

## PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM

In this moment of heightened scrutiny and political pressure being exerted on colleges and universities, campus leaders are being forced to navigate increasingly complex terrain. Antisemitism is a real and deeply troubling threat that demands our urgent and unequivocal response. At the same time, there is growing concern about the weaponization of antisemitism—where accusations are leveraged not to protect Jewish students, faculty, and staff, but to suppress dissent, target DEI initiatives, or erode academic freedom.

**How can higher education leaders confront the reality of antisemitism while resisting its misuse as a political tool—and what does principled leadership look like in the face of these dual challenges?**



“Higher ed leaders must unequivocally reject antisemitism and all forms of hate and simultaneously defend academic freedom and intellectual discourse. This challenge requires principled leaders who cultivate the deliberate practice of reflecting on their own and others’ mental states—a practice that fosters empathy, perspective-taking, and mutual understanding. At Rutgers, our Scarlet Well initiative—prioritizing holistic wellness and training peer supporters—illustrates how structured empathy education can build trust, discernment, and solidarity. Integrating reflective practices into curricula, training faculty to respond to emotionally charged conversations with care, and valuing engagement with complexity, ensure institutions fulfill their democratic mission.”

Francine Conway  
*Chancellor, Rutgers University-New Brunswick*



“The weaponization of antisemitism to limit freedom of speech must be resisted. There is a long history of ‘the Jewish question’ standing in for whatever a society cannot tolerate facing within itself—from the threat that religious liberty poses for empires, to the contradictions inherent in blood and soil nationalism, to the unhealed wounds left by European colonialism and American imperialism. Campus leaders should seek to build a broader context for today’s conflicts and protests. We should provide support for individual students, even as we foster a climate that embraces pluralism, free expression, and respectful, passionate debate. And we can model critique of Israel as a nation-state—one with ancient roots and modern problems—with a deep commitment to resisting antisemitism in all its forms.”

Marjorie Hass  
*President, Council of Independent Colleges*



“Principled leadership must always begin with the core values of the university: a deep commitment to free inquiry and academic freedom. Expression is presumed to be protected unless it represents actual threats of imminent harm or undue interference with the operations of the university. Where there is such incitement of lawless activity, punitive measures may be called for. But universities, first and foremost, are educative institutions; they are not punitive institutions.

The educative mission of higher education requires more than protecting expression. Leaders must call out and condemn bigotry and racism, including the current aberrations of antisemitism, as inconsistent with the highest aspirations of the university, even where such speech is protected. By addressing prejudice from principle rather than pressure, academic leaders embody consistency, integrity, and mission, resisting political misuse.”

Frederick M. Lawrence  
*Secretary and CEO, The Phi Beta Kappa Society  
Distinguished Lecturer, Georgetown Law*

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## PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM *Continued*

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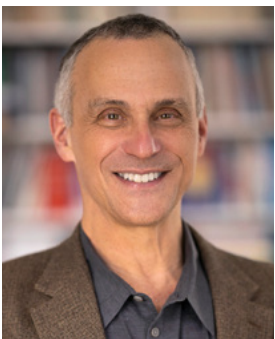


“ Principled academic leaders must confront antisemitism by naming it, condemning it, and doing something about it. This includes vocally opposing the targeting of American Jews for Israel’s policies. It involves publicly rejecting the portrayal of Zionism as racism while ignoring its parallels to legitimate Palestinian claims, for either all peoples have rights to self-determination in the land of their historic origin, or none do. And it involves joining in coalition to resist the politicization of antisemitism on campus that force changes in university policies and research activity. These efforts undermine academic freedom and risk intensifying antisemitism in the long run rather than addressing its root causes.

And we must lead by example, encouraging dialogue that moves beyond slogans that provoke and divide, using language to convey empathy, seek meaning, and promote understanding. Only through principled, sensitive, and courageous leadership can we confront antisemitism while upholding the intellectual virtues essential to a just and thriving academic community. ”

Andrew Rehfeld  
*President, Hebrew Union College*

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“ I’ve been very aware of antisemitism since I was a little boy when a fellow fourth grader told me the only thing wrong with Hitler was that ‘he didn’t finish the job.’ I reported this to my dad, and he told me to punch the kid at the next opportunity, which I did. I got in trouble at school, but my father was pleased. I’ve never thought antisemitism would go away, but then again, I never thought I’d see a Christian nationalist American government use Jew hatred as a vehicle to advance its authoritarian agenda. That’s what we see today, the exploitation of Jews by a White House determined to extort money and expressions of loyalty from higher education. As academic leaders, we must support students of faith generally, and we should celebrate religious minorities who have traditionally been targets of abuse. I will spend time with these groups early in the semester and make clear that they have the backing of the university administration. In turn, I will ask for their support in defending our freedoms from government interference. ”

Michael S. Roth  
*President, Wesleyan University*

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### Resources:

- [“Antisemitism, Free Speech, or Anti-Zionism?”](#) (*Liberal Education*, Winter 2023)
- [“Hate Has No Place on Our Campuses”](#) (*Liberal Education*, Winter 2023)
- [Ideology in the Classroom: How Faculty at US Universities Navigate Politics and Pedagogy Amid Federal Pressure Over Viewpoint Diversity and Antisemitism](#) (Brandeis University, July 2025)
- [Legislative Threats to Academic Freedom: Redefinitions of Antisemitism and Racism](#) (AAUP, March 2022)
- [Tracking Legal Challenges to EO-14188: “Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism”](#) (Akin, January 2025)
- [“Weaponizing Antisemitism”: Campus Speech Under Siege](#) (*Inside Higher Ed*, September 2025)