

ELI N. EVANS

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Dear Alumni and Friends:

The campaign for the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies lays out a vision that represents a dramatic aspiration. We are proud that our university has launched a \$24 million campaign that will be transformational for the university with far reaching implications for the role of Jewish studies in the humanities curriculum and in its proposed partnership with the state and the region.

The importance of this step for those of us in the Carolina family—alumni, friends, and parents—is reflected in the times in which we live. In a post 9/11 world, when religious fanaticism has ignited the sparks of hatred all over the globe, there is a psychological shift toward pluralism in America that makes the Center profoundly appropriate. With this step, UNC proposes, as it has so many times before in its history, to become the leader among public universities at a time when the past and future of Jewish history is on the world stage. Across the South, there is special interest because of the religious dimension of current events. Non-Jewish as well as Jewish students at UNC want to learn more about the Jewish story as part of their roots. It is a trend that national observers call a “longing for the spiritual” and the “search for meaning.” It is inspiring to witness Jewish studies for all faiths coming alive at UNC.

The Center is a consequential idea. It’s the right time and place in history to do it; and Carolina has the reputation and the commitment to make it happen. As the oldest state university in the nation, ranking among the five best “public ivies” in America, what our flagship university does radiates across the south and the nation.

We love the university we remember. But UNC has changed for the better from the one many Jewish alumni experienced. It will surprise you to hear that UNC already offers 28 courses in Jewish studies within various departments, enough to declare a minor just this past September. Yet many of the courses, the faculty reports, are over-subscribed—hundreds of students, perhaps more since many are discouraged from trying, cannot get into the courses being offered. As concerned alumni, we must respond. In the 21st century, the Jewish community has a responsibility not only to educate our own, but to help educate others as well.

The number of Jewish students is also increasing. The UNC Hillel estimates that there are currently more than 1200 Jewish students on campus, probably many more (applicants for years have not been required to list religious preference on their applications). UNC plans to grow by about 20 to 25% over the next five to seven years. Down the road, there will clearly be growing numbers of Jewish students at Chapel Hill, who will experience a new \$3.5 million Hillel building with an outstanding staff that has brought new excitement to student life.

The state of North Carolina is changing as well. The Jewish population in the Research Triangle has quadrupled in the last 20 years: there are two congregations in Durham, four in Raleigh and new day schools as well; in 1996, Chapel Hill started a new congregation which has 200 families and a 100-child religious school. Charlotte is on its way to becoming the Atlanta of the 21st century and its 54-acre Shalom Park has just completed a \$30 million campaign for new facilities. In Greensboro there is a new 100-acre Hebrew Academy, a residential school built at a cost of \$100 million dollars, with links to the state's universities. The UNC Center aspires to a statewide partnership with these growing Jewish communities. It will bring major speakers to the campus and invite adults to the campus for weekends of study and learning. It will join with local federations to co-sponsor outstanding programs in the communities; send its faculty out across the state for lectures that will be open to the general public; sponsor trips to Jewish sites around the world. And it will develop publications and use the Internet creatively to communicate with communities in the state and throughout the South.

Here is how the case statement describes the idea: "Through the Center, the University campus will become a home where pluralism abides, diversity is celebrated, and our common heritage flourishes.... The Center will greatly enrich Jewish life on the Carolina campus and transform North Carolina's major research institution into one of the leading universities in the world where faculty and students study the Jewish experience...from the beginnings of Judaic civilization in the ancient Near East to the present day struggles of the State of Israel and Jewish life in America...including the American South and its place in American Jewish history." The Center already has cooperative programs with our neighbors at Duke, including open access for students to courses on both campuses.

Many alumni tell us how glad they are to be asked to give because of the boldness of the vision. Many want to honor their parents and grandparents who bet their lives on America and the South. Foundation officials who have never made a grant for Jewish studies in the South think that population growth and the rising support for Israel all across the South make a dynamic Jewish studies center at a public university an imperative for the future. Non-Jewish alumni who work in the financial world in New York City and in the state have inquired about honoring clients and colleagues.

This campaign is not only about big money. Any donations will be welcomed and recognized; annual pledges over many years of any size will give the campaign stability and credibility; and responses by thousands of donors will launch a network of friends that will grow. So make decisions and be in touch. A vital Carolina Center for Jewish Studies will lift our campus, our state and our region, and the time is now.