

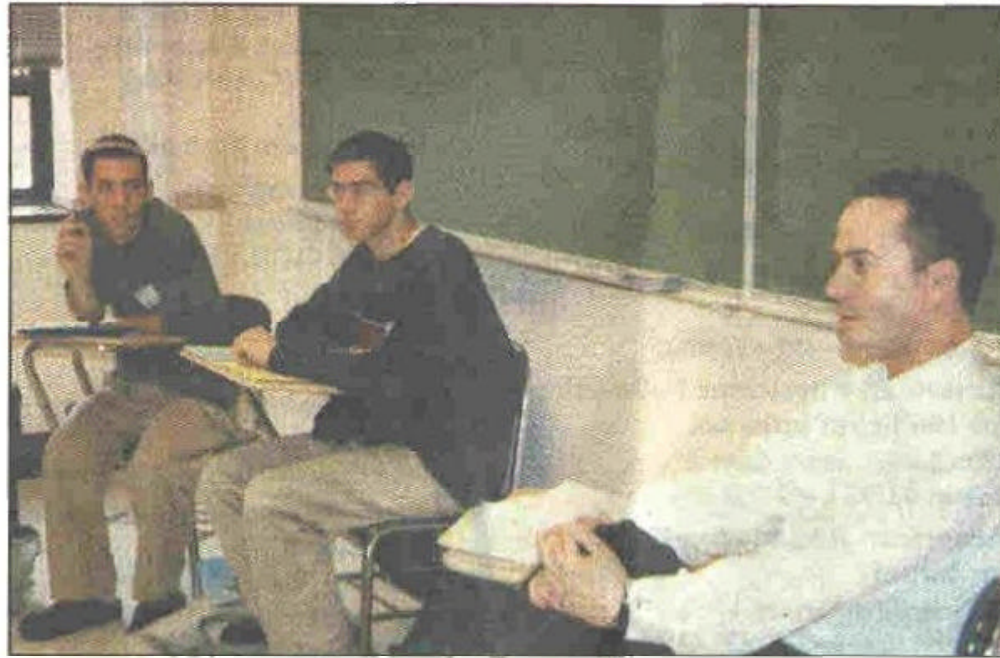
Local college students cast their votes

Mock Israel election designed to educate

By Deborah Fineblum Raub
Special to the Advocate

This week, as Israelis went to the polls to select their government, thousands of students at 30 New England universities also cast their votes as part of a mock Israel election taking place on campuses nationwide.

Working with student leaders, Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the Hillel Council of New England sponsored the local elections with education in mind. Casting a vote is a real-time demonstration of



Michael Eglash of Upstart Activist works with students on Israel campus activism, including this week's mock Israeli elections.

Israel's democracy in action, designed to educate students and fac-

ulty about the tough decisions facing the Israeli electorate in these

complex and difficult times.

"It's important for people to understand that Israel is a vibrant, healthy oasis of a democracy in the Middle East, that all her citizens, including over one million Arabs, can vote and are entitled to equal rights under the law," said Joshua Marcus, president of Brown University Students for Israel. "And that, unlike the vast majority of her neighbors, Israel tolerates dissent; in fact, dissent absolutely thrives there."

With the past year marked by unprecedented anti-Israel demonstrations, divestiture campaigns and petitions on the nation's cam-

Continued on page A11

Israeli Elections

Students focus on election

Continued from page A1

poses, colleges and universities represent a volatile arena. And caught in the middle, more often than not, are Jewish students.

IsraelVotes.com, where the votes are collected, also includes explanations of party platforms and other information on Israel's complex political landscape. The Web site is the brainchild of Upstart Activist. A Jerusalem-based activist training venture, Upstart Activist specializes in developing pro-Israel materials and helping students become effective pro-Israel campus activists through training and mentoring partnerships.

Calling the results of the mock election "frankly irrelevant," Brandeis University student Elana Lichtenstein instead points to the process of casting votes as "highly important."

As a democracy under incredible pressure, Israel needs support, she adds. "And I'd like to add that, as much as that is true, we should not be fooled. We need Israel as much — if not more — as she needs us."

At campus advocacy workshops around the country, students such as Lichtenstein who are concerned about Israel are learning that emphasizing Israel's democratic nature is key. The goal, according to Michael Eglash of Upstart Activist, is engendering identification with and support for the Jewish state. "What better way to educate than to let thousands of students participate in Israel's democratic process?" he said.

Indeed, education is the key,

"It's important for people to understand that Israel is a vibrant, healthy oasis of a democracy in the Middle East, that all her citizens, including over one million Arabs, can vote and are entitled to equal rights under the law."

— Joshua Marcus

and on-campus education is an integral part of CJP's Israel agenda, says Cheryl Aronson, director of CJP's Commission on Jewish Continuity (COJC). "What we're doing on campus isn't about taking sides or politicizing Israel's choices. What we're doing has everything to do with raising awareness about the democratic process in Israel."

To accomplish this goal and provide students with the knowledge and tools to defend Israel in an often-hostile campus environment, CJP, Hillel Council and the Jewish Community Relations Council have convened the Israel Campus Roundtable. "The Roundtable has

become an incubator, with each campus now having a strong group of students organized and knowledgeable about Israel," Aronson said. "At this difficult time for them, we are there to help."

Meanwhile, Brown's Marcus remains committed to getting the word out about Israel. "I'm involved in Israel advocacy projects on my campus because I am proud of Israel, proud that Israel is a democracy where peoples of all religions, ethnicities, races and genders can live together," he said. "I see some people on campuses criticizing Israel and not saying a word about the terrorists. As a human being, an American, a college student, and a Jew, I will not sit by and watch. I will stand up and do something about it."

For results of the mock Israeli election and more information on Israel activities on campus, check www.IsraelVotes.com/newengland. To learn more about Israel activism on local campuses, contact James Bornstein at CJP (617-457-8655 or jamesb@CJP.org).