A Message from President John Thrasher: An Update on Antisemitism and Religious Discrimination

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Dear FSU community,

I am writing today to update you on our efforts to address concerns expressed by our Jewish community and others and to reaffirm that Antisemitism and religious discrimination have no home at Florida State University.

As a minority group, the Jewish people have faced bias and discrimination and have been marginalized for centuries. It is one of the oldest forms of bigotry and is as intolerable as all forms of hate. The United States, the State of Florida, and Florida State University recognize the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism and its contemporary examples. I encourage everyone to educate themselves on the IHRA definition and examples of Antisemitism, as I have done myself. You can read it here.

In June, I publicly pledged to our Jewish students, families, faculty, staff, alumni and friends that FSU will continue to embrace them and stand behind our stated vision of fully valuing and respecting every member of our community. In support of that promise, there have since been a number of significant developments on campus to combat Antisemitism.

In July, the FSU Student Body Executive Cabinet adopted the IHRA definition of Antisemitism, and the Student Senate passed Resolution 59, which adopts the IHRA definition of Antisemitism, in line with the Florida Statutes 1000.05(7).

The students are to be commended, but we know it is only a first step in addressing needed changes in campus culture.

Therefore, FSU administrators, led by Vice President for Student Affairs Amy Hecht, have been working closely throughout the summer with Jewish student leaders, Hillel at FSU leadership, Jewish alumni and local Jewish organizations.

Together, we have created a task force to review Jewish student life on campus and develop recommendations for Vice President Hecht to consider by Sept. 7, 2020. We will conduct a student campus survey on Jewish student life at FSU and Antisemitism. The task force will use a questionnaire developed by Hillel at FSU as a basis for initial discussions.

The Division of Student Affairs also will institute annual training for its staff surrounding Antisemitism, religious discrimination and ways in which to foster a more inclusive campus for our Jewish students and employees.
We have updated the university calendar to capture all significant religious holidays and we will work to increase understanding of these holidays across our campus.

FSU also has reestablished its Jewish Student Union and is creating a Jewish Alumni Network to provide enhanced support and educational resources for all our students.

In the coming months, the university will hire a new Student Equity and Inclusion Director with consultation from various members of the university community including the Jewish community.

I want to reaffirm that this is a top priority. My university leadership team and I will continue to work determinedly to combat Antisemitism and unlawful behavior. While freedom of speech is of paramount importance on a college campus, so is creating a climate of acceptance and appreciation for the value and richness of the many cultures and ideas that make Florida State University such an excellent academic experience.

Sincerely,

John Thrasher
President