

THE  
ROAD  
TO  
*Renaissance*  
1923-2002



*Written by Jeff Rubin, Hillel's Director of Communications. The retrospective is based on documents found in Hillel's archives as well as on the work of former Hillel International Director Rabbi Benjamin Kahn, ז"ל, former Associate International Director Rabbi Samuel Fishman and Hillel Executive Vice President Jay Rubin.*



Hillel began in 1923 with humble means, a noble mission and a breathtaking vision: to convey Jewish civilization to a new generation.

Through the dedication of students, lay leaders and professionals, Hillel has grown from a handful of students in a rented room above a barbershop in Champaign, Illinois, to a worldwide movement with a gleaming new home in the U.S. capital.

As important as Hillel's size and scope is the organization's success in helping the Jewish community to thrive through periods of travail and triumph. Hillel helped the children of immigrants find a place in the American Jewish community; it provided Jewish education for those with little background and nurtured young Jewish scholars; it helped Jewish students overcome open discrimination on their campuses; it sent students off to war and welcomed them back to campus; it protested

persecution of Jews abroad and helped to open the doors of civil rights in the United States; it celebrated Israel's victories, mourned its losses, and spoke out on its behalf. Hillel has been the Jewish students' "home away from home," a place where they could share their fears and successes, where they could feel the comfort of a family while asserting their independence from it, a place where they could grow as individuals and as Jews.

And now Hillel provokes a Jewish renaissance by creating thriving, valuable, multifaceted communities on campus, serving as a crucible for student leadership development, and a laboratory for Jewish engagement.

It has never been easy. The great-grandparents of today's Jewish students came to campus with many of the same hopes and fears, ambitions and questions as their 21st Century heirs. And then some.

Hillel Founder Rabbi Benjamin Frankel was known for his warm disposition.



Successful fundraising, such as the event described in Rabbi Frankel's 1926 telegram, enabled Hillel to maintain its first home on the second floor of the Champaign, Illinois building on the opposite page.



Hillel International Director Abram L. Sachar (l. to r.) confers with Prof. Edward Chauncey Baldwin and Champaign Jewish leader Isaac Kuhn who played critical roles in the creation of Hillel.

In the two years he served as a rabbinic intern at Temple Sinai in Champaign, Illinois, from 1921 to 1923, Benjamin Frankel became familiar with the 300 Jewish students at the University of Illinois. He saw a generation of young Jews struggling to come to terms with America and their Jewishness. Jewish students are in “intellectual flux” Frankel told B'nai B'rith leaders in 1924. “As a rule [the Jewish student] is passively Jewish and he is not sure of his Jewish learning. When he enters the university and finds what he interprets as anti-Semitism, he ducks his head in the sand like an ostrich and thinks he has solved the problem.”

The lack of Jewish opportunities was so profound that Edward Chauncey Baldwin, a non-Jewish professor of English at the university, challenged Chicago Jewish leader

Rabbi Louis Mann, “Don’t you think the time has come when a Jewish student might educate his mind without losing his soul?”

Upon graduating from rabbinical school in 1923, Frankel accepted a part-time pulpit with the Champaign congregation under the condition that he could continue to work with college students. Baldwin, Mann and Champaign Jewish leader Isaac Kuhn set out to raise funds to turn Frankel’s part-time college program into a full-time organization. Mann secured the entire first-year budget, \$12,000, in a single luncheon with Chicago Jewish business leaders, including Sears executive Julius Rosenwald.

Local and national organizations already offered piecemeal programming for Jewish students. Frankel’s breakthrough innovation, the birth of



The student executive board of Hillel at Queen's University, 1942-1943, the first in Canada.



Hillel sponsors a Seder for military trainees at College Station, Texas in 1945 (background) and sends them off to war from Indiana University.



the Hillel concept, was to provide a structure that brought together a variety of student-run opportunities on a permanent basis under the guidance of a professional.

Frankel and his board of lay leaders adopted the name Hillel. According to Frankel's friend, colleague and successor, Abram L. Sachar: "Frankel thought it up and it was a felicitous choice. Hillel is a symbol of the quest for higher learning. It was a beautiful name, too. It appealed to the Christian fellowship that pioneered the foundation, since Hillel was virtually a contemporary of Jesus. In those days the Jewish community still felt the need for the Christian imprimatur."

Sachar credited the birth of Hillel to Frankel's "remarkably expansive, lovable personality, his genius for

friendship, his courageous idealism and love for a great cultural heritage."

Seeking more secure financial backing, Frankel appealed to B'nai B'rith in 1924. Frankel explained that "Hillel's establishment last September is designed in part to train the students for intelligent leadership. Through Hillel the Jewish student gets to know something about his people and their life. Responsibility for the activities of the Hillel Foundation is placed clearly on the shoulders of the students." B'nai B'rith adopted Hillel at the University of Illinois, undertook a survey of universities and directed Frankel to open a Hillel at the University of Wisconsin.

Hillels opened at Wisconsin in 1924, at Ohio State in 1925, and at the University of Michigan in 1926.



Florida State College for Women students build their Sukkah.



B'nai B'rith President Henry Monsky greets Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt at the dedication of the Hillel Sara Delano Roosevelt Memorial House at Hunter College as New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia looks on.

Tragedy struck in 1927 when Rabbi Frankel died of endocarditis after visiting Eretz Yisrael. He was 30 years old. Chicago Rabbi Louis Mann served for five years as the acting national director of Hillel. In 1933, Abram L. Sachar left his post in the University of Illinois history department to become the first full-time national director of Hillel.

Sachar was a skilled administrator who worked deftly with B'nai B'rith and Jewish Federations to secure support for Hillel. As a renowned scholar, Sachar created Hillels that were not only religious and social centers, but were also centers of Jewish learning. In an era when Jewish studies were rarely offered in an academic setting, Hillel provided them. Hillel not only earned the respect of students, it earned the respect of academia at a time when Jews were sometimes accepted grudgingly. Hillel took pride in the fact that non-Jewish students attended these classes, fostering understanding and good relations with future American leaders of all faiths.



Hillel's third Summer Institute in 1948 brings together Hillel students and professionals.

Havana Hillel, founded in 1945, sends delegates to the Southeastern Hillel Convention in Florida in 1948.



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An Israeli shaliach (emissary) discusses immigration with Rutgers Hillel students in December 1948.



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Hillel students at Queens College, New York, support the "Jewish resistance movement" in British Mandatory Palestine in 1947.

Despite the Depression, Hillel continued to grow. By 1935, the organization boasted 11 Foundations. A landmark B'nai B'rith study in 1935 found that Jews comprised 9 percent of college students in the United States, two and a half times their number in the general population. They were heavily represented in the fields of dentistry, law, pharmacy, commerce and medicine. Excluded from other fraternities by discriminatory policies, Jewish students set up dozens of social groups on their campuses, but few cultural or religious organizations. Their sense of social isolation was fueled, in many cases, by the fact that many were New York-area students who were forced to travel great distances in search of higher education. The report recommended a vast expansion of Hillel across the country.

Sachar continued to build Hillel. In 1939, he created Hillel counselorships in 50 locations. Led by part-time professionals, they were designated to provide Jewish programming on campuses not served by Hillel's 20 Foundations. Hillel opened its first Foundation in the East in 1939 with the creation of Brooklyn College Hillel. With an estimated Jewish enrollment of 8,000, Brooklyn College posed Hillel's greatest challenge and Sachar personally oversaw its creation.

As conflict raged abroad, Hillel students' attention turned toward war, their persecuted brothers and sisters in Europe, and, increasingly, the Jewish homeland. In addition to social, religious and cultural activities, Hillel students participated in joint activities with the Avukah student Zionist organization and raised money for the United Jewish Appeal — \$50,000 in 1944 alone.



George Washington University Hillel students perform "Purim Goes to College" on WTTG television in 1952.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower (left) attends the 1955 cornerstone laying for the interfaith chapel at Penn State University where Hillel International Director Rabbi Benjamin Kahn (center) delivered the invocation.

Before the Civil Rights movement began, Hillel professionals hosted an "Inter Racial Conference" at the Southeastern Hillel Conference, 1948.



University of Alabama Hillel students present Talent Night, 1954.



In 1938, Hillel created its Refugee Student Program to save European students by providing them with scholarships to American universities. By 1940 there were 64 European refugee students receiving a college education in the United States thanks to the Hillel program. Local Hillels adopted these students and helped them adapt to American campus life. The program continued after the war, providing survivors with a chance to start new lives. In 1947, Tom Lantos, a Hungarian Jewish refugee, wrote,

**“I AM PERFECTLY SATISFIED FOR HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY OF LEARNING, WORKING AND FOR HAVING A WARM HOME. NOW I CAN FULLY REALIZE WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS WORD HILLEL! – GOODNESS, WARMTH AND LOVE, THOSE FEELINGS THAT WE SO DESPERATELY MISS IN THE MORALLY DESTROYED EUROPE.”**

Lantos, one of 124 young people sponsored by Hillel, today serves in the U.S. House of Representatives.

After Pearl Harbor, a considerable part of the Hillel program was devoted to the service of military trainees on the campuses. Hillel worked with the Jewish Welfare Board to develop an initiative to cater to the social and religious needs of tens of thousands of Jewish soldier-students on 144 campuses. Every effort was made to integrate the trainees into the life of the Hillel community. As one brochure explained, this was not superficial “corned-beef Judaism.” At the end of the war, Hillel helped the vast numbers of servicemen and women who came to campus under the G.I. bill.

Hillel gathered 57 professionals and 53 student leaders together in August 1946 at a summer camp in Upstate New York for the first Hillel Summer Institute. Hillel opened its first Foundation outside the United States in 1942 at Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada, and its first Latin American Foundation in October 1945 in Havana, Cuba.



As the 1950s dawned, Hillel had Foundations or Counselorships on 200 campuses. In addition to a full range of social, cultural and religious programs, Hillels offered work-study scholarships and interest-free loans. Hillels embraced the new technology of television, giving students the opportunity to create and broadcast programs. Hillel leaders defied segregation to work with their black counterparts in the Jim Crow South.

The 1950s was a period of quiet growth for Hillel, but the 1960s burst on the campus to the sound of Rock and Roll. Hillel directors, working alone or with one staffer, were deluged by waves of Baby Boomers. Campuses that once hosted small Jewish populations became viable Jewish communities in need of Hillel Foundations.

In 1966, Hillel Pacific Regional Director Rabbi Jehudah M. Cohen told colleagues, "The students of the Fifties went to school when the stream of history was wide and moved slowly. Today, the stream is rushing through a narrow gorge. We are living in a period of rapid social change...." Hillel directors struggled to make Jewish tradition relevant to this iconoclastic generation. In the words of University of Illinois Hillel Director Edward Feld, "In an age when students protest against the establishment, Hillel is the symbol of the establishment."

Spurred by pride in Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, Jewish students created groups that championed causes from Soviet Jewry to Israel, Jewish feminism to chavurot, Ethiopian Jewry to the environment.

Writing in 1973 on the occasion of Hillel's 50th anniversary, Hillel International Director Rabbi Alfred Jospe observed: "thousands of young people, among them our best and most sensitive students... are searching for better ways to express and act upon their moral and spiritual concerns." Jospe issued a plea for the necessary resources to meet the challenges of this generation: "What could Jewish life in America be like in another generation if the entire American Jewish community were to share in the work initiated and supported mainly by B'nai B'rith in the past to provide the human and material resources that will bring the potential for Jewish life on campus to full flowering?"

But cutbacks to Hillel's budget forced professionals to do more with less. Programs such as the Hillel Summer Institute, Hillel professorships at some universities, and financial aid to students fell by the wayside. Jewish federations began to play an increasingly important role in the governance and funding of local Hillels. By 1988, Hillel as a national Jewish movement faced an uncertain future.



In December 1963, Hillel staff participating in the annual Directors Meeting pay tribute to President John F. Kennedy at Arlington National Cemetery

Purdue Hillel teaches women the art of baking challah for the High Holy Days in 1965.



Protesters and supporters rally outside as former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion speaks at a UCLA Hillel event in April 1967.



In 1988, B'nai B'rith hired a 37-year-old attorney and Yeshiva University dean to revitalize Hillel. As an outsider, Richard M. Joel could see aspects of Hillel less visible to organization insiders. "We thought Hillel needed a tune-up," said Rabbi William Rudolph, former associate international director. "Richard knew it needed an overhaul."

Hillel's rebirth was given additional impetus in 1990 with the release of the National Jewish Population Survey. The study shocked the American Jewish community with its finding that a small majority of American Jews were marrying out of the faith and not raising their children as Jews. Since an estimated 85 percent of American Jews attended college, Hillel was a logical antidote.

Joel worked with professionals and a group of dedicated lay leaders to strengthen Hillel. Detroit business executive David L. Bittker served as a bridge between the Jewish Federations and B'nai B'rith. Rabbi Herbert Friedman, president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, supported the effort and introduced Hillel to gifted leaders such as Paul Cherner of Chicago, Louis Berlin of Miami, and Neil Moss of Columbus. Early lay partners also included Barry Levin of Philadelphia, Chuck Newman of Ann Arbor, Ellie Meyerhoff Katz of South Florida, and Michael Rukin of Boston.

Everything began to change. Hillel bolstered student, professional and lay leaders by providing them with training and encouraging them to take ownership of the organization locally and internationally. Hillel established a process of accreditation to provide universal standards of excellence throughout the system. A new Hillel logo was created that formed the Hebrew letters for Hillel into a dynamic flame. And to underscore a desire to engage all Jews on campus and beyond, Hillel adopted a new mission statement: "Maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews."



Hillel activists take "Shalom" on the road after a regional conference in March 1970.



Students study a portion of the Talmud following Shabbat services in the early 1970s.



Pittsburgh Hillel's beautiful new facility is one of 20 new buildings built or substantially renovated in the last 15 years. Another 11 buildings are currently underway.



Moscow Hillel, one of 27 Foundations in the former Soviet Union, sponsors the Yachad women's choir.

In the background, Hillel's annual Charles Schusterman International Student Leaders Assembly brings together over 400 students with Hillel professionals and top community leaders for five days of Jewish celebration and intensive leadership development.

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, an independent non-profit organization, was created in 1994. A Board of Directors comprising representatives of Hillel stakeholders – lay leaders, students, professionals, Federations, B'nai B'rith – was created to oversee the organization. Local Hillel Foundations were encouraged to create their own boards of directors based on the international model. The crucial partnership of students,

professionals and lay leaders developed around the world.

Hillel's international stature grew in 1994 when renowned Jewish leader Edgar M. Bronfman, the chairman of the board of the Seagram Corporation and chair of the World Jewish Congress, became chair of the newly formed Hillel International Board of Governors. Bronfman and Joel undertook an international campaign to provoke "Jewish renaissance," a joyful



As part of a 1988 initiative to free Soviet Jewry, newly appointed Hillel International Director Richard M. Joel (at left) and Associate International Director Rabbi William Rudolph (center) facilitate a call between former refuseniks and their family in the Soviet Union.

Through her support for a variety of Hillel programs, International Board of Governors Co-Chair Lynn Schusterman has fostered a renaissance of Jewish life in the former Soviet republic of Moldova, throughout the former Soviet Union, and around the world.



President and International Director Richard M. Joel and International Board of Governors Chairman Edgar M. Bronfman join with Uruguay Hillel President Marcelo Cynovich (third from left), Jewish Agency officials and other Latin American Jewish leaders to open Hillel in Uruguay in 2001.

celebration of Jewish life and the strengthening of Jewish communities on campuses and beyond. “We thought about the term ‘rejuvenation,’” Bronfman often jokes, “but it was not only a bad pun. We found that it was not as compelling among students. What we are trying to do with Hillel is to reawaken our knowledge of Judaism and by doing so, to reawaken our pride.”

Philanthropist Michael Steinhardt became co-chair of the Board of Governors in 1994. Steinhardt and his wife Judy also launched the Jewish Campus Service Corps, a bold innovation in Jewish life. The Steinhardt JCSC Fellows are recent college graduates hired to work on campuses to engage uninvolved Jewish students. Never before had such a significant level of resources been systematically invested to engage inactive Jewish students on college campuses. By the year 2002, JCSC Fellows were active on 100 campuses, including Israel and Uruguay.

According to the landmark 2001 Hillel-University of California Los Angeles study *America’s Jewish Freshmen*, a majority of young Jews attend schools away from home and come to campus more interested in politics, culture and social life than in spirituality. Hillel finds ways to engage these young people through activities that interest them – activities that help them move forward on their own Jewish journeys. Hillel’s “engagement” philosophy seeks

to meet Jewish students where they are, and to help them explore and celebrate their Jewishness.

Hillel is also engaging Jewish students on campuses with small Jewish populations through the Soref Initiative for Emerging Campuses. The Soref Initiative connects these students with Jewish resources and opportunities that are not available on their campuses. Students served by the Soref Initiative at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point hosted a Shabbaton for Jewish students from Queens College soon after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. “The cadets said they would go on with their military education with greater fervor, now that they had a goal in mind. Their morale was unbelievable,” said Queens College senior Kate

### Hillel International Directors

Rabbi Benjamin Frankel	1925 - 1927
Dr. Louis L. Mann	1928 - 1933
Dr. Abram L. Sachar	1933 - 1947
Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld	1947 - 1956
Dr. Judah J. Shiapiro	1956 - 1959
Rabbi Benjamin M. Kahn	1959 - 1971
Rabbi Alfred Jospe	1971 - 1975
Rabbi Norman Frimer	1975 - 1979
Rabbi Oscar Groner	1979 - 1984
Larry Moses	1984 - 1987
Richard M. Joel	1988 - 2003



Arizona State University Hillel students celebrate Passover.

University of Maryland Hillel students build housing for migrant farm workers in California in one of a dozen alternative spring break programs sponsored by Hillel.

Grossman. “We definitely felt a sense of solidarity with them.”

Hillel’s growth in North America and around the world has been supported by many devoted lay leaders. Charles Schusterman, of blessed memory, and his wife Lynn, have been catalysts for much of this growth. Mr. Schusterman, who served as co-chair of the International Board of Governors until his untimely death in 2000, championed the expansion of Hillel in the former Soviet Union. Working with the Joint Distribution Committee, Hillel provides Jewish celebration to tens of thousands of Jews in 27 communities through ongoing programming as well as through special holiday events.

Mr. Schusterman’s legacy has continued and grown through the work of Mrs. Schusterman who succeeded him as co-chair of the Board of Governors.

Hillel has also expanded to Latin America where it has joined with the Jewish Agency for Israel to provide a social, cultural and spiritual outlet for young people in Montevideo, Uruguay, and Buenos Aires, Argentina. Additional Hillels are planned for Brazil. Hillel works with leaders in these communities to ensure that groups respond to local needs.

“Argentina Hillel provides me with a new way to participate in the Jewish community in Buenos Aires and around the world,” said student Luciana Pattin. “I feel like I am part of a bigger family now.” Students, professionals and lay leaders from Latin America participate in Hillel conferences



Hillel Board of Governors Co-Chair Michael Steinhardt and wife Judy (not pictured) have revolutionized Jewish campus communities through the creation of the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps, recent college graduates employed by Hillel to engage uninvolved Jewish college students on campus.

and programs in North America while students from North America have traveled to Latin America to perform social justice work as part of alternative spring break programs.

Alternative spring breaks are one element of Hillel's growing Weinberg Tzedek Hillel program. Tzedek Hillel helps Jewish students pursue justice and transform their communities through coalition building, advocacy, service and education. They are conducting innovative programs in the areas of child welfare, literacy, hunger, homelessness and the environment. "We can build on the work of others, and even if we don't succeed in remaking the world, we must at least make the effort. We have to think of new ways to conquer problems," said University of Albany student Sarah Szymkowitz, one of 400 participants in the 2002 Charlotte and Jack J. Spitzer B'nai B'rith Hillel Forum on Public Policy.

Hillel students are also taking a more active role in advocating for Israel. Israel has always been at the heart of Hillel's work. Hillel supports Israel's right to thrive as a Jewish state within recognized and secure borders. Hillels organize Israel-oriented activities on campus: everything from lectures, to concerts, to Yom Haatzmaut celebrations.



University of Michigan Hillel helps to organize the campus-wide vigil following the attacks of September 11, 2001.



A University of Illinois Hillel student teaches in the Israeli town of Kiryat Gat during a birthright israel trip.

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Hillel students from across North America rally in front of Jerusalem's City Hall during the May 2002 Israel Advocacy Mission.





University of California  
Berkeley, 2002.

In 2002, Hillel organized its Center for Israel Affairs with the Jewish Agency for Israel. Hillel provided campuses with grants to organize events; created a speakers' bureau that sent Middle East experts to campuses across North America; and is supporting 40 Grinspoon Israel advocacy interns on campuses around the country. In July, Hillel and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation launched the Israel on Campus Coalition to coordinate pro-Israel advocacy among 25 Jewish groups.

In May, more than 400 student activists took time away from study periods and summer jobs to participate in

Hillel's Student Advocacy Mission to Israel. The young people spent a week learning the basics of the Middle East conflict and sharpening their advocacy skills. At a rally in front of Jerusalem's City Hall, Mayor Ehud Olmert addressed 400 singing, dancing Hillel student activists from across North America. "This was the most beautiful music I have heard in a long time," said Olmert. "I appreciate the spirit and strength you bring here."

Israel is also an important element in helping Jewish students to explore their Jewishness. Hillel helped pioneer the birthright Israel program and brought over 10,000 Jewish students to Israel in the first three years of the program. Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning, which designed the educational content of these trips, provides Jewish learning opportunities in a variety of venues, from the Internet, to dorm rooms, to traditional text study.

The December 2002 resignation of Hillel President and International Director Richard M. Joel to become president of Yeshiva University closes an important and impressive chapter in the history of Hillel. Joel leaves the organization with a remarkable array of enduring programs and institutions, everything from the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps to the International Board of Governors. These initiatives – and the partnership of students, professionals and lay leaders – will continue to advance the Jewish renaissance and to provide Jewish college students with vibrant, celebratory communities on their campuses.



Lenore Ruben (left to right), Robert Belfer and Jack Sultz, whose family are benefactors of the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Building, join together with Richard M. Joel to celebrate the building dedication on October 27, 2002.

Hillel is indeed experiencing a renaissance. More than 600 Hillel professionals are at work around the world engaging Jewish students. Hillel has built or significantly renovated 20 buildings in the last 15 years and another 11 are underway. In October 2002, Hillel dedicated the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Building, home to the Charles and Lynn Schusterman International Center, Hillel's first headquarters.

Never before have so many professionals dedicated themselves to the needs of Jewish college students. Never before have so many Jewish college students enjoyed the variety of programs made available through Hillel. Young people are expressing their Jewishness, "doing Jewish," in myriad ways on campuses from Montevideo to Silicon Valley to Siberia. They are speaking out for Israel, making art, building Sukkahs, studying Jewish texts, forming a cappella groups. They are dancing to Salsa music and teaching one another how to throw a Frisbee. They are building housing for migrant workers, tutoring needy children, and running Seders in the shtetls of their great-grandparents.

"Everything changed in my life when I came to Hillel," said Kiev State Linguistic University student Manya Basauri, who rediscovered her family's Jewish heritage through Hillel. "I had a blank page in the history of my family. I decided to fill that blank page. Now as a teacher of fellow students I am helping them to fill in their blank pages as well."

Around the world these young people are becoming leaders of an international movement that is celebratory, pluralistic, creative, engaging, empowering, and full of meaning. They are proud to call themselves Hillel.

Not a bad legacy for Rabbi Benjamin Frankel and the movement he started over a Midwestern barbershop.



Hillel International Board of Governors Chairman Edgar M. Bronfman and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg at the dedication.



B'Yachad, the Brandeis Hillel Israeli Folk Troupe, performs at the dedication.

Tufts Hillel supporters Perry Granoff (left to right), Michael Granoff and Martin Granoff join with Tufts University President Lawrence Bacow, Adele Fleet Bacow, and Tufts University Hillel Executive Director Jeff Summit.



