



Building the next generation of Jewish student advocates and leaders

Executive Summary Rabbi Jill Avrin, Director of Campus Affairs

The inaugural year of the Ko'ach Advocacy Fellowship was a tremendous success. Twenty fellows strengthened their leadership, advocacy, and relationship-building skills while gaining experience engaging with campus leaders, elected officials, and community stakeholders. In turn, the fellows provided influential decision-makers a deeper understanding of the experiences, concerns, and priorities of Jewish students. Fellows left the program better prepared to advocate for themselves, their peers, and the Jewish community. Importantly, their commitment to this work continues beyond the fellowship. We are so grateful for your investment in these emerging leaders and in a stronger future for Jewish life on campus.

20

Ko'ach
Fellows

8

Fellowship
Sessions

15

Advocacy
Meetings

Fellowship Curriculum

*Introduction to
Advocacy*

*State and Federal
Policies*

*Advocacy
Strategies*

*College
Campuses*

*Telling Your
Story*

*Influence from
Legislative Bodies*

*Meeting
Preparation*

*Initiative
Creation*

What fellows shared with legislators and administrators:

- Their comfort being openly Jewish on campus
- Jewish literacy
- Incidents in the classrooms with both faculty and peers
- Incidents in social environments on campus
- Experiences with official reporting systems

Fellow Spotlight

Skylar Strudwick proposed a bill to help strengthen peer-to-peer incident reporting procedures.



2026 JCRC Ko'ach Advocacy Fellows

Rabbi Jill Avrin serves as JCRC's Director of Campus Affairs, a role created in response to the growing challenges facing Jewish students on college campuses. A trusted advocate, relationship-builder, and Jewish leader, Rabbi Avrin has been instrumental in developing and leading the Ko'ach Advocacy Fellowship, empowering students to strengthen their leadership skills, engage directly with policymakers and campus administrators, and advocate confidently for themselves and their communities.

Benjamin Regenbaum serves as JCRC's Executive Assistant. His main role was to assist Rabbi Jill in any capacity to ensure the Fellowship proceeded smoothly. Benjamin also managed the data and analysis of student feedback for this Fellowship.





Impact and outcomes

Skills Gained

Advocating for Jewish student life with confidence

Sharing personal stories with clarity and purpose

Developing strategies for advocacy & communication

Advancing a shared advocacy agenda

Coalition and relationship building

Creating meaningful change for Jewish life on campus



“The Ko’ach Fellowship taught me how to articulate my perspective on issues I find important to those with the power to do something about them.”

Elijah Golob, Ko’ach Fellow

Fellows worked together to organize **15 advocacy meetings**, including with members of the UMN Board of Regents, Leaders in UMN’s College of Education & Human Development, the UMN Director of the Center for Jewish Studies, the President of St. Thomas, Minnesota State Senators (Sen. Ron Latz, Sen. Doron Clark, and Sen. Steve Cwodziński), and US Representatives (Rep. Kelly Morrison and Rep. Angie Craig).



“The main lesson I learned was strength through unity, because the power of peer coalitions is more than just the sum of its parts.”

- Garek Garcia-Galindo, Ko’ach Fellow



DR. NATAN PARADISE,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE
CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Fellows met with Dr. Natan Paradise, Associate Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Minnesota, to discuss the growing rise of antisemitism on college campuses and the urgent need to advocate for Jewish students. Dr. Paradise emphasized the importance of building strong relationships, coalitions, and community support in response. He reminded fellows that this work cannot be done alone, encouraging them to lean on one another and recognize the power of collective advocacy and leadership. His insight and enthusiasm left a lasting impact on the cohort and reinforced the importance of continuing this work together.

By the end of the fellowship, Fellows demonstrated a nearly **25 percent increase in their understanding of effective advocacy** strategies and their ability to navigate campus events and investigations with confidence and purpose. Across all of our core objectives, **Fellows’ understandings improved meaningfully by 15 percent.**





Impact and outcomes

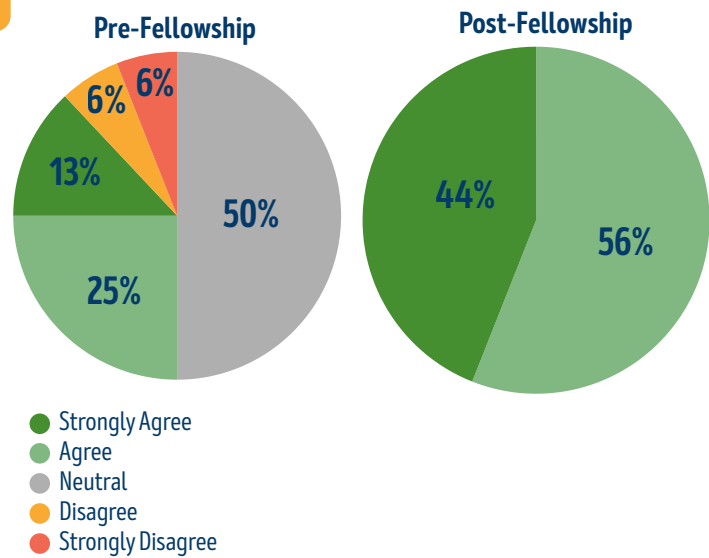
What We Learned



Keitha-Gail Martin-Kerr, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction

"Participating in the undergraduate students' fellowship meeting was both meaningful and deeply informative. Hearing directly from students about their lived experiences at the university offered invaluable insight into the realities they navigate across different colleges, departments, and academic programs. While each student's story was distinct, several common themes emerged, including the importance of belonging and the ongoing need for greater awareness and understanding of Jewish identity and antisemitism on campus. What made the experience particularly impactful was the opportunity to listen to students speak candidly about how campus climates, classroom experiences, and institutional responses shape their sense of inclusion and well-being. Their reflections highlighted the importance of moving beyond assumptions and engaging directly with the voices of those most affected by these issues. I left the meeting with a renewed sense of responsibility to continue learning, building partnerships, and contributing to efforts that promote Jewish inclusion and address antisemitism at the UMN."

Significant growth in knowledge and confidence in advocacy strategies



To measure the fellowship's impact, Fellows completed surveys at the beginning and end of the program. They were asked to rate their **understanding of effective advocacy strategies and how to engage with leaders** on campus, state and federal legislators, and other decision-makers. The charts above highlight the significant growth in Fellows' knowledge and confidence throughout the fellowship.

As we reflected on the inaugural year of the Ko'ach Advocacy Fellowship, one message from fellows was clear: *Students are eager for more opportunities to deepen their leadership and advocacy skills.*

Fellows expressed a strong interest in:

Exploring key topics
in greater depth

Engaging more directly
with policymakers,
campus leaders, and
community stakeholders

Taking on more
hands-on leadership
roles

Fellows emphasized the value of:

Building effective
coalitions

Navigating complex
campus environments

Advocating confidently
for themselves and their
communities



Looking Ahead

Our Vision For Growth

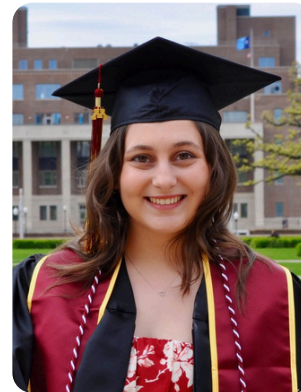
- Expand to year-long programming
- Add alumni mentorship opportunities
- Improve assessment tools
- Increase student-led advocacy preparation
- Give students more autonomy in choosing which leaders they meet
- Deepen students' understanding of key topics through more in-depth learning

The Ko'ach Fellowship Journey



FROM FELLOW TO LEADER

Johnna Parks joined the inaugural cohort of the Ko'ach Advocacy Fellowship as a student fellow passionate about Jewish community, leadership, and advocacy on campus. Through the fellowship, she developed meaningful relationships, strengthened her advocacy skills, and gained firsthand experience engaging with campus and community leaders. Now serving as the newest addition to JCRC's staff team as Program Associate, Johnna works closely with Rabbi Jill Avrin to strengthen and expand the fellowship experience for future cohorts. Drawing from her perspective as both a former fellow and emerging Jewish leader, she brings valuable insight and passion to the continued growth of the program.



Left: Johnna Parks at University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management graduation; Right: Rep Kelly Morrison and Johnna Parks at the 2026 JCRC Annual Event.

Fellows left the Ko'ach Advocacy Fellowship with stronger leadership skills, deeper connections, and a renewed sense of responsibility to their communities.

With continued donor support, we can build on this momentum, empowering even more students to navigate challenges with confidence and become thoughtful, effective advocates for Jewish life on campus and beyond.