at events, and on the internet;
- Affirm the university's commitment to preparing its students for responsible and compassionate leadership in a diverse, complex, and interdependent world
- Affirm the university's responsibility to become a just and diverse workplace, where diversity of race, religion, and ethnicity are represented at all levels of the institution.

This vision should be arrived at through a process that enlists the commitment of a broad range of community members and campus leaders. The university's leadership should engage members of the community in creatively applying the vision and its principles to their own areas of authority and activity. (See Recommendation C, below.)

Based on this newly articulated vision, the university leadership should review the institution's processes for procurement and distribution of resources (including, but not only, resources for academic programs) to ensure that these processes contribute to the realization of the vision.

Finally, the university leadership should establish benchmarks that will gauge the institution's progress in implementing the vision. This will ensure that the leadership is accountable to the campus community.

(Note: While we find many reasons for recommending the affirmation of Brandeis' commitment both to its Jewish roots and to pluralism, we recognize that there are other valid "visions" that could be considered. Most important, we believe, is that descriptions of Brandeis be candid and that the image presented of the institution match closely the actual circumstances people are likely to encounter as members of the community.)

B. Once the vision is articulated, work with every unit of the university to assess or "audit" its current relationship to and implementation of the vision. Support each unit in outlining a future direction for implementing this vision.

This assessment or auditing process would support each of the university's units—including divisions, offices, departments, centers, programs, and clubs—to proactively assess its own current understanding and enactment of the university's commitments to pluralism and to its Jewish roots. It would also support each unit in making this information widely available and accessible to the campus community. The management of this process will be the responsibility of the newly empowered coexistence office (see

recommendation C, below). That office will guide each unit in collecting, assessing, and sharing with the community information including:

- Reflections on the climate of the particular unit for all of its members, including the concerns of members of various majority and minority communities
- the demographics of its staff, students, and/or faculty
- the nature and diversity of its funding sources
- relevant practices, policies and publications
- its mission and vision vis-à-vis the mission and vision of the university as a whole.

These self-assessments or audits will serve several purposes relevant to strengthening coexistence and understanding at Brandeis:

- They will initiate candid conversations about and explorations of the university’s vision and its implementation “on the ground.”
- They will collect and make widely available information about how the vision—and specifically Brandeis’ commitments to its Jewish roots and to diversity—is currently being implemented within each unit of the university. This transparency will make discussions about coexistence and diversity more constructive and will minimize the role that myths (partial or unsubstantiated truths) play in these conversations.
- They will enlist the creativity and energy of members of the university community in developing approaches and strategies for furthering the institutional vision that are appropriate to their own units.

C. Create and staff an office with the authority and resources to coordinate coexistence efforts across the university community.

This office should have the authority, responsibility, and resources to:

- Facilitate self-assessment processes described in Recommendation B, above, including data-gathering, analysis, learning, and dissemination of information about the current status of coexistence and diversity at Brandeis;
- Facilitate coordination and assessment of coexistence-related initiatives on campus;
- Coordinate institutional responses to hurtful events on campus, including incidents of harassment. These responses should utilize “restorative justice” processes, which seek to repair and restore the community, educate community members as broadly as possible, and prevent recurrences of the harm, rather than simply to punish the perpetrator;
- Monitor emerging coexistence-related needs and develop initiatives to address them;
- Serve as a university ombudsperson on issues of diversity;
- Acquire and make accessible information on “best practices” and models from other institutions and coexistence efforts;

- Promote opportunities for members of the Brandeis community both to develop their own particular cultures and to strengthen skills to engage in communication across differences. (See Recommendation D, below.)
- Convene and support inter- and intra-group conversations and dialogues, such as those mentioned in Recommendation E, below.

D. Invest resources in building capacities and skills for coexistence leadership, with a particular emphasis on members of the faculty, staff, and administration.

The quality of community life at Brandeis—our ability to build bridges across differences, to engage with difficult problems and challenges, and to thrive as individuals and collectivities—would improve if more members of the community had well developed coexistence skills and capacities. These include: the ability to listen to those who you disagree with; the ability to withhold judgment until having thoroughly listened to and contemplated all sides of a story; the ability to assess one’s own role in a conflict or a tense situation; the ability to speak to others in a way that does not raise their defenses; the ability to be a bridge builder between people who are divided; the ability to constructively facilitate conversations about sensitive issues; and the patience to listen for, and be sensitive to the needs of others.

Opportunities to develop such capacities and skills exist in abundance in our community. While the low demographic representation of some minority groups on campus is an important issue to address, we do not need to wait for the “numbers” to change to begin this work. Within our community—and here we should remember to draw on the resources of our graduate schools, which have students of many cultures, countries, ages, and experiences— there is great diversity.⁸

The university should invest resources in making sure that community members do not miss these opportunities. Specifically, it should encourage:

- Facilitated dialogues across and within groups
- Coexistence workshops conducted by professionals from the coexistence field
- Creative projects that use the arts to engage people in building community and addressing difficult issues
- Service projects that bring people into relationship while helping communities in need
- Further inquiries, research, and public conversations about coexistence issues

While efforts that involve students, or students and faculty together, are important, we want to emphasize the importance of initiatives designed specifically for the university’s administration, staff, and faculty. These members of the community cannot serve as

⁸ Drawing on the resources of our graduate school students would not only contribute greatly to the learning of the community as a whole, but would address the desire for more community that we have heard expressed by a number of graduate school students. Graduate student leaders, and representatives of offices designated to support graduate students, should be supported to think creatively about how graduate students can enjoy a greater sense of community, and, at the same time, contribute to the development of meaningful relationships across differences on campus. In our experience, many international graduate students, in particular, crave opportunities to meet American families and learn more about Jewish culture and religion. Conversations among graduate student leaders and various organizations and centers on campus would likely result in innovative and mutually beneficial programs and initiatives.

models and educators on coexistence issues if they are not themselves working on, and taking responsibility for, the institution's commitment to coexistence.

E. Encourage leaders of both majority and minority groups to have *intra-communal* conversations and dialogues to explore how they, as members of the majority and members of various minorities, can and do contribute to the realization of the university's vision.

As members of the majority, leaders of centers of Jewish scholarship and community life on campus should be encouraged to dialogue with each other about their experiences, dynamics, roles, and responsibilities in the campus community. Among other issues, this group should explore the following:

- Ways that Jewish curricular, cultural, and religious resources appropriately can be made more accessible and welcoming to non-Jewish members of the Brandeis community
- Differences within the Jewish community about the significance of Brandeis' identity as a Jewish institution
- Questions regarding the responsibilities inherent in the Jewish community's position of relative power at Brandeis University, and approaches to helping Jewish students engage in this discussion
- Cultivating respectful relationships among members of Brandeis' growing Orthodox community, other segments of the Jewish community, and non-Jewish members of the community

Leaders of minority groups on campus should be supported to have similar conversations—addressing intra-group dynamics as well as their relationship to the community as a whole, and looking at how they can most effectively contribute to the realization of the university's vision—in configurations of their own choosing. When such efforts develop from the grassroots—as in the example of the group of gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of the faculty and staff that recently began meeting to provide a support network and to increase their visibility on campus—the administration should be open to supporting them, providing modest resources that encourage and bolster this kind of intra-group dialogue.

We recognize that members of the Brandeis community hold many identities: as scholars, as members of their families, and as members of the human community. In focusing here on people's religious, ethnic and cultural identities we do not intend to diminish in any way people's ability to make choices about their affiliations and commitments. We do believe, however, that building respectful relationships across differences requires people to acknowledge not only our common humanity, but also our unique identities and the dynamics of power that inform relations among groups.

VI. In Conclusion

We hope that this report has been useful in stimulating creative thinking and dialogue about issues of coexistence and pluralism at Brandeis University. We hope that it has deepened your understanding of the inter-group dynamics on campus and that it has raised your awareness about the many different perspectives and experiences that exist within our community.

As already stated, this is a preliminary report. We are eager to receive feedback from every corner of the community—from as many perspectives as possible. After collecting additional data, further analyzing some already-collected data, and reflecting on responses to this report, we will issue a more complete and comprehensive report in the fall of 2002.

We hope that in sharing our tentative conclusions at this time we are supporting the campus community to engage productively in questions of coexistence and community at Brandeis University. We face several substantial challenges. Our strongest resources are the intelligence, creativity and commitment of our students, staff, administrators and faculty.

Appendix I: Description of Surveys

Coexistence at Brandeis: Reflections and Recommendations is informed by data from the surveys described below. All of the data presented from the surveys are statistically significant. Analyses to date have consisted of basic descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Additional analyses of the survey data, including multi-variate techniques, will be done by Fall 2002 and a more comprehensive report will be issued at that time.

Senior Surveys, 2000 and 2001. The Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence added a set of questions about coexistence and diversity issues to the survey annually administered to seniors prior to graduation. Students are required to complete the survey in order to receive their commencement tickets. This web-based survey traditionally has a response rate of over 95%. In that year, 56.5% of respondents identified themselves as Jewish, and 43.5% as non-Jewish. Twenty-one percent of the total respondents classified themselves as non-white. Of those who identified as Jewish, 6% identified as non-white. Among those who were not Jewish, 39% classified themselves as non-white. Demographic data for the Class of 2001 were comparable.

Class of 2004, Beginning of the Year Survey, Fall 2000. The Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence added a short section of questions about coexistence and diversity issues to a survey administered to first year students immediately prior to their matriculation. The response rate for this survey was 47% (out of a population of approximately 850 students.) Forty-four percent of students identified themselves as Jewish, 31% as non-Jewish, and 13% with no religious preference. Twenty-five percent identified themselves as non-white.

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Class of 2004, Year End Survey on Community, Co-existence, and Diversity, Spring 2001.

This survey was administered by the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence in April 2001. It was a web-based survey and included a cover note from the Dean of First Year Students. Three hundred and forty-six usable responses were received out of a population of 847, for a response rate of 41%. Sub-group information was not available; analyses are limited to responses of the whole sample.

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Class of 2005, Beginning of the Year Survey, Fall 2001. This survey was sponsored by both the Brandeis Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence and the Hewlett Pluralism and Unity Initiative. It was distributed as a paper survey along with the CIRP Survey during student orientation in Fall 2001. Students completed surveys independently and returned them over the first couple of weeks of school. Two hundred and sixty-seven responses out of a population of 743 were received, for a response rate of 36%. Sub-group data are not available for this survey.