



Inspiring every Jewish student at Northwestern to make a meaningful and enduring commitment to Jewish life

Northwestern Hillel

25-26 Annual Report

Dear Friends,

Expressing gratitude is a core Jewish value. As we reflect on the 2025–2026 academic year, we find ourselves returning, again and again, to our tremendous sense of gratitude.

Even in a time filled with continuing challenges, this year on campus was marked by meaningful opportunities for connection, celebration, and growth. Together, our students supported one another while embracing the joy, purpose, and sense of belonging that define Jewish life at Northwestern.

Our 2025–26 year featured myriad moments of connection: Free Coffee Fridays and Free Tea Tuesdays, Wind-Downs and hangouts, countless one-on-one conversations, and even a sunrise prayer service by the lake. It was filled with celebration: Latkepalooza; our largest MegaShabbat ever on the turf at Ryan Fieldhouse; another wonderful Dillo Shabbat; speaker events with Alex Edelman, Tyler Pager, and Jackie Tohn; and transformative journeys to Poland and Greece. And it was filled with growth, as students deepened their Jewish learning through the Jewish Learning Fellowship while we launched the Hillel Leadership Initiative and the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue. Together, these experiences strengthened friendships, nurtured Jewish identity, and helped students build connections that will remain with them long after graduation.

Our students and staff are building a joyful community rooted in care, curiosity, and responsibility. They are supporting one another, deepening their Jewish identities, repairing the world, and creating a pluralistic Jewish community where every student can find connection, purpose, and belonging.

This is what your support makes possible.

None of this happens without extraordinary student leaders, including our terrific Hillel Executive Board led by Claire Conner '27, or without our dedicated staff, who are invested in the well-being and success of every student. We congratulate the remarkable Class of 2026, whose leadership helped shape this community through a year of challenge, resilience, and growth. We are also grateful to our partners—the Northwestern Hillel Board of Directors, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Northwestern University, our alumni, parents, friends, and all of you whose generosity sustains our work.

Before we close, we note with sadness that during the past year we lost three cherished members of our community: Jordan Nerenberg, Professor Mark Ratner, and Professor Irwin Weil. We will continue to carry forward their legacy of building meaningful Jewish life at Northwestern and beyond. May their memories be for a blessing always.

From all of us at Northwestern Hillel, *todah rabba*—thank you.

With love and gratitude,



Michael Simon
Executive Director



Scott Topal
Chair, Board of Directors





1,545
Total Students
Engaged in Jewish Life
at Hillel



3,356
Shabbat Meals
Served

30

Students
Traveled with
Hillel to Greece
and Poland



152

Students Participated
in Learning Cohorts



293
Coffee Chats



193
Students in
Leadership Roles

400

Students
Celebrated the High
Holidays with Hillel

Hillel Student Groups

Hillel supports a diverse array of student groups, offering students valuable peer leadership opportunities and the ability to pursue professional and recreational interests through a Jewish lens. These groups include: Challah for Hunger, Wildcats for Israel, Jewish Theatre Ensemble, ShireiNU, Tikkun Olam Makers (T.O.M.), Kulanu, Hillel Basketball, Kadima, TAMID, and Cats Who Compost.

We also encourage students to pursue innovative ideas and create new opportunities to discover and connect to Jewish rituals, culture, and values through our Make It Happen Fund!



ShireiNU A Cappella



Kadima



MegaShabbat

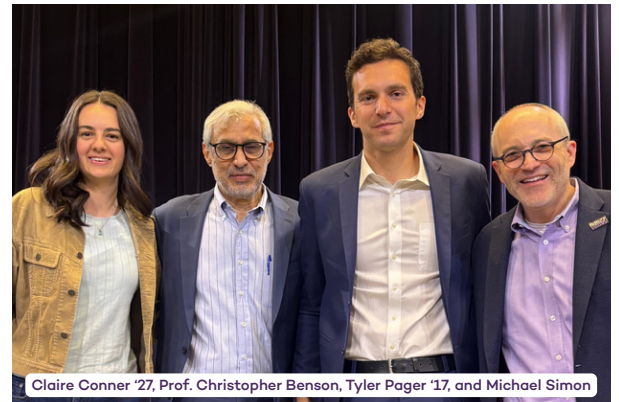


Each year, Northwestern Hillel hosts **MegaShabbat**, the largest celebration of Shabbat at Northwestern. This program, co-sponsored by Chabad and Olami, unites the Northwestern Jewish community for an especially meaningful Shabbat dinner in the heart of campus. **Our 2026 MegaShabbat welcomed a record-breaking 650 students and guests** to Ryan Fieldhouse. MegaShabbat gives students of all backgrounds the opportunity to experience the beauty of Shabbat, and this year's gathering reflected the strength and unity of our community.

Speaker Events

It is a privilege to connect our students with an array of speakers who come to campus to share their experiences, expertise, and perspectives on Jewish identity.

In 2025-26, we were thrilled to welcome authors **Sarah Hurwitz** and **Pamela Nadell**, who spoke about their new books and offered students powerful thoughts on reclaiming Jewish identity and understanding our shared history amid rising antisemitism. We also hosted **Haviv Rettig Gur** and **Tyler Pager '17**, journalists who spoke candidly about having a front-row seat to history. This year also provided special opportunities to welcome comedian **Alex Edelman** and actress **Jackie Tohn** to campus, both of whom enthusiastically engaged our students in Jewish joy and humor in ways that were affirming and inspiring.



Claire Conner '27, Prof. Christopher Benson, Tyler Pager '17, and Michael Simon



Abs Lev '26 and Jackie Tohn

"Having the opportunity to interview Jackie at our speaker event was such a fantastic and empowering experience. She spoke about bringing her Jewish values to the entertainment industry and brought an incredibly bright energy to our conversation. Hearing her story and perspective was both inspiring and encouraging."

"I'm so grateful to Northwestern Hillel for creating opportunities like this. Every speaker event leaves me with something new, and this one helped me grow as a public speaker while learning from an incredible Jewish woman."

- Abs Lev '26

Immersive Experiences

Alternative Spring Break: Poland and Greece

Our annual Alternative Spring Break programs invite students to engage with global Jewish history, identity, and community.

This year's journeys to Greece and Poland immersed students in vibrant Jewish communities, historic landmarks, and powerful moments of reflection. Along the way, they built lasting friendships, strengthened their connection to Jewish life, and returned to campus with a deeper understanding of our shared past and the resilience of Jewish communities today.



"One of the most meaningful parts of the Greece ASB trip was hearing firsthand from a member of the Thessaloniki Jewish community whose family was deeply impacted by the Holocaust, and learning how he helps to sustain Jewish life in the city today. Moments like that made the history feel deeply personal and highlighted the resilience that continues to define Jewish life there."

- Amelia Stone '27



Poland



Greece



National Hillel Basketball Tournament

"Connecting with students from other Hillels was the best part of the tournament. We were all there to represent our schools, but really we were there for the broader Hillel community. I gained a group of friends I wouldn't have met otherwise. It's amazing how quickly Jewish community can form around a shared experience."

- Levi Gillis '27

(Pictured below, right)



Seventeen Northwestern students traveled to compete in the National Hillel Basketball Tournament at the University of Maryland this April. They returned with new friendships, a deeper sense of belonging, and the lasting reminder that the Hillel community extends far beyond Northwestern.



Learning Cohorts

At Northwestern Hillel, learning happens through conversation. Students come together in cohorts to explore Jewish traditions, ask hard questions, and build relationships that last well beyond graduation.

Senior Series helps graduating students think through their growth into young professional life through a Jewish lens. Other cohorts build leadership skills, dig into Jewish text and history, or take on questions of identity and Israel. The cohorts below are just a few examples of how students engage in Jewish learning throughout the year.



Shabbat Hosting Lab

Catholic-Jewish Dinner and Dialogue



Campus Rabbi Jessica Lott and Father Bradley Zamora, Chaplain and Director of Sheil Catholic Center

Campus Rabbi Jessica Lott and Father Bradley Zamora piloted a new Catholic-Jewish Dinner and Dialogue series that brought Jewish and Catholic students together weekly to connect across differences in belief and practice. In a moment where that kind of engagement feels genuinely countercultural, students nurtured a deeper understanding of their own tradition and those of their neighbors.

"We began dreaming up this program a year ago, when it became clear that our students were yearning for connection across difference but didn't know how to build the bridge. Throughout the quarter, we saw students become less afraid of asking questions. Our students uncovered their similarities and differences, and through our discussions, deepened their understanding of their own beliefs, practices, and communities. What struck us most was not just what was said, but how it was received—with chesed—kindness, curiosity, and a deep respect that created trust and belonging."

Hillel Leadership Institute

Hillel Leadership Institute (HLI), facilitated by Executive Director Michael Simon, invited students to explore Jewish texts, reflect on their experiences, and learn alongside one another. Through guided discussion and mentorship, participants developed a deeper understanding of their values and left better equipped to lead within Hillel, elsewhere on campus, and beyond.

"HLI became one of the most meaningful and grounding parts of my year. It offered something that could be hard to find in the hectic pace of Northwestern: a space to reflect, to set intentions, and to develop a clearer sense of who I am—both as a person and as a student leader in Northwestern's Jewish community. Through it all, I grew not just in how I led, but in how I thought, listened, and engaged with those around me."

- Dina Drogin '27

Recognizing our Wonderful Partners

We are so grateful to our amazing community of parents, alumni, faculty, and friends who have generously contributed to the Jewish community at Northwestern and have joined us as partners in ensuring that Jewish students are empowered to express, embrace, and explore their Judaism throughout their time at Northwestern. Thank you!



FY26 Fundraising Highlights

1,614
Gifts

1,327
Total Donors

\$1,579,633
From Individuals

315
New Donors

\$147,500
From Grants

"Northwestern Hillel has been a constant in my life—from the moment I first stepped through its doors as a student to my role as a Board member today. It's where I found lifelong friendships, meaningful leadership opportunities, and a community that encouraged me to grow in ways I never expected. Serving on the Board is my opportunity to give back to the place that gave me so much and to help ensure that future students find the same sense of belonging, purpose, and connection that I did."

- Samantha Nissen '13, Northwestern Hillel Board Member

2026-27 Leadership and Staff

Student Executive Board

President
Jonah Rosenberg

Programming Co-Chairs
Lily Katz & Cayla Labgold-Carroll

Religious & Spiritual Life Co-Chairs
Gabi Bernstein & Emily Levin

Vice President
Callie Berthold

Outreach Co-Chairs
Conley Bolusky & Evan Weitzman

First-Year Student Cohort Co-Chairs
Eliza Goldwasser & Yoni Zacks

Board of Directors

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Ronald Bernstein
Callie Berthold '27
Rich Biller
Ron Blaustein*
Emily Briskman
Nora Cohen
Claire Conner '27
Lindsay Conner
Linda Dashefsky
Talia Dauer '27
Tamar Dolgen

Ellen Finestone
Lev Ginsburg
Sandy Goldberg
Adam Goodman
Zach Goldstein
Jennifer Gross*
Heidi Gluck Jonas
Eric Kahn*
Shelly Kupfer
Jim Levitas
Debbie Lobel*

Lisa May
Sammie Offsay Nissen
Hannah Newman Rodheim*
Melissa Saperstein*
Michael Simon*
Barry Slotnick
Scott Topal, Chair Emeritus*
Cydney Topaz*
Barbara Weisskopf*
Lisa Williams
Debbie Winick, Board Chair*

**Executive Committee*

Staff



Michael Simon
Executive Director



Jessica Lott
Campus Rabbi



Sara Bogomolny
Associate Director



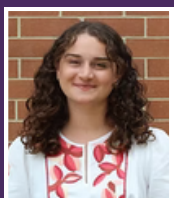
Ronna Belinky
Finance/Operations
Manager



Rachel Kline
Director of
Student Life



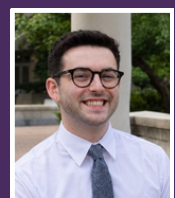
Audree Goone
Development
Manager



Sylvia Miller
Engagement
Associate



Jessica Nudelman
Experiences
Associate



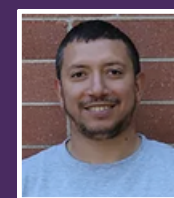
Noah Shapiro
Jewish Learning and
Communications
Associate



Tamir Haik
Jewish Agency for
Israel Fellow



Jacob Portman
Chef



Chris Rabago
Custodian

“As we reflect on one year of student leadership and look ahead to the next, we're grateful for the opportunity to help strengthen the Northwestern Hillel community. To both of us, Hillel leadership means recognizing the strengths of those around you and encouraging others to get involved in ways that are meaningful to them. This year, we saw that come to life through interdenominational and interfaith experiences, cherished holiday traditions, and honest conversations that welcomed different perspectives. Our Student Executive Board became a close-knit team, and those friendships made our collaboration both meaningful and rewarding. As we pass the torch from one president to the next, we're excited to continue building on that momentum and creating opportunities for more students to connect with Jewish life at Northwestern. It's been an honor to serve this community, and we're excited for the year ahead. Go 'Cats!”



- Claire Conner '27, Northwestern Hillel's 25-26 Student President and Jonah Rosenberg '27, Northwestern Hillel's 26-27 Student President



**Northwestern
Hillel**

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Inspiring Northwestern Jewish students to enrich their campus, their community, and the world.

