

# The Student Voice

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## "It Makes You Afraid to Go to Certain Colleges": Seniors Grapple with Antisemitism on University Campuses

# 73%

**of Jewish college students have experienced or witnessed antisemitism since the beginning of the school year**

Source: ADL



# 400%

**rise in antisemitic incidents in the United States since October 7th**

Source: Reuters

Illustration courtesy of Emmett Sher '26

Zachary Klein '24  
editor-in-chief

During my junior year, while I researched colleges, I considered size, academics, and sports. But one thing I never had to consider was whether I'd be safe on campus; that changed after October 7.

Given the rise of antisemitism on college campuses after the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, the question on my mind and those of many Jewish students at Buckley is: "Will universities protect me against antisemitism?"

The mind-boggling instances of antisemitism on many college campuses - ranging from among others, violent threats to a Hillel at Cornell, the intentional burning of a Jewish student's dorm at Drexel, and the endorsement of the killing of Israeli civilians by multiple collegiate Students for Justice for Palestine clubs - have created both fear and hesitancy about colleges that once used to be on the top of students' lists.

A recent survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) about the climate of antisemitism on college campuses prior to and after the October 7 attacks, found that about 6 in 10 Jewish students feel scared of letting others know that they are Jewish. In addition, 73% of Jewish college students who were surveyed have either experienced or witnessed antisemitism since the beginning of the school year.

These statistics are scary for all Jewish students at Buckley, but especially the seniors who are applying to colleges that they'll be attending this fall. Opening Instagram to see blatant antisemitism at multiple universities, some that I've even applied to, is extremely frightening.

This feeling is felt throughout Jewish students in the senior class. "As somebody who's going to be going to college next year, it's scary because you see these acts of antisemitism, and being a Jew, it makes you afraid to go to certain colleges," senior Sam Terr said.

Senior Sienna Simantob, co-president of Jewish Student Union, hesitated to send in applications to specific colleges after the December Congressional hearing in which presidents of Harvard, MIT, and UPenn refused to say that calling for the genocide of Jews was against school conduct. "My cousin went to Harvard and he was like, 'you should totally apply' right before all this stuff happened," Simantob said. "Then he saw what Harvard had turned into and he's like, 'no way in hell you should apply.'"

When writing his applications, senior Rueben Barbarash considered leaving out Jewish aspects due to the climate on college campuses. "I've thought about it for a second, taking out some Jewish stuff, but then I thought that it wouldn't be true to me," Barbarash said.

Reading the news and seeing videos on social media about antisemitic incidents on college campuses is frightening, but the reality of the situation truly sets in when you hear someone you personally know go through it.

Tufts University student and Buckley alumni Kasey Afshani '22 has seen a change on campus since October 7. "I've definitely experienced antisemitism on my college campus, and I know dozens of other Jewish students who have," Afshani said. "Our Students for Justice for Palestine club has become unbelievably active after October 7, making (Jewish) students feel uncomfortable and unsafe on campus."

Another Buckley alumni Katie Silverman '23, who is in her first-year at Harvard, has also experienced an antisemitic environment since October 7. "I've been lucky enough not to be the target of antisemitism personally. Videos I've seen on social media of Jewish students at Harvard being physically assaulted, and non-Jewish students expressing explicitly genocidal views, have made me feel less safe at school," Silverman said.

Due to where Silverman's dorm is located, she is often at the center of intense protests when she steps out of her building. "As one of 14 students living in the building that also houses the president's office, I also had to regularly walk through crowds of protestors chanting slogans like 'Globalize the Intifada' and 'From the River to the Sea,' associated with calls for violence against Jews, just to leave my home," Silverman said.

Hearing these harrowing experiences from Jewish alumni has left me and other Jewish seniors worried about our future college experience.

"Looking at Drexel, the Jewish student with their dorm being burned, I became more concerned about who my roommate was going to be," Simantob said.

So what's there to do?

UC Berkeley student and Buckley alumni Avery Bergman '22 has found a way to process not just the antisemitism on her campus, but also a lack of action by the school administration. "While Berkeley has not done much to make Jewish students feel safe, campus organizations such as Hillel have really helped me process all the antisemitism I have seen on campus," Bergman said. "Knowing that there are other students who feel the same way and who can conduct productive conversations makes me feel supported in my Jewish experience at UC Berkeley."

Head of School Alona Scott believes that the antisemitism on college campuses may stem from a lack of proper information. "I think there's a lot of misinformation and misperception out there that is growing rampantly on college campuses," Scott said. "My wish for college students, just as my expectation of Buckley students, is that people actually do some fact-checking and cross-check multiple resources so that they can get to the bottom of it."

In looking at the future, Scott hopes we can be vulnerable and learn from one another, despite our differences. "Checking our assumptions about ourselves, checking our assumptions about whether we're united in opinion and perspective, checking our assumptions about people that we believe might have lots of differences with, and see if we can find some common ground," Scott said. "But that takes a lot of courage and a real willingness to be open-minded, which in this day and age is not seen as a value that is universally upheld."

Being at Buckley for six years, it wasn't until after the October 7 attacks that I was in a class where antisemitism was the focus of a class discussion. If something is ever going to be a shift in the right direction, if this issue is ever going to get even a little better, change must begin with the acknowledgment that antisemitism is a real - and growing - problem. It is also necessary to call out antisemitism, whether this is a friend or a post on social media. Stopping the spread of antisemitic conspiracy theories, messages, and content is a step forward to a safe space for Jews, not just on college campuses but in the greater world.

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