The University of Richmond has evolved from a Baptist seminary into one of the United States’ elite Liberal Arts universities, building on its heritage of both nurturing individual spirituality and promoting inclusivity. For nearly a century, the Jewish community has been a part of the University of Richmond, as students, faculty, staff, volunteers, trustees, and donors. However, during that time, a sense of Jewish community never fully coalesced limiting the ability of the University to benefit from the richness of the Jewish tradition of wisdom, culture, and social justice. By realizing the Richmond Promise’s “spirit of opportunity and welcome” and the Office of the Chaplaincy’s “structures of welcome and inclusion,” the Jewish Life Program enables the Jewish population on campus to thrive while supporting the University of Richmond in its mission of providing the best educational opportunity to all of its students.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to articulate the strategic vision of the Jewish Life Program of the Office of the Chaplaincy at the University of Richmond.

History

Jews have been part of the Richmond story for centuries. By 1789 the sixth oldest Jewish congregation in the United States was established in Richmond. The Jewish community strived to be integrated in the communal and business life as evidenced by the presence of Jewish commerce in the nineteenth century and participation by Jewish men among the ranks of the Confederate States’ Army in the Civil War.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there was a Jewish student in the T.C. Williams School of Law in the late 19th century; there very well may have been other Jewish students who attended the University of Richmond in its initial location downtown. The real story of Jews on campus begins when the University was transplanted to its current location. By 1923, according to records of student body polls, we know that 3% of the students on campus were Jewish. Three years later, in 1926, Jewish students constituted 3.9% of the male student body. (Data was unavailable that year for female students).

Through the 1950s, many institutions of Higher Education – especially the elite schools in the Northeast – had admission quotas for religious/ethnic minorities including Jews. The University of Richmond had no such policy in place, de jure or de facto. Thus, Jewish students were able to attend the University of Richmond and did so in significant numbers. Many of these students, however, were local students, living with their parents and engaging in Jewish life only with their home congregations.

In the 1950s, a Hillel student group existed on campus and continued to be an intermittent presence throughout the decades. For a variety of reasons, robust Jewish life never seemed to take shape at the University of Richmond. Among these reasons: Jewish Life could be found off campus, Jewish students often preferred to acculturate to the UR culture, and the University offered minimal only Hillel programming.
Richmond Promise

At the time of the arrival of Dr. Edward Ayers as President of the University, it is clear there had been a real investment in the Jewish life of the campus community. However, the sense of a Jewish community on campus never coalesced and the identities of the Jewish students, faculty, and staff were never fully nurtured. In 2009, the University community established The Richmond Promise as the strategic vision for the University of Richmond from 2009-2014. One of the document’s promises reads:

“A defining spirit of opportunity and welcome to excellent students, faculty, and staff of all means and backgrounds, sustained through a bold program of financial aid, a dedication to fairness in all that we do, and an authentic culture of inclusivity that seeks and prizes diversity of experience, belief, and thought.”

This notion of inclusivity is a value that made room for a true expression of Jewish life on campus.

The Office of the Chaplaincy at the University of Richmond, under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Craig Kocher, adopted a new strategic vision in 2010, Inspiring Generous Faith; Engaging the Heart of the Community. Two of Dr. Kocher’s major objectives were:

- Create structures of welcome and inclusion for the wide range of religious traditions present on campus; and,
- Develop programming for students to pursue spiritual renewal, reflection, and critical engagement with their own experience and that of others.

In the summer of 2011, the Office of the Chaplaincy hired Rabbi Andrew A. Goodman, the first Director of Jewish Life and Campus Rabbi, to help advance the strategic vision and to build on the history of Judaism at the University of Richmond. This important step advanced both the Richmond Promise and the Chaplaincy Strategic Vision.

The Five Platforms of Jewish Life at the University of Richmond

Judaism has never been a monolith; there has never been a singular understanding of what it means to be Jewish. Judaism has been defined as a religion, a culture, a nationality, and myriad other ways. In order to create a Jewish Life program for the University of Richmond, awareness of the multiplicity of ways Jews connect to their tradition is paramount.

In order to respect the many ways Judaism resonates for students, Rabbi Goodman created the “Five Platforms” model. This model provides substantive programming in five important aspects of Jewish tradition. The five platforms are:

- Ritual/Prayer
- Study/Torah
- Social Action/Tzedek (Justice)
With this broad approach to Jewish life, students can access programming in the facets of Judaism that resonate best with them while also being exposed to other important aspects of Judaism.

The Five Platform model of Judaism is one that will resonate with Jewish individuals across the United States. This model is particularly effective in a university setting. For most, the undergraduate experience is the first time an individual is responsible for making (and living with the outcomes of) his/her own life choices. Guided by religious values and family mores, each student has the task of creating a meaningful, adult connection to his/her Judaism in a way that is resonant with the tradition. This can be particularly challenging because it forces a student to refine his/her Jewish expression from the community of origin to this new setting.

This work can be extremely liberating for individuals looking to claim tradition on their own terms. To empower the student to make these mature choices, the Five Platform model gives the students necessary experience and guidance in various important aspects of Judaism.

In order to understand the Five Platform model holistically, it is necessary to explore each platform as a crucial attribute of Judaism, and then delve into the programmatic possibilities of each platform.

**Platform 1 – Ritual/Prayer**

For many, ritual on daily, weekly, and yearly cycles is the structure of Jewish life. Jews mark sacred time, develop community, and continue their religious education through ritual. These rituals are often the most recognizable and identifiable facets of the faith. Shared holiday celebrations connect Jews to their heritage and can serve to increase literacy of Jewish thought and culture in the non-Jewish community. As a result, prayer, holiday celebrations, and ritualized gatherings are a crucial part of Jewish identity. We will engage the platform of Ritual/Prayer through:

- Weekly “Welcoming Shabbat” meetings followed by official or unofficial Shabbat dinners,
- High Holiday meals and worship as a UR community in conjunction with local synagogue communities,
- Holiday celebrations on campus when the holidays fall during the academic calendar, and
- Life-cycle rituals and impromptu prayer opportunities as they arise.

**Platform 2 – Study/Torah**

Judaism is a religion grounded in Torah, encompassing intimate knowledge and serious analysis of *Tanach* (the Hebrew Bible) and rabbinic literature spanning millennia. Judaism has always stressed study. In order to learn about our history, traditions, and rituals, study becomes an invaluable asset to those seeking to explore their relationship with Judaism. This informal education bridges the rich past of Judaism with the modern realities of the 21st century. Study challenges all students, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to engage with the universal wisdom and
lessons in Jewish texts, tradition, and history. Study is a crucial part of Jewish identity for college students coming to terms with being independent Jews. We will engage the platform of Study/Torah through:

a. Bi-weekly “Torah Tuesdays” program which encourages students to connect Jewish sources to challenges/ethical dilemmas in today’s world,
b. A study of personal heritage and Jewish history both academically and experientially,
c. A concerted effort to teach the messages of the Holocaust through a variety of programming that respects the memory of the fallen and explores greater messages of awareness and responsibility, and
d. Jewish literacy education for all students to remedy the lack of familiarity with Judaism in the dominant culture.

Platform 3 – Social Action/Tzedek

As early as the Torah and the Book of Prophets, the call for social justice has been the distinctive contribution of the Jewish tradition. In a world that is still imperfect and incomplete, Jewish tradition teaches that each person is a partner with God in the ongoing act of Creation. While the quest for social justice can be overwhelming, Jewish tradition teaches that “You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it.”¹ As a result, the mandate for works of righteousness and social justice is a crucial part of Jewish identity. We will engage the platform of Social Action/Tzedek through:

a. Individual and small-group service projects with community organizations based on the needs of the organizations and the interests of the students at any given time,
b. Long-term projects developed with local Jewish community organizations that address the needs of the Jewish non-profit organizations in the Richmond area, and
c. A connection with the University of Richmond’s Bonner Center for Civic Engagement where Jewish students will connect with other social justice work being pursued.

Platform 4 – Culture

Jewish practice encourages prayer, study, and acts of loving-kindness in the context of community. Life-cycles, holidays, meals, and life in general have always been seen as shared and public. As a result, the cultural and social aspects of Jewish life are, for many, a crucial part of Jewish identity. We will engage the platform of Culture through:

a. Meals and communal gatherings connected to holy day celebrations,
b. The development of the sense of Jewish community on campus whether or not connected to programming through the Office of the Chaplaincy,
c. A connection with prospective students and Jewish alumni when they visit campus,
d. Participation in significant arts opportunities when the opportunity arises on campus and in the greater Richmond community, and
e. Social activities that allow Jewish students to participate in meaningful interactions with other Jews on campus, in the greater Jewish community of Richmond, and with students from other Universities.

¹ Mishnah Avot 2:21
Platform 5 - Israel

Judaism is inextricably linked to the ancient Land of Israel and to the modern State of Israel. While there are emotional, religious, cultural, and political dimensions of this land that are often fraught, the connection to Israel is deeply-rooted and undeniable for most Jews. For many, a connection to Judaism is synonymous with a connection to Israel. As a result, Israel is crucial to their Jewish identity. We will engage the platform of Israel through:

a. Film, lecture, and round-table programming that address the political and religious complexity of Israel in an academically honest way,
b. Travel to Israel through the University of Richmond on the Chaplaincy’s Pilgrimage program and the Office of International Education’s partnership with the University of Haifa, and
c. Active participation in international travel opportunities to Israel including the Taglit-Birthright Israel program and Masa.

Strengths and Challenges

In order to implement these ambitious goals, the Jewish Life program will need to strengthen its assets and resources while also developing approaches to correct its weaknesses. The major strength of this program is that the Director of Jewish Life is fully integrated into the Office of the Chaplaincy, a vital and integral part of the University of Richmond. Therefore, partnerships and alliances can be leveraged across campus to help make Jewish Life programming a success. In turn, the Jewish Life Program can help other offices at UR in pursuit of their goals. Major allies abound at the University.

- The Office of Admissions shows that the Chaplaincy is fostering inclusivity for students of all religious traditions. From the beginning of a college search process, it is important for students and their parents to envision their identities being fostered as a part of the campus culture. The Jewish Life Program can help Admissions show that, in addition to the academic and social advantages of Richmond, students choosing to attend UR will not be alone in their Judaism and can strengthen their Jewish identity on campus.
- The Office of Alumni Affairs seeks to remain in contact with UR alumni. By nurturing opportunities for Jewish alumni to interact with current Jewish students, both groups develop meaningful relationships. From this bond, the alumni are able to support Jewish students through Advancement’s “Hire a Spider” program, a less formal mentoring relationship, and through direct financial support of the Jewish Life Program.
- The Office of the Chaplaincy has other groups whose programming, especially the campus ministries, is looking to support specific religious groups and foster an inclusive community. Within the Office of the Chaplaincy the Multifaith Student Council and Muslim Student Association are groups with similar desires to increase visibility and to normalize non-Christian experience on campus.
- The Division of Student Development is concerned with the holistic wellbeing of the University of Richmond students, including the dimensions of religion and spirituality. The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Common Ground share the desire to increase the
quantity of, quality of, and support to students who have been typically underrepresented at this institution.

- Dining Services, including the Heilman Dining Center and Catering, is accommodating of religious dietary issues to help students feel at home campus. As conversations continue, we are exploring purchasing kosher food items, creating special cultural foods, accommodating special dietary needs for Passover, and even discussing possibilities of having a kosher/halal/vegetarian cooking/serving space. Through education and increased patronage, we will raise the level of support for the dietary needs of our students.

- Jewish faculty and staff are incredible partners in creating a culture of acceptance in all facets of campus life. With official support from the Office of the Chaplaincy, campus-wide Jewish programming, and increased visibility of Jews at the University of Richmond, the Jewish faculty and staff members will continue to serve as partners towards fostering positive Jewish experiences.

- At the University, faculty and staff are encouraged to build interdisciplinary programming. New alliances are constantly being formed between the Office of the Chaplaincy and the rest of the University of Richmond. Through committees, personal interactions, and joint programming, alliances are made with Athletics, Communications, the Office of International Education, and Academics. These relationships enable the Office of the Chaplaincy and Jewish Life Program to better serve the needs of our students.

While there are many assets that will help the Jewish Life Program flourish, there are distinct challenges as well. In order to best succeed, we must not only be aware of these challenges but also deliberate and thoughtful of how to address them. The major challenges are: knowledge of campus culture, visibility, and organization.

- **Knowledge of Campus Culture:** The University of Richmond has over a century of traditions and a culture that is firmly established. In addition, there is the natural ebb and flow of the academic calendar that guides campus life. This great framework for college programming can also be a challenge. Being a new program and trying to create a culture of Judaism in college, Jewish Life can often feel at odds with Richmond life. It is a challenge to create annual, holiday programming with a Jewish calendar that is different every year – holidays that fall during breaks, campus events, or examination periods. To address this challenge, we must immerse in campus culture to learn what traditions are most important to the student body. Also, to encourage substantive holiday programming that does not conflict with campus life, we must plan in advance to ensure that students, faculty, and staff are aware of the sacred times for the Jewish population and accommodate them.

- **Visibility:** The University of Richmond is an excellent school with great prestige. It is known for its gorgeous campus, stellar academics, and novel opportunities for students. It has also been inaccurately characterized as a Baptist school devoid of religious diversity. As a result, many Jewish students probably did not entertain Richmond as an option for their education and, if they did, might have kept their Jewish identity secret for a perceived fear of ostracization. This challenge of visibility is twofold; students are reluctant to be openly Jewish on campus and Richmond appears to the outside world unlikely to nurture Judaism. To address this challenge, the active presence of Jewish Life
programming and Jewish students will normalize Jewish experience for those Jews who want to self-identify but are fearful of the climate. Through the continued publicity effort to Jewish communities nationwide, the University of Richmond will become synonymous with Jewish Life and will attract more openly identified Jewish students.

**Organization:** The University of Richmond faculty, staff, and student population is a smart, capable group of people. To encourage their ownership of the Jewish Life programs, it is crucial to have the participants in Jewish Life devise, plan, and implement their own programming. Because of the inconsistency in Jewish programming in years past and with no established culture of leadership, the Jewish groups on campus have suffered organizationally. It is a challenge to simultaneously set a high bar of strong, reliable programming while enabling participants to develop their leadership skills. This organizational challenge is present in Hillel and Jewish Law Student Association as well as the new Jewish Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Student group. To address this challenge, current leaders will be encouraged to succeed to create a culture of leadership within the groups. In order to promote ownership and leadership by its current members continuing on into the future, guidelines of expectations, volunteerism, and leadership development need to continue to be fostered in order to establish sturdy and lasting group infrastructures.

**Next Steps**

Significant transformation has taken place in just a few months. In this first phase, the Jewish Life Program has been integrated into the Office of the Chaplaincy, resources from all over campus have been given to the program, and the quantity and quality of programming have flourished. As a result, the number of students participating in programs has grown significantly and continues to increase. The Strategic Plan is based on this current reality. This first phase will increase the number of students active on campus and will expect to attract Jewish students with a deeper connection to their tradition. This first phase will implement the Five Platform Model of programming and will work on the challenges. This first phase of the Jewish Life Program will continue through the summer of 2013.

The second phase of the Jewish Life Program will be more aggressive in three specific areas: growth, awareness, and participation.

- **Growth** - There will be solid organizational infrastructure in place that will allow for student leaders to take primary planning roles. This will allow for the Director of Jewish Life to bolster the educational impact, ritual opportunities, and communal scope of the Jewish Life program. There will be consistent, annual events (like the Seder, Yom Kippur Break Fast, and Homecoming Shabbat) that will have high visibility among and eager anticipation from both current students and community members.

- **Awareness** - The literacy and appreciation of Jewish culture, sensitivity to programming on holidays, and awareness of dietary needs will be stronger. The goal is to increase vegetarian and vegan food options with the hope of a kosher vegetarian dining facility on campus. This will allow Jews of a more observant religious background to thrive on campus, as well as cater to Muslim students who desire halal food. Planning will include regular Shabbat worship on campus in addition to the home ritual of Welcoming Shabbat.
• **Participation** - There is the expectation that the number of Jewish students will increase. In addition, interest and student involvement in programs will increase on each of the Five Platforms, resulting in more students engaging in worship, educational opportunities, social action, culture, and Israel programming.

**Conclusion**

The vision, plans and solutions outlined in the Strategic Plan can be realized, ultimately to create a deeper sense of communal connection among the Jews on campus, thereby strengthening the Jewish contributions to the fabric of the University and broader possibilities for a rich spiritual experience for all Richmond students. By 2014, the centennial celebration of the University of Richmond’s moving to its current grounds, there will be a stable and established presence, high visibility, and deep pride in Jewish Life on campus.

Building from a history of presence, the Jewish Life Program will create an atmosphere where Jewish students can thrive. Through programming in the platforms of ritual/prayer, study/Torah, social action/Tzedek, Culture, and Israel, Jewish students will connect to their religious heritage. By leveraging the current strengths and overcoming the challenges, the Jewish Life Program will flourish while assisting other offices on campus to fulfill their missions. In keeping with the “spirit of opportunity and welcome” of the Richmond Promise and the “structures of welcome and inclusion” of the Office of the Chaplaincy, the Jewish Life Program strengthens the Jewish population on campus and enables the University of Richmond to better pursue its work – providing the best educational opportunity to all of its students.

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