

DORE L' DORE

From One Generation of Commodores to the Next



Building Community one Shabbat at a Time

Ari Dubin, Executive Director

I am often asked why Vanderbilt Hillel dedicates so much of our resources to the Shabbat experience. Given the worsening economy and the need to tighten belts, people wonder why we continue to provide students with a free, high-quality meal every Friday night of the school year. They ask whether it would make sense to require students to pay for their meals, or cut down on the quality of the food, or perhaps even stop doing it every week. These are reasonable points, and we may indeed be forced to take one of these actions in the near future as we continue to streamline our expenses to stay in line with economic realities.

However, it is important to note just how vital Hillel's student leaders believe this program is. Student after student has talked to me about the importance of the program; they unanimously believe that keeping the Shabbat experience intact is the most important programmatic need we have, and are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure we are able to con-

tinue it.

The reason for this is as simple as it is profound: Community. Shabbat allows students to take a break from their hectic weekly routines. It is a time for them to connect with friends they haven't seen in awhile, meet new people, and eat a wonderful meal that reminds them of home. For some, the kosher food we serve is the only meat meal they're able to have all week. For others, thanks to our caterer Goldie Shepard, it is simply the best meal they eat all week, period.

American Jewry often talks about "High Holiday Jews," those who attend services once or twice a year and do little Jewishly the rest of the time. Interestingly, that is an infrequent occurrence here at Vanderbilt. We have found there are very few Jewish students who come only to the High Holidays or Passover Seders. Most are also involved in something else we do, and Shabbat is where that begins.

We are incredibly fortunate to have the ongoing support of

the Nashville chapter of the National Council for Jewish Women, which underwrites a portion of the cost of our Shabbat experience each year. However, even with this support the meals are still expensive. In an effort to help, this year students began to voluntarily donate a dinner from their meal plan each week. Vanderbilt Dining Services assisted in this effort by putting Hillel on Vanderbilt's meal plan. Student leaders take turns addressing the 80-120 students each Friday night, explaining how the program works and why the need is so great. It has become a bit of a competition to see who is able to encourage the most students to swipe their cards!

As I conclude my fourth year here, I continue to be impressed by the efforts of all our students. The strong sense of community they bring with them burns brightly all week long, culminating in a weekly blaze of Shabbat warmth...fortifying us for the week to come.

First Year Students Find Their Niche

Sam Libowsky '12

This past year, I had the opportunity to serve on the First Year Students of Hillel Board and as the liaison to the programming board. At Vandy, FYSH Board serves as the direct link between the freshman class and Hillel. Because we were the first class to live on "The Commons", and not in the other dorms closer to Hillel, we created our own events to take place on the Commons rather than at Hillel. This brought even more Jewish freshman

and their friends to Hillel events, without having to cross 21st Avenue and make the 20 minute walk across campus. We planned events such as "Chanukah Party at the Commons" and brought in speakers, including Alan Veingrad, former Cowboys lineman and Superbowl Champion.

Vanderbilt's vibrant community, Hillel events, and Shabbat services/dinner promote and help freshmen meet Vandy students from all years. As a member of the FYSH Board

and an active member of Hillel, I met a lot of students in the first week of school, many of which I am still friends with today.

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Life as a Vandy Graduate Student

Blair Lazarus, Jewish Law Students' Association, President

As an undergraduate at George Washington University, making Jewish friends was easy. My roommate was Jewish, my Judaic Studies program was pretty Jewish, and half the women in my sorority were Jewish, too. I wasn't involved in formal Jewish life at all. Sure, there was a Hillel on campus, and plenty of Jewish student organizations, but I just wasn't interested.

My transition to law school, however, was not easy. The crazy thing about law school was that I lost much of the autonomy I'd worked to develop in college. I didn't visit Vanderbilt before committing. I'd never been to the southern United States before, unless you count Disney World. I showed up on my first day and received my class schedule and, get this, I'd have all of my classes with the same group of 100 students, whether I liked it or

not. American Bar Association regulations and custom discouraged me from holding a part-time job. Suddenly it felt like my world had shrunk from all of Washington, DC to a single building at Broadway and 21st.

Vanderbilt Hillel, and the JMingle program it administers, has helped make my world bigger again. Making Jewish friends through organized Jewish student life (like the Jewish Law Students' Association) made me feel more at home at Vanderbilt.

I've made other great friends at the law school, but the strong organized Jewish life at Vanderbilt has dramatically enriched my experiences. There is camaraderie amongst Jewish graduate and professional students that would not exist if not for Hillel's strong support. Most of us would not have

met were it not for pan-graduate school and JMingle programming.

Some may remember the stressed out students in *The Paper Chase* or may have heard stories about law students stealing books from the law libraries. Those students only knew each other in a hyper-competitive environment. Vanderbilt Law School has a collegial environment overall, but there is a special quality to seeing my classmates at Shabbat dinners and Purim Shpiels. Seeing young members of the Nashville Jewish community at JMingle events provides a similar comfort. I get to break out of the law school bubble, and I'm happier and healthier for it.

I'm graduating in a month. I'll leave Vanderbilt with a great legal education and many people to keep in touch with. Some of them will be fellow young lawyers, and some

of them won't be. I've made some of my best memories with Jewish friends I met through organized Jewish life. Thank you to everyone who makes that possible. Your support has helped make Vanderbilt feel like home.



Blair Lazarus, (JD '09)

Presidential Address

Jessi Solomon '10, President

The numbers of Jewish Students at Vanderbilt are increasing, and to our delight, so are the numbers of students who are engaged with Vanderbilt Hillel and who seek leadership positions. Thus, we have recently expanded the leadership opportunities for students, providing even more outlets for the many interested students to take the reins on a variety of programs and initiatives.

We elected a new executive board in February. I serve as the new President, **Theo Samets** as the Vice President of Programming, **Eric Walk** as the Vice President of Religious Life, **Jacob Hirsch** as the Vice President of Programming, **Jessica Morse** as the Vice President of Communications, **Allison Gordon** as the Vice President of

Marketing, and Past Presidents **Jeremy Sandler** and **Gaby Avery-Peck**. This new board has a great deal of experience and passion with Hillel programming, and in its first two months in office, the board has continued to spark new ideas and infuse new, successful initiatives into the Hillel framework.

In addition to the executive board, there is also a program board. This board is under the leadership of the Vice President of Programming, and presides over the general programs offered by Hillel, from "Latkes at Midnight" to guest speakers at "Tuesdays at Hillel" programs (our weekly Hillel get-togethers). Additionally, there is the First Year Students of Hillel board (FYSH) that is made up of

first year students who plan programs that cater to their class and often occur on or around The Commons.

Some other exciting initiatives that provide opportunities for new leadership under the Hillel umbrella include Dore for Israel, the Israeli advocacy group on campus; Jewgrass, a bluegrass band with Jewish musicians; the Jewish Women's group; Hillel Alternative Spring Break; and a new Hillel Social Action group that will support and plan community service projects on and off campus.

The amount of interest for new Jewish student initiatives is outstanding. Vanderbilt Hillel is constantly expanding its reaches and accommodating more diverse groups of students with its pro-

gramming and opportunities. We look forward to an exciting end to the spring semester with our new student boards, and a strong start to the Fall 2009 semester with our leadership boards having one semester of experience under their belts.



Jessi Solomon ('10)

Alternative Spring Break in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Aly Greenblum '11

Where do I even begin? My spring break experience through Hillel in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was incredible. All facets of the trip—the culture, community service, and Jewish aspects were each unique and meaningful in their own way. Our trip to Brazil was my first service trip, and it was surpassed all my expectations. Learning about Brazilian and Latin American culture through local college aged volunteers made our immersion into the culture easy.

The Hillel volunteers were incredibly generous with their time and explained and showed us everything there was to know about Brazilian culture. The tourism was exceptional; we hiked up to Sugar Loaf Mountain, drank from coconuts on Ipanema Beach, and bought gifts for family and friends at a hippie fair.

More important than the tourism was the service aspect of the trip

which was incredibly rewarding as well. Our service site was about an hour from Ipanema Beach at the only favela (shanty town) not controlled by a drug gang in Rio. As the first of four Hillel groups working on this site, we were responsible for doing the preliminary labor on the conversion of a church into a cultural center for the children of the village.

We sanded, plastered and began painting the interior and exterior of the building. Even more rewarding than the physical

labor were our interactions with the members of the favela, especially the children. Most of the Brazilians had never seen an American before, so the fact that 28 American students came to their village to help out on Spring Break thrilled them.



Amanda Allen ('12) and Lauren Zaluda ('11) with a local from the favela

While working with the community, we learned that they needed love more than any material object. The local children had the time of their lives

playing soccer with us (they won) and helping us work on the community center.

The Jewish aspect of the trip was

also incredible. Hillel Rio was extremely welcoming and inviting. The staff and volunteers were there for every activity and seemed genuinely excited to be with us. Friday night Shabbat experience was fabulous. Local Jews joined us for services and stayed for dinner afterwards where sushi was served in boats! The atmosphere of the Hillel was laid back, relaxing, and fun—overall an ideal place for Jews to come together. I hope to bring back to Vanderbilt Hillel the excitement and ambiance of the Hillel in Rio.

I could go on and on about my experience in Rio—the service, Judaism, and tourism all coalesced beautifully and allowed each of us to gain so much knowledge about ourselves, our faiths, and the vibrant culture of Rio de Janeiro.

Birthright: 20 Students Headed to Israel

Adam Meyer '12

With summer 2009 approaching, something new and exciting awaits me. Every year, summer is viewed as a break from school and a chance to do something unique. For me, this summer marks one I have been looking forward to for quite some time.

I will be participating in a once in a lifetime opportunity to travel to Israel for free through the program "Birthright" with 19 other Vanderbilt Hillel students. We will embark on a ten day journey throughout Israel with students from Duke

University. For most of the students including myself, the trip to Israel will be our first experience in a land with so much history and rich tradition.

I look forward to getting to know 19 other fellow Vanderbilt Jews in a way that is so different from the academic context we are accustomed to. The bonds formed between us from this unique, common experience will be invaluable. I am most excited to site-see and travel the land of Israel with my friends. I cannot wait for my first trip to Jeru-

salem to experience the old city and the remnants of the second temple. I am excited for the sunrise climb up Masada as well.

Three aspects of the trip I am particularly looking forward to are camel riding, floating in the Dead Sea, and the Israeli traditions. I have never ridden a camel and cannot wait to do so in the desert. Everyone who has been to Israel says the Dead Sea is an experience unlike any other. I cannot wait to try my first true Israeli falafel ball and experience my first Shabbat in the land

I've heard so much about my whole life.

When we get back to school in the fall, I will not only have had a unique experience in Israel, but I will have shared this experience with a large group of other active Vanderbilt Jews. I, along with the other birthright participants, are thankful for the opportunity that we have been afforded and cannot wait to get on the plane on May 17th!

Pro-Israel Group Making Waves on Campus

Michelle Peck '09

Dores for Israel is Vanderbilt's pro-Israel organization, and as president, as well as a graduating senior who has watched the organization grow over the years, I can safely say we've had our best year yet. Our dedicated board has run many programs this academic year. From making our own hummus, to having political discussions with professors, to watching documentaries, to learning how to defend ourselves with Krav Maga sessions

(Israeli martial arts), there have been activities to suit every pro-Israel student. Fall semester was also a milestone as we celebrated our most successful Falafel at Midnight to date, attracting nearly 300 students!

While this academic year is coming to a close, we just completed our most ambitious project yet: a five-



Chelsea Gaw('11) at Israel Fest

day long, four-event Israel-Fest. In order to make this possible, we reached out to organizations both on and off campus, creating many new partnerships. Our festival included a speech by former SEC and Israeli basketball player, LaVon Mercer; an Israel-themed Shabbat; Falafel at Midnight; and a picnic on Rand Terrace. We aim to portray

Israel in a positive light to the Vanderbilt community, and we are confident that our program was a great success.

On a personal note, I am sad to be leaving Vanderbilt shortly, but am proud to see how 'Dores for Israel, as well as Hillel, have grown over the past four years. I am thoroughly impressed by everything these organizations do, and will truly miss these integral parts of my Vandy experience.

Religious Life Committee Forms

Gaby Avery-Peck '10

The newly instituted Vanderbilt Hillel Religious Life Committee started off the semester by creating programming for the Jewish holidays. For Purim, the RLC planned an evening of *Megillah* reading along with an event where students prepared *mishloach manot* (gift bags) for their friends. Later in the week Hillel hosted an incredibly successful Purim party at a karaoke bar. Students came dressed in their favorite costumes

in celebration of the holiday.

For Passover, the RLC worked to provide religious programming that appealed to all students. On the first night of Passover, Vanderbilt Hillel hosted two Seders a more traditional version and an abridged version. The second night of Passover, everyone joined together in one giant Seder to celebrate the holiday. Each Seder was led by various students leaders and members of the RLC. The RLC

also helped create a matzah pizza night and a chocolate matzah decorating night.

Aside from all of the holiday planning, the RLC is working on hosting weekly lunch discussion groups on the Commons (the area of campus where first years dorm). The discussions will focus on different religious themes and their relationship to student life and give students the opportunity to grab lunch with their friends from Hillel

that they might not see during the week.

Every member of the Religious Life Committee is excited to be working towards enhancing the lives of Vanderbilt Hillel students. We hope to expand our programs so that every Jewish student on campus can be a part of Jewish religious life at Vanderbilt.



Jewgrass group performs at reform services on Shabbat

Revamped Reform Services

Rob Friedman '12 & Danielle Kruglak '11

The Reform services, in order to add diversity to the Shabbat experience, have instituted several new techniques to increase appeal. For example, Hillel has made great use of the donation of many *Mishkan T'fillah*, the new URJ prayer book, from Camp Newman.

In addition to the new prayer books, the Reform service leaders, **Jessica Solomon**,

Danielle Kruglak, **Tyler Severance**, and **Rob Friedman**, have instituted monthly services during which a special theme is adopted. Previous Shabbat themes have included Camp Shabbat, Rock Shabbat, and Jew-Grass Shabbat, which featured a student-organized five-piece bluegrass band. On April 3, in honor of Israel Fest, the Reform services hosted an Israel Shabbat.

New Shabbat Program in Place

Eric Walk '11

This semester we made a great addition to our Shabbat program: Seudat Shlishit (the third meal of Shabbat). The program, planned in conjunction with the new Religious Life Committee, has been a great success. Each week about 10-15 students come together to say goodbye to Shabbat and nosh on free bagels, lox, and cream

cheese. After the meal, students gather to perform the traditional Havdalah service which marks the end of Shabbat. The program has been growing over the course of the semester, from a group of a few friends to a program that draws a diverse group of our constituents.

Hillel Staff

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Candice Perilstein, Director of Engagement

Tessa Wells, Program Coordinator

Daniel Shulman, Student Life Coordinator

Student Executive Board

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Theo Samets, Programming Vice President

Jacob Hirsch, Membership Vice President

Eric Walk, Religious Vice President

Jessica Morse, Communications Vice President

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