



Gratz Insider, January 2012 - Story Continuation

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Penn BDS Controversy Highlights Need for Students to Connect with Israel in High School

On college campuses throughout the country, Jewish students may confront anti-Israel hostility, often veiled in flawed and one-sided policy arguments. Case in point: the BDS conference slated for February 3rd to the 5th at the University of Pennsylvania. BDS is a movement calling for the imposition of boycotts, divestment and sanctions on Israel - hence, the name. "This movement has been working to isolate the State of Israel to the point of its nonexistence," explains Gratz JCHS faculty member Asaf Romirowsky. In fact, Gratz has joined twenty-three Jewish organizations in both signing a statement condemning the upcoming conference at Penn and in supporting the pro-Israel presentation by Professor Alan Dershowitz, which is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia in conjunction with Hillel. (For information on the Dershowitz program, see the description in this *Insider*. For background on the BDS controversy, see Asaf Romirowsky's recent article in *The Jewish Exponent* at http://www.jewishexponent.com/article/25081/Opinion_Dont_Be_Fooled_by_the_BDS/.)

While the BDS example is an extreme case, Romirowsky, a Middle East historian and acting executive director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, is committed to preparing Jewish high school students to tackle the anti-Israel rhetoric that they may encounter in college. To this end, Romirowsky teaches a course at Gratz on the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the goal of providing high school seniors with the history, background and resources to respond intelligently and confidently to hostile attacks against Israel. A frequent lecturer on university campuses, Romirowsky also takes on speaking engagements at the request of former Gratz students facing such hostility.

Gratz also makes other efforts to deepen its students' connection to Israel through opportunities for travel and study before college. For example, on January 8th, JCHS partnered with the youth group Habonim Dror to host an Israel fair. The fair was attended by over 200 students who met with different organizations and trip providers to explore various options for traveling to Israel. "Israel has always been a core pillar of the Gratz curriculum," says Romirowsky, "because Israel and Jewish identity go hand in hand."