Abstract: Since the start of the 20th century, the presence of Jewish students on American university campuses required accommodation of their religious practices. Jewish activities, including prayer, took place in existing campus buildings designed for other purposes. Eventually, at some universities, facilities were built to serve Jewish religious and social needs. These Jewish Student Centers, which include worship spaces yet are typologically different from synagogues, generally have to accommodate the diverse religious streams that characterize Jewish life in the United States. To do so, both architects and Jewish organizations have adapted the idea of ecumenism, by which related sects seek unity through fellowship and dialogue, not doctrinal agreement. Three examples—at Yale, Duke University, and the University of California San Diego—demonstrate differently the situational ecumenism at the core of their designs. These buildings, and other Jewish Student Centers elsewhere, make visible the intersection between American collegiate and Jewish religious values, variously defined.

Keywords: Jews; architecture; college; university; student center

1. Introduction

As universities in the United States sought to bolster their research mission in the late 19th century, schools founded by religious sects shifted their undergraduate emphasis towards secular education (Geiger 2015; Veysey 1970). Doing so attracted students from backgrounds that reflected the changing demographics of an immigrant society. Universities such as Harvard and Yale—established in colonial times to educate ministers for Congregationalist New England—now had to educate Catholics, Baptists, and Jews seeking to enter academic and professional ranks (Coe and Davidson 2001, p. 236). The structure of undergraduate education, which previously required both religious training and supervised worship, necessarily had to change.

The architecture of higher education followed suit. The campus chapel, at one time the literal center of many private universities, became effectively obsolete. As historian Margaret Grubiak has explained, some universities lessened their institutional emphasis on religion by ending compulsory attendance of chapel services (Grubiak 2014, pp. 4–6). At other schools, the religious spirit was transposed onto cultural or social edifices, such as the library, the dining hall, or the football stadium. Yet students’ religious needs still had to be met. If the spiritual place of religion on campus was no longer central, the physical place for students’ worship could at least be found on the campus periphery. Examples of current-day university-affiliated religious organizations include the Newman Center (Catholic, established in 1893 at University of Pennsylvania), the Wesleyan Foundation (United Methodist Campus Ministry Association, established in 1913 at University of Illinois), and Hillel International (Jewish, without specific denominational affiliation, established in 1923 at University of Illinois). Grubiak writes that “they house a vibrant sectarian religious life, allowing for participation in any number of faith traditions without the concern of a careful, legal nondenominational identity” (Grubiak 2014, p. 121). But what are the concerns of these sectarian organizations? What is their...
relationship to their host universities and to the surrounding communities in which those universities are located? How are those relationships expressed by the architecture of the buildings in which they operate?

From among the university-affiliated religious groups, attention to the design of buildings for Hillel can begin to answer such questions. Called here “Jewish Student Centers,” these buildings tend to cultivate Jewish identity within an integrative framework, emphasizing institutional affiliation rather than religious difference. To do so, Jewish Student Centers are designed consciously to reflect the architecture of the adjacent university or that of a surrounding neighborhood. Such a reflection is often itself an architectural proposition about reciprocal openness among Jewish students, students of other faiths, and the university’s faculty or administration. To nurture that openness, Jewish Student Centers borrow the innovative programmatic model of Jewish Community Centers, developed in the 1920’s and proliferating after the Second World War (Karp 1995, pp. 19–23). Those innovations included an emphasis on spatial and functional flexibility; accommodation of non-religious activities; provision of classrooms for both religious and secular education; inclusion of extensive administrative facilities; and the cautious application of symbolic artwork at interior and exterior locations.

Jewish Student Centers go further. The most successful ones make visible through their architectural design an effervescent social life that may not otherwise be available to Jewish students on campus or elsewhere. In a related fashion, Jewish Student Centers distinguish themselves from synagogues and community centers by insisting upon a religious openness—ecumenism, to adapt the typically Christian usage of the word—to accommodate the different, even conflicting, religious perspectives that constitute American Judaism. In some cases, ecumenism is embedded in architectural planning; in others, ecumenism guides a facility’s operation. In all cases, it is situational, depending upon context to determine its architectural expression. Moreover, Jewish Student Centers aspire to religious pluralism despite ever-sharper disagreements over the scope of inclusion within Jewish student communities (Bernstein 2018; Hurwitz 2019; Prince 2019). With this aspiration comes a basic message that common Jewish interests exist despite differences of political opinion, cultural background, or even faith. Some interests must, inevitably and even contentiously, fall outside this framework. But for those that fall within it, Jewish Student Centers should provide the spatial and material infrastructure for their engagement. To demonstrate these and related issues, this paper contains the following:

1. A definition of the Jewish Student Center, its relationship to Jewish architecture, and the issues addressed by its development.
2. A social-historical overview of Jewish student organizations in American higher education, with special emphasis on the history of Hillel International.
3. Three case studies of campus-affiliated Jewish Student Center buildings:
   - Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale (Roth and Moore Architects, 1995)
   - Freeman Center for Jewish Life, Duke University (Gurlitz Architectural Group, 1999)
   - Glickman Hillel Center for Jewish Life, UCSD (M. W. Steele Group, in development)

These three are a very small sample of the many Jewish Student Centers at universities around the United States. Nevertheless, they indicate the existence of a coherent building type not previously studied within the history of Jewish architecture or the history of university campuses. This account of the Jewish Student Center is consistent with recent historiographical emphasis on local architectures and their relationship to the better-known subjects of traditional architectural histories, as follows: The recapitulation of styles since the Renaissance, Modernism’s innovations, progress, and failures, postmodernism’s critique of the former, Critical Regionalism, etc. (Goldhagen 2003; Huyssen 2006). Although the Yale, Duke, and UCSD campuses participate in many of these histories, campus architecture designed for Jews has not. If Jewish Student Centers have long since assumed an
2. What Is a Jewish Student Center?

At the very least, a Jewish Student Center houses administrative offices of the group (or groups) that provides Jewish programming for a school’s student body. Typically, a Jewish Student Center also has spaces for social events, for kosher dining, and for religious services. In addition, a Jewish Student Center may include a library, classrooms, an auditorium for lectures, and even a ritual bath. Space for Jewish worship distinguishes Jewish Student Centers from other campus buildings. On the other hand, it is the way that space serves the student community that distinguishes a Jewish Student Center from other Jewish buildings.

Unlike a synagogue, a Jewish Student Center usually supports activities of several Jewish religious movements, not any single one of them. That distinction extends only subtly to the exterior design of the building. As with synagogues, stylistic diversity is the rule (Gruber 2004). The individual designs of American Jewish Student Centers demonstrate each building’s connection to a regional design culture and local building practices (See Figure 1a–f). Yet, although Jewish Student Centers share a superficial similarity with other contemporary buildings—including those designed for Jewish communities—there exist differences that are more than just programmatic. Jewish Student Centers tend to share a centripetal layout that supports operational flexibility and, more importantly, focuses occupants’ visual attention towards a common center. These buildings’ interior designs encourage a feeling of intimacy, often described by students as “like home.” On the exterior, Jewish Student Centers bear few, if any, Jewish religious symbols; instead, designs of Jewish Student Centers engage (directly or indirectly) the architectural language of the college or university they serve in a manner consistent with each school’s unique institutional identity.

Among the examples to be illustrated here, the Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale is especially urbane and thoughtful. Its architecture reflects Yale University’s on-going institutional discourse about design. For more than a century, Yale’s campus has been a test bed for architectural theories and their practical application. The Slifka Center’s design came at the tail end of a transitional period in Yale’s architectural development; conviction about modernism, the positive efficacy of urban renewal, and even architectural progress had been superseded by an embrace of contingency, connection, and context. The design of the Slifka center is (implicitly) a statement about these positions, as well as (explicitly) a proposition about how these architectural positions can serve Jewish life at Yale, and elsewhere. Slifka Center’s Rabbi Jason Rubenstein has said, “Judaism doesn’t just do something for the Jews here, but that pluralistic matrix also has something for Judaism . . . There’s a kind of Jewish creativity that can happen here” (Roth et al. 2019). The Slifka Center’s plan underlies the spatial counterpart to that matrix, as follows: Visual interconnection, functional flexibility, and the centrality of social (not religious) functions. Yale’s Slifka Center is prototypical in this regard.

Duke’s Freeman Center for Jewish Life is included here for its overt stylistic reference to Duke’s Gothic campus architecture and how that reference signifies, through a kind of architectural catachresis, meanings different from the original Christian ones. Primary among them is institutional affiliation. In common with many other Jewish Student Centers, the Freeman Center uses architectural style to reinforce Jews’ arrival and belonging to a venerable—and long exclusive—academic club. The Freeman Center’s planning shares much in common with other Jewish Student Centers, and so it is characteristic of the type.

The design of UCSD’s Glickman Hillel Center for Jewish Life, still in development, points usefully to contemporary issues surrounding Jewish Student Centers and their stakeholders. The story of its commission is a current-day example of the exigencies that have historically affected Jewish student life at American universities: intra-student bias, institutionalized exclusion, and even violence. Today, security considerations increasingly affect Jewish college students, their group activities, and the physical environment in which those activities take place. The architecture of the Glickman
Center results in part from those considerations. Even so, its design shares the two common planning characteristics with the other buildings also under consideration here: At the center, spatial interconnectivity and, on the periphery, deflective camouflage, under the guise of “fitting in.” The appearance of the Glickman Center’s architectural design may be unique among Jewish Student Centers, and its tripartite massing may be an innovation among other Hillel buildings, but the schematic relationship among the building’s functional spaces is similar to that of many others. The Glickman Center’s courtyard, towards which all interior spaces open, promises to provide the same kind of openness, flexibility, and centripetal movement found at the other Jewish Student Centers.

Figure 1. Examples of contemporary Jewish Student Centers. (a) Smokler Center for Jewish Life, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD; (b) Rabin Hillel Center for Jewish Life, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA; (c) The Cohen Center for Jewish Life, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, IL; (d) Hillel at Steinhardt Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; (e) Newberger Hillel Center, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL; (f) Melvin Garb Hillel Center, San Diego State, San Diego, CA. Image Credits: © 2019 Google Street View; reuse according to Google’s Terms of Service.
In short, each case study demonstrates important differences in the way architecture’s physical and material elements have been deployed; but, together, they demonstrate a common approach towards spatial organization, architectural context, and the use of architecture itself to manage both. Furthermore, these Jewish Student Centers have been designed within a global Jewish tradition. Each building created by and for Jews engages, inevitably, the issue of Jewish identity. “What does it mean to be ‘Jewish’?” is a question that is embodied by Jews’ material culture (including architecture) at local, regional, national, and international scales of discourse (Sachs and Voolen 2004; Gruber 2003, p. 12). The use of architecture to conduct such a discourse depends on a community’s social aspirations, as well as its means. A Jewish Student Center is no exception, and more generally, it mirrors the values of the student communities it serves. Those values include religious ones (gender egalitarianism, or traditional Jewish gender roles; the acceptance or rejection of Jewish dietary laws; which traditional religious obligations must be respected; etc.), social ones (Zionism, charity, material wealth, environmentalism, political action), or intellectual ones (the importance of study; Judaism’s intellectual history; fluency in Hebrew or the preservation of Jewish vernacular languages). Some of those values naturally intersect with those of the university community as a whole, or with those of other religious student groups on campus. As historian Gretchen Buggeln has pointed out, “many of the same concerns shaped the architecture and . . . religious lives of all [faiths groups]” in twentieth-century United States (Buggeln 2015, p. xx). It is the set of values defined by those intersections that become most visible in Jewish Student Center architecture. As the following examples show, the architecture of Jewish Student Centers addresses those values in ways both consistent and unique.

3. Jewish Student Organizations in American Higher Education

The Jewish Student Center’s origin can be explained in part by the development of Jewish student organizations in North American higher education. Throughout most of the 19th century, the number of Jewish college students was small, and so there were few opportunities for cooperative action. The needs of students’ worship could be met either by nearby synagogues or not at all; generally, Jewish college students came from assimilated families for whom observance of the Sabbath or kashrut was not a compelling obligation. After the accelerated immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe after 1881, however, the number of Jewish college students increased, and more of them were religiously observant (Levinger 1937, pp. 1–2). At the turn of the 20th century, increasing numbers of Jewish students faced a dilemma that has been characterized by historian Jenna Weissman Joselit as “an especially difficult one. Not only were co-religionists [relatively] few and far between, but organizations designed specifically to service the needs of the Jewish student were noticeably lacking” (Joselit 1978, p. 133).

Coming even before spiritual or religious needs were social and intellectual ones. Excluded from other students’ fraternities due to ethnic bias, Jewish students at the time also lacked academic endorsement of their creed. American universities had yet to establish a program, like the German Wissenschaft des Judentum, that placed Jewish religious texts at the focus of secular study and accorded to Jewish culture the prestige long given to Christian sources (Soussan 2013, p. 3). In 1906, the Menorah Society was founded by Jewish undergraduates at Harvard University in part to address this problem (Hurwitz and Sharfman 1914, p. vii). The Menorah Society’s founders were forthright about their inspiration, at once intellectual and social. “The organization was the result of a spontaneous desire at Harvard to have some kind of Jewish cultural society,” wrote Henry Hurwitz in retrospect. He continued:

[T]here was room at the university, and need, for a non-partisan organization, devoted to the study of Jewish history, literature, religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, art, manners, in a word, Jewish culture, and to the academic discussion of Jewish problems. (Hurwitz and Sharfman 1914, p. 1)

As Joselit points out, only an organization that was neither exclusively religious (such as an on-campus Jewish prayer group) nor exclusively social (such as a Jews-only fraternity) would have been acceptable
at that time to Harvard’s administration or to the administration of any other American university. By 1914, the Menorah Society had become a national movement. Its founders stressed that each chapter’s fit to a particular university could determine the substance and tenor of its activities (Joselit 1978, p. 138). They limited the Society’s brief to that of a campus organization, merely one club among others at its members’ school, and so Menorah Society chapters had no physical home apart from their host universities’ existing facilities.

After the First World War, however, the Menorah Society had difficulty maintaining its appeal among Jewish students. Some criticized its reluctance to assume political positions during the 1920s, a time when Zionism assumed an increasing importance among American Jews (Joselit 1978, p. 144). Of greater impact was the concurrent rise in Jewish fraternity and sorority membership that accompanied a nationwide post-war boom in fraternity activity among all university students. The earnest intellectualism of the Menorah Society may still have held an attraction for some students; indeed, the movement continued its publication, Menorah Journal, until the founder’s death in 1961 (Alter 1965). But Jewish fraternities, eventually permitted by university authorities, made possible the kinds of activities that students (of all faiths) commonly sought while in college. Yet neither the Menorah Society nor fraternities provided pastoral advising or religious services for Jewish students.

It was to do both, as well as to improve other aspects of Jewish students’ college life, that the Hillel organization was founded. In 1923, Rabbi Benjamin Frankel led a small Jewish congregation in Champaign, Illinois, the seat of University of Illinois. Frankel was “shocked at the cynicism, ignorance, and indifference of the Jewish students towards their own faith and people” (Grusd 1939, p. 72). The students’ isolation from the main centers of Jewish community could hardly have helped; nor did the apparent polarization between the Menorah Society and local chapters of Jewish fraternities. Frankel’s solution was two-fold, as follows: To establish “a cultural and social center for Jewish students” and to solicit financial support from B’nai B’rith, the oldest Jewish service organization in the United States. Frankel made the case that, “instead of bemoaning the lack of moral fibre [sic] and responsibility in youth and attributing our political, economic, and social ailments to a so-called misguided younger generation,” a new organization could instead cultivate those same students “by a coordinated program of character-building” (Bisgyer 1940, p. 9). By reaching out to B’nai B’rith, Frankel spontaneously innovated a model whereby student involvement would be nurtured by professional administrators and sustained by a national organization’s finances.

Frankel named his program after Hillel the Elder, an ancient Jewish religious teacher and leader. Frankel’s 20th century Hillel addressed the full spectrum of Jewish life—including religious as well as academic, social, and political activities—rather than any single facet of it. Almost a century later, Frankel’s original concept remains intact, even if Hillel’s administrative framework has changed. Each Hillel chapter is still governed by local stakeholders with ties to the host school; but subsidies to them from the umbrella organization (and its original sponsor, B’nai Brith) no longer contribute to the chapter’s operating costs. Hillel International, the offices of which are located in Washington DC, provides “students and professionals with Jewish educational resources and learning curricula … [as well as] support in the areas of human resources, fundraising, strategic planning, leadership development, communications, fiscal administration, and student engagement” (Hillel International 2019). Hillel’s original and continued success has been ascribed to the following:

Permanent professional direction [rather than solely student-led governance] … Every Foundation operates under the guidance of a Hillel Director … who combines Jewish academic competence with experience in Youth work … Hillel is neither theologically nor ideologically selective … It is designed to serve all Jewish students regardless of

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1 The first Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau, was established in 1898. Jewish professional fraternities, such as Sigma Epsilon Delta and Phi Delta Epsilon, formed in 1901 and 1904, respectively. A Jewish sorority, Iota Alpha Pi, was founded in 1903. But it was only after the First World War that membership in these groups expanded substantially among Jewish students (Levinger 1937, p. 2).
their backgrounds, ideologies or denominational preferences ... Jewish education on the college level requires a college approach to Jewish life and culture ... Lastly, Hillel operates on the fundamental principle of self-motivation. The Director is the guide and counselor, but students ... share responsibility in Hillel’s operation and program development. (Jospe 1963, pp. 30–32)

These principles continue to guide the organization, although some on-campus Jewish groups choose not to ally with Hillel. Jewish organizations at some schools have severed long-standing ties with Hillel’s parent organization (Banko 2015); others, such as Chabad, choose separate quarters in rejection of Hillel’s ecumenism (Jeffay 2007). These moves reflect the increasing polarization of religious and political views at American universities. Nevertheless, on the overwhelming majority of college campuses, Hillel is the primary tenant, if not the sole manager, of Jewish Student Centers. Through their first three decades, individual Hillel units operated within existing buildings, either on or off campus. After the Second World War, the increased affluence of some Jewish communities (on and off campus) provided sufficient funding for dedicated buildings to house Hillel functions. The commission, design, construction, and operation of these facilities were conducted in as many ways as there are college campuses; each Jewish Student Center reflects in its developmental history the organizational character of the local institution. Some universities have been active partners, providing a building’s site and design guidance as part of a campus master plan. Others, especially public universities, can contribute nothing to the process, so that its Center must be developed entirely by the local Hillel Foundation’s supporters. In every case, a Jewish Student Center is the physical manifestation of its stakeholders’ consensus about the how to support Jewish identity—variously defined—among students at a particular school.

4. Case Study I: Slifka Center for Jewish Life, Yale University (1995, Roth and Moore, Architects)

4.1. Historical Background

As the third oldest college founded in what became the United States, Yale University has the longest history of Jewish enrollment among the schools considered here. Yale was chartered in 1701 to serve the Connecticut colony’s Congregationalist religious establishment and by 1777 included the study of Hebrew as part of its curriculum. Over the course of the next century, the religious content of Yale’s curriculum changed incrementally to reflect the increasing secularization of American higher education. In 1892, Yale removed theology from its required curriculum, although students were still obligated to attend daily chapel service until 1926 (Grubiak 2014, pp. 14–16).

Yale initially admitted Jewish students in the first decade of the 19th century but, in the following years, only a handful of Jewish students chose to attend (Oren 1986, p. 6). After the wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe began in the 1880s, the number of successful Jewish applicants to Yale increased considerably. In 1923, Yale—along with other prestigious universities around the United States—imposed admission quotas restricting the number of Jewish students to be admitted (Oren 1986, p. 320). For the next forty years, therefore, those Jews that were admitted to Yale shared a crisis of identity familiar to all immigrant groups seeking to assimilate within an indifferent or inhospitable society (Prell 2000, p. 165). Otherwise, Jewish student activity at Yale reflected collegiate trends elsewhere. Early on, Jewish students at Yale followed Harvard’s example and established a chapter of the Menorah Society (Hurwitz and Sharfman 1914, p. 136). Attempts to establish recognized Jewish fraternities were at first rejected by Yale but later, in 1923, were successful (Oren 1986, p. 83). For religious activities, students attended services at local community synagogues. In 1933, a graduate student was appointed counselor for Jewish undergraduates under the supervision of the university chaplain (Oren 1986, p. 107). The counselor’s office on Yale’s Old Campus subsequently became the locus of Jewish activities for undergraduates and graduate students alike.

A Hillel unit serving Yale and University of Connecticut was set up in 1941, and the Hillel director assumed the counselor’s function and office on Yale’s campus (Call 2012). Hillel’s physical
footprint changed definitively at the start of the 1960s in the wake of Yale’s loosening admission quotas and the subsequent increase of Jewish enrollment. As early as 1964, Yale Hillel Rabbi Richard Israel began conversations with architect Harold Roth to design a dedicated facility to house the program (Fellman 1995). The next year, the Yale’s Friends of Hillel purchased a house on High Street, a block south of the campus, as the residence of Hillel’s rabbi and an independent dining facility, the Kosher Kitchen (Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale 2019). Larger facilities on nearby Crown Street were acquired, in 1973, to establish a kosher dining facility for students’ regular use. Yet Hillel’s programming still operated out of its Old Campus office, so that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the unit occupied three distinct locations serving a Jewish student body exceeding 25% of undergraduate enrollment. With the 1981 appointment of Rabbi James Ponet as Yale Hillel’s director, the stage was set for a campaign to consolidate Hillel’s facilities in a building created expressly to serve Jewish pastoral and cultural activities at Yale. With Harold Roth’s continued involvement, in collaboration with his partner William Moore, the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale opened in 1995.

4.2. Site Context

The Slifka Center is located within New Haven’s original nine-square street grid, laid out in 1638 (Osterweis 1953, p. 12) (See Figure 2). In New Haven’s historic plan, eight squares of developed land surrounded a central plot (the Green) given over to public functions, including worship as well as burial, commercial, and governmental activities. Since the early 1800s, three churches have presided over the central area of the Green (Osterweis 1953, p. 192), reflecting New Haven’s theocratic origins and the city’s past religious identity. The Slifka Center fronts onto Wall Street, a secondary street bisecting the grid’s north-central square, only one block north-west of the Green. The core of Yale University’s undergraduate campus lies northwest of the site, further along Wall Street. The Slifka Center’s site is adjacent, on one side, to a mixed used building, with active commercial properties on its ground floor; to the other side is the Yale University Chaplain’s residence. Directly across Wall Street is Silliman College, one of Yale’s fourteen residential colleges. These nearby buildings are sheathed variously in brick, stone, and clapboard. The Slifka Center’s surroundings are architecturally heterogeneous, composed of close-set buildings built in diverse styles during different periods, together characteristic of a New England city almost four centuries old.

Figure 2. Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, Location Plan. Image Credit: map data © 2018 Google, Landsat/Copernicus; reuse according to Google’s Terms of Service. Annotations by the author.
Yale University’s campus is itself a famous showcase of American architecture. The Collegiate Gothic-style library, law school, and residential colleges stand side-by-side with modernist buildings byLouis Kahn, Eero Saarinen, SOM, and Paul Rudolph, among others (Scully et al. 2004, pp. 293–330). Campus development slowed in the mid-1970s, after which Yale planners focused primarily on renovating its aging building stock (Turner 1984, p. 304). Before this time, Yale began to grapple fitfully with the theories and practices of architectural postmodernism. Architect Charles Moore replaced Paul Rudolph as Dean of Yale’s School of Architecture in 1963, signifying the school’s shift away from modernist formalism (Stern and Stamp 2016, pp. 248–49). The influential 1971 book Learning from Las Vegas was based on a class taught at Yale by its authors Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. Vincent Scully, the celebrated architectural historian at Yale, had endorsed Venturi’s earlier book, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, and published The Shingle Style Today or The Historian’s Revenge, an account of American architects’ renewed engagement with historical styles, in 1974. Yet the Yale campus at the time reflected almost none of these trends (See Figure 3a–c).

![Figure 3. Buildings on the Yale University campus, New Haven, CT. (a) Saybrook College (1922), Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon; (b) Art and Architecture Building (1963) and (c) Mellon Center for British Art (1977), Image Credit: © 2014 Gunnar Klack, reuse according to Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license; (d) Seeley G. Mudd Library (1982), © 2012 Frampton Tolbert, MidCentury Mundane, used by permission.]

One exception was a lauded but unbuilt extension to the mathematics building, designed by Robert Venturi in 1970 (Moore 1974). Another was the heavily-criticized Henry R. Luce Hall, completed by the firm of Edward Larrabee Barnes in 1994 (Needham 2009). The former design explored the juxtapositions of scale that characterized Venturi’s polemical emphasis on façade composition, but

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2 See Scully et al. (2004) and Pinnell (2012). See also the many monographs on architects who built for Yale, including James Gamble Rogers, Eero Saarinen, Louis Kahn, Paul Rudolph, Gordon Bunshaft, Maya Lin, etc.
the latter deployed historical architectural details simply to embellish a poorly-proportioned exterior. In fact, only the lone building built during the 1980s, the Seeley G. Mudd Library, successfully combined the historicizing tendencies of postmodern architecture with the lessons afforded by Yale’s own modernist architectural legacy (Needham 2008). With reference to Kahn’s Mellon Center for British Art, the architects of Mudd Library set within an exposed concrete frame the iconic masonry work (and ogee-curved trim) of Federal-period New Haven (See Figure 3d). More than a decade after the Mudd Library’s completion in 1982, its architects Harold Roth and William Moore brought a similar sensibility to their design of the Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale.

4.3. The Slifka Center’s Design

When discussing the project, a lead donor asked that the architect design the building to “look like a Yale building,” both inside and out (Roth et al. 2019). Roth and Moore interpreted his comment to refer to smart detailing and to an emphasis on sturdy materials absent from other buildings of its era. They did not intend to copy any particular building. The architects had noticed that university buildings built before and after the main phase of Yale’s Collegiate Gothic (between 1917 and 1934) are stylistically diverse. The Center’s extensive use of brick reflects not only that diversity, but also the material of its commercial neighbors along Wall Street (See Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, Exterior View Seen from the north along Wall Street. Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.](image)

The Slifka Center’s exterior façade is heavy and made of brick and stone trim. The walls have depth. The window openings are numerous, yet relatively small, and oriented vertically. On view are brick arches, rustication, and a slightly corbeled cornice. These accents evoke aspects of New Haven’s nineteenth century commercial and residential buildings. But, like their Seeley G. Mudd Library, Roth and Moore’s Slifka Center alludes to nearby buildings but does not directly copy them. In fact, the architects’ facility with historical detail obscures the essential a-historicism of the result, which conforms to no single period style. The complexity of the building’s massing does encourage free and lively interpretations, according to which certain building elements are thought to evoke Jewish ritual objects; for instance, the exterior turret on the front façade has been likened by many visitors to a mezuzah (Roth et al. 2019). On the other hand, the Slifka Center bears no fixed symbols to identify the building as Jewish. The Center’s managers do hang the Israeli flag outside, beside the Yale University banner and the Stars and Stripes, but the building’s design expresses affiliation primarily not with Judaism but with Yale—the institution—and with the material culture of New Haven’s three-century-long history.
For all the solidity of the Slifka Center’s masonry exterior, its interior appears open and light. Co-architect William Moore agreed that the Slifka Center was conceived for visual connection among its spaces, creating a kind of inner transparency (Roth et al. 2019). Throughout the building’s interior, it is possible to see from one area to another, often from one floor to another. Doing so is made possible by each floor’s organization as a kind of nine-square plan of its own. Each level’s central space is a special event—an opening to the floor below, a common seating area, or the heart of the Center’s communal dining. Daylight passes from the main stairs and through large windows at the building’s rear façade, and so illuminates spaces throughout the building’s interior (See Figure 5a–f).

During the building’s planning, advocates for the project and architect Harold Roth considered the scope of apparently competing requirements. As Roth explained at the time of its completion, “We spent a lot of time talking about what form the building should take and whom it should serve… Should we build a Yale synagogue, a conference center, a social club, or even an eating club? In the end, we decided to try to combine everything under one roof” (Fellman 1995) (See Figure 6a–d). Among those functions, the Slifka Center provides the following:

**Figure 5.** Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, Interior Views. (a) Library (upper level); (b) library ceiling (upper level); (c) Beit Midrash (middle level); (d) chapel/multipurpose (middle level); (e) view from entrance (ground level); (f) dining commons (lower level). Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.
• At the basement level, kosher food preparation (meat and dairy); serving line; communal dining; two small seminar or event rooms; a below-grade courtyard; and service spaces such as storage and toilets.

• At the ground level, a welcome desk; casual seating; administrative offices; a meeting room; and a well-furnished common room (complete with fireplace), akin to similar living-room-type spaces in Yale’s residential colleges.

• At the middle level, a double-height chapel and multi-purpose room (seating more than 160 persons); a beit midrash (religious study room, seating 40 persons), intended also for religious services; and, a room for student programming and administration. A central circulation space is itself a functional room, flexible in its configuration for receptions or the chapel’s overflow seating.

At the upper level, a double-height library, including adjacent research rooms; the rabbi’s study (with fireplace); and, another central, flexible circulation space.

Figure 6. Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, Interior Plans. (a) Library (upper level); (b) library ceiling (upper level); (c) library (upper level); (d) library ceiling (upper level). Image Credits: © Roth and Moore, Architects, used by permission.
The rear of the building opens onto an exterior terrace, which features a permanent pergola that serves annually as a succah (See Figure 7).

Figure 7. Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, Exterior View, Rear Patio. Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.

The Slifka Center’s building structure is, for the most part, concrete. The ceilings are exposed concrete coffered into which acoustical panels have been placed. An exception is the roof above the chapel and the library; in these locations, the architects specified an exposed heavy-timber beam-and-deck structure that evokes the interiors of Yale’s Collegiate-Gothic residential college commons. The interior wall surfaces are durable ground-faced concrete block, left unfinished. Additionally, stained oak panels provide visual relief from the masonry. Those surfaces are unornamented, even by Jewish symbols. Only at the middle-level beit midrash (house of study) does one encounter a fixture purpose-built for ritual use. Wood paneling there covers a small aron kodesh, above which the Talmudic phrase “Know Before Whom You Stand”\(^3\) is engraved in stone. The beit midrash features also a prominent, rounded glass block eastern wall to fulfill the Jewish practice of facing Jerusalem during prayer. In this space, as elsewhere, the Slifka Center’s architects sought to encourage Jewish acts (and activity) through a visually-neutral kind of spatial and material infrastructure, open to diverse and alternative uses.

The weightiness of the Slifka Center’s exterior and the control afforded by its single primary entrance visibly evoke a posture of defense against New Haven’s reputed street crime. Nevertheless, the building’s door is unlocked during business hours, and an attendant sits near the entrance to welcome visitors. Building administrators are aware, however, of the increasing numbers of attacks against Jewish targets in the United States (Hirschhorn 2019). Plans have been made to add a guard’s station with a view of the building’s exterior entrance, so that visible threats may be prevented from crossing the building’s threshold (Roth et al. 2019).

4.4. Reception of the Slifka Center’s Design

At its inauguration, descriptions of the Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale emphasized the way in which the new building would confirm Jews’ belonging at an institution with which they had maintained, historically, an ambivalent relationship. In a profile for Yale Alumni Magazine, Bruce Fellman wrote, “After

\(^3\) A phrase adapted from the Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 28b.
years of wandering, Yale’s Jewish community has a home of its own” (Fellman 1995). Fellman meant a home for students as Jews and their Jewish activities, rather than simply a residence for Jewish students at Yale. In fact, the trope of home, side by side with the trope of wandering (and the Jewish diaspora), remains vivid in contemporary descriptions of the building. References to plurality and tolerance are equally common. As the architect Harold Roth explained, the building “had to be welcoming and comfortable for all persuasions of the Jewish faith” (Fellman 1995), a goal as much architectural as programmatic. Rabbi James Ponet, leader of the Yale Hillel at the Slifka Center’s opening, has told the following story of how both home and tolerance had to be continually renegotiated:

One day, the Orthodox were davening in the room . . . called the Beit Midrash . . . There’s an event across the way, organized by Yale Friends of Israel. And this group has got pizza out there. There was a sign . . . saying this pizza is not kosher. [The Orthodox worshiper] comes out, and he says . . . with genuine anger, “Why should [I] and the rest of us who are davening here, in our home, come out see an event that’s of interest to us, and we can’t eat anything there. We care about Israel, why should we be thus excluded from eating?” And, I said to him, “That’s because this place is a home to everybody.” And, to be at home in a place that’s for everybody—the State of Israel is an important metaphor—means a lot of compromise in order for everybody to be able to have some sense of being at home. (Roth et al. 2019)

This perspective underscores how the Slifka Center is neither a synagogue nor a community center. Compromise and coexistence extend equally to worship and to secular affairs, within close spatial proximity and with the kind of intimacy that proximity imposes. Of course, not everyone accepts that vision and in the quarter century since the Slifka Center opened other Jewish groups at Yale have challenged Slifka’s role as the most visible physical signifier of Jewishness on the Yale campus (Xue 2008). Yet what allows the Slifka Center to continue as such is its architectural concept, one that physically promotes the intellectual flexibility continually demanded by Yale’s Jewish student body.

The Slifka Center’s completion coincided with the start of a new phase of Yale’s campus development, and so the Slifka Center provided the university a strong example of contextual architecture that incorporated modernism’s important lessons, too. The 2017 completion of two new residential colleges, designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by Robert A. M. Stern Architects, attests to Yale’s latter-day endorsement of Postmodernism—demonstrated just as vividly, if less pedantically, by both of Roth and Moore’s earlier buildings.


5.1. Historical Background

Duke University’s institutional history is much shorter than Yale’s but emerges in a similar way from a local need for clerical training. Normal College in Trinity, North Carolina, became Trinity College in 1859 with support from North Carolina members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1892, local magnate Washington Duke funded Trinity College’s move to Durham, seventy miles to the east. The Duke family continued its patronage, culminating in 1924 with a substantial $40 million donation to the college and other charities. The college was renamed Duke University and embarked on an ambitious physical expansion culminating in the construction of the West Campus, designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by African American architect Julian Abele with the Philadelphia firm Horace Trumbauer and Associates (See Figure 8a–c).
The commission of a separate Jewish Student Center was, in part, a reaction to such persistent Christian imagery.

Duke's Freeman Center for Jewish life is located adjacent to Campus Drive, a road connecting West Campus's Gothic quadrangle with the older East Campus, near Durham's downtown. The land along Campus Drive is heavily wooded, maintaining the forest-like environment that inspired Duke's original planners (Blackburn 1946, p. 16). Lots on both sides of Campus Drive have been used in recent years for major public structures such as the Nasher Museum of Art (Rafael Viñoly 2005) and the Rubenstein Arts Center (William Rawn Associates 2018). The Freeman Center, at the northwest corner of Campus Drive and Swift Avenue, occupies a prominent site roughly a mile from the center of West Campus (See Figure 9).

**Figure 8.** The Architecture of Duke University’s West Campus, Durham, NC. (a) Duke Chapel (1932); (b) Residential Quadrangle and Tower; (c) Gothic Archway and Ornament. Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.

Throughout its history, Duke’s Methodist origin has remained explicit, as attested by its motto *Eruditio et Religio*, “Knowledge and Faith.” Yet despite the school’s Methodist affiliation, Jewish students enrolled in Trinity College as early as 1908 (Wilson 1999). By 1939, a Hillel unit had been established at Duke to serve approximately 100 students (Grusd 1939, p. 73). Jewish enrollment accelerated in the 1980s after the University aggressively sought to raise its academic profile to that of a national—and secular—research institution. Today, Jews make up around 11% of the undergraduate student body (Hillel’s Guide to Jewish Life 2019). Yet the prominence of Duke Chapel, situated at the very center of West Campus, continues to remind students of the Methodist Church’s established presence. Christian symbols may be found throughout the campus, so much so that some Jewish students at Duke claimed that expression of their Jewish identity was discouraged as a result (Solomon 1983). The commission of a separate Jewish Student Center was, in part, a reaction to such persistent Christian imagery.

Duke’s Freeman Center for Jewish life is located adjacent to Campus Drive, a road connecting West Campus’s Gothic quadrangle with the older East Campus, near Durham’s downtown. The land along Campus Drive is heavily wooded, maintaining the forest-like environment that inspired Duke’s original planners (Blackburn 1946, p. 16). Lots on both sides of Campus Drive have been used in recent years for major public structures such as the Nasher Museum of Art (Rafael Viñoly 2005) and the Rubenstein Arts Center (William Rawn Associates 2018). The Freeman Center, at the northwest corner of Campus Drive and Swift Avenue, occupies a prominent site roughly a mile from the center of West Campus (See Figure 9).
5.2. Site Selection and Initial Building Design

That site was not the one originally selected. After the project’s initial approval by Duke’s Board of Trustees in 1987, the University offered a lot on the south side of Campus Drive, about a third of a mile closer to West Campus. A design was commissioned from New York architects, Gwathmey Siegel and Associates, a firm with a national reputation as dedicated modernists. Their commission signaled both to Duke administrators and to Durham’s general public that the Center for Jewish Life could “challenge preconceptions and provoke new ways of thinking . . . about religion (specifically Judaism), cultural continuity and education” at Duke (Weiss 1990, p. 21). But Gwathmey Siegel’s unbuilt design suggests that the building’s innovation would be aesthetic, rather than programmatic.

Like other campus Jewish Centers, Gwathmey Siegel’s proposal included a sanctuary for worship, a multi-purpose room for social events, a library, a student lounge, offices, and dining facilities. These would be housed, however, within abstract architectural forms, the appearance of which differed starkly from Duke’s predominant Gothic architecture (See Figure 10).
This difference was intended not just as a matter of style. As the architects explained, “The architectural image is one of a village, a collection of spaces around a plaza . . . The historical image is the Old City of Jerusalem, with its gateways, temple roofs and town squares—one civilization building over the previous one, creating a layering through time” (Development Committee for the Center for Jewish Life 1990). Gwathmey Siegel sought, through a contemporary architectural language, to evoke a connection to Judaism’s origins, different from but complementary to Duke’s Christian ones.

In 1990, a faculty member raised concerns about the selected property’s wetland status (Richardson 1990). The architects adjusted their design, but the costs of those adjustments exceeded the Center’s stipulated budget. In 1995, the Center’s backers decided to “find a new site and to refine the program of needs,” in order to align more realistically with the level of funding available for the project (Djuren 1997). In 1996, architect Richard Gurlitz of Chapel Hill was hired to assist selection of a new site. Gurlitz’s team evaluated five locations north of Campus Drive, considering design potential and cost. Their report recommended a site at the corner of College Drive and Swift Avenue “as exhibiting the most favorable physical as well as planning characteristics” (Richard A Gurlitz Architects 1997, p. 4). Duke’s Building and Grounds Committee endorsed Gurlitz’s recommendation, as well as his selection to replace Gwathmey Siegel as architect of the building, to be named after donors Brian and Harriet Freeman. As an implicit criticism of the project’s previous incarnation, Duke’s Building and Grounds Committee made also the following comment: “The building will have the appearance of the other buildings nearby it” (Duke University Building and Grounds Committee 1996).

5.3. The Freeman Center’s Design

The selection of the new site dictated to Gurlitz a different design approach. The site’s topography would ensure that, seen from Campus Drive, the Center would appear at its fullest height. At the site’s north side, neighboring buildings were smaller and residential. Gurlitz’s design addressed both considerations. It shared the earlier project’s compositional method, whereby the building would be assembled from distinct architectural elements, each standing in counterpoint to the next. But, as an ensemble, it looked entirely different. The Freeman Center for Jewish Life derives its exterior appearance from the university’s Collegiate Gothic architecture (Compare Figures 8b and 11). Sheathed in Duke’s typical stone, a three-story tower anchors the southwest corner of the building, facing Campus Drive, and allows for student access directly into the Center’s dining hall.

Figure 11. Freeman Center for Jewish Life at Duke, Exterior View from Southwest. Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.
Adapting the Gothic style for a Jewish building was unusual, but not without precedent. Although the oldest European synagogues shared rudimentary Gothic-like building details with their mediaeval Christian neighbors (Wischenitzer 1955, p. 7), the Gothic style most recently signified there a Christian culture in opposition to secularizing trends. In the United States, such associations have been more equivocal, although obviously influential, as Duke’s own Gothic campus attests. Yet the Gothic style had only rarely been adopted in full by American Jews for their synagogues. Many were designed in eclectic historical styles with some Gothic elements, side by side with so-called “Moorish” or “Oriental” details. Many more 19th-century American synagogues were built in neo-Classical styles. For three decades following the Second World War, synagogue design followed other architectural fashions, as follows: Modernist, formalist, regionalist, and Postmodern neo-classicist. Duke’s Freeman Center borrows a bit from all of these, as well as from Duke’s Collegiate Gothic. But the architect tempered that style’s overt Christian associations by removing all symbolic ornament and by contrasting the style’s basic forms with elements of different architectural associations. The result asserts the Freeman Center’s affiliation with Duke University rather than with Methodism or Christianity.

On the building’s north side, brick masonry walls support two pyramidal roofs, between which the main entrance provides access from vehicular parking. At the building’s east and west sides, exterior spaces separate the north from the south wings. In this way, the Freeman Center’s apparent scale depends upon one’s position—monumental and collegiate, as seen from Campus Drive; smaller and domestic, as seen from the building’s neighbors (See Figure 12). The building’s architect also sought to evoke associations with Jewish history, not just Duke’s history. Gurlitz has said that “the very first thought of a building, anything that was other than a tent, in Judaism, was a tabernacle. This is probably the roots of any kind of Jewish architecture—and the root of that Jewish architecture really had a lot to do with community” (Koster 2000).

Gurlitz also explained, “A big part of the Jewish experience is the Egyptian experience. These are the three pyramids of Giza, which you can see very clearly in these plans of the administration area and sanctuary … [pyramids] are a strong image throughout Judaism and throughout the centuries” (Koster 2000). Whether or not this particular association is correct, the pyramidal roofs do connote locally a kind of domesticity akin to the Center’s residential neighbors. The Freeman Center’s plans are schematically simple. Building elements flank a wide central corridor and its open staircase. Yet the plan’s geometry is complicated, influenced by the site’s boundaries. The north half of the

Figure 12. Freeman Center for Jewish Life at Duke, Exterior View from North. Image Credit: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.

See Figure 13a,b.
building aligns with true north; the south half of the building is rotated to align with Campus Drive (See Figure 13a,b).

![Figure 13](Image Credit: © Gurlitz Architectural Group, used by permission. Original document courtesy Duke University Archives.)

These rotations allowed the architect to accentuate the building’s Gothic-style tower seen from the south; at the same time, the building’s chapel (located on the north side) faces due east without any adjustment. As constructed, Freeman Center houses the following functions:

- At the upper level, welcome desk; casual seating; the chapel (seating more than 110 persons); a library and adjacent exterior terrace; administrative offices; meeting/study rooms; and a lounge at the end of a wide, open corridor.
- At the lower level, kosher food preparation (meat and dairy); communal dining and multi-purpose room, suitable also for worship (seating more than 200 persons); an at-grade courtyard; and service spaces such as storage and toilets. A room designated mikvah (ritual bath) remains unfinished.

The Freeman Center’s structure is covered by other finishes. Interior wall surfaces are generally painted drywall and ceilings are commercial-grade acoustical tile and painted-drywall soffits (See Figure 14a–f). Extensive glazing provides a sense of openness towards the exterior. For instance, the placement of a glazed wall immediately behind the chapel’s bemah emphasizes its connection to the natural surroundings. But instances of traditional Jewish iconography are few. A local craftsman, Steve Herman, created decorative woodwork for the building (Freeman Center for Jewish Life at Duke 1999). Herman inserted a magen David (Star of David) at the base of the reader’s desk in the chapel and in an unglazed portal in the lounge, overlooking the multi-purpose hall. For the chapel’s aron kodesh, Herman applied imagery of a menorah (ritual candelabra). In addition, the curtain cover for a smaller aron kodesh in the library also bears a magen David. In advance of the building’s 1999 dedication, artwork depicting biblical themes was donated by local artists Jim Kellough and Sherri Wood; Ikat fabrics by Lynne Caldwell were donated to the Freeman Center soon after.
Figure 14. Freeman Center for Jewish Life at Duke, interior views. (a) View from reception (upper level); (b) lounge area (upper level); (c) sanctuary facing bemah (upper level); (d) library (upper level); (e) central space and stairs (upper level); (f) commons and dining (upper level). Image Credits: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.

Like many buildings designed for Jewish functions, the Freeman Center includes building elements whose gematria (numeric code) is intended to signify biblical themes. Twelve small windows in the multipurpose room refer to Israel’s Biblical-era twelve tribes; five small windows in the library refer to the five books of Moses. At the building’s exterior, a pergola of five columns, set against the north exterior wall of the chapel, forms an arbor for the cultivation of grapes, thereby alluding (according to the architect) to the Jewish Sabbath and its ritual cup of wine (Koster 2000).

One long-anticipated building element, the mikvah (ritual bath), has yet to be built. A mikvah was included in the initial stages of the planning process in the late 1980s (Ruderman et al. 1988, p. 2) but was controversial from the start. Used primarily by Orthodox women and men for ritual purification, inclusion of a mikvah was seen by some Jews at Duke as an example of traditional gender inequality unwelcome on college campuses today. Others countered that “a mikvah would exclude no one while...
opening the center to those who hold to traditional Jewish practice” (Byrne 1989). The opposing sides worried about the balance between Jewish religiosity and cultural identity: what would the predominance of one say about the significance of the other at Duke? To accommodate the wishes of both sides, an endowment separate from the building fund was established to build and maintain the mikvah, and space in the building was set aside for that purpose (Gordon 2019). In the end, a mikvah was never built, and the designated room is today used for storage.

5.4. Reception of the Freeman Center’s Design

At the time of its dedication, the Freeman Center’s opening was described by Duke’s student paper as an “emotional event” for the university’s Jewish community. Roger Kaplan, director of Duke’s Center for Jewish Life for which the Freeman Center was built, said that Jewish students at Duke had now “a room to call their own.” University President Nan Keohane called the building “lovely and practical,” and opined that the building’s “soul is large” (Wilson 1999). Members of the committee that had commissioned the building spoke favorably about the building’s siting, as well as its open connection to the exterior. Judith Ruderman, Duke’s assistant vice provost and an advocate of the project from its conception, said that “When . . . I look out of every window, there’s a vista. It’s eautifully sited, it’s functional, I find it warm yet elegant, people like to be in there” (Koster 2000). Twenty years later, the Freeman Center continues to serve its original purpose with only a few changes. The building’s openness, however, has led to concerns about security. Even in advance of anti-Semitic defacement of Duke students’ memorial for the victims of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shootings (Kimmelman 2018), the Freeman Center’s administration had restricted free access between the building’s exterior and interior spaces. Visitors to the building must request access via intercom, but the building’s complicated geometry makes single-point surveillance difficult (Gordon 2019).

Controversies over funding, too, raise concerns about the Center’s institutional sustainability and that of Jewish Student Centers everywhere. In 2018, Bernie Lunzer, president of a union representing newspaper journalists, wrote to Duke President Vincent Price about job cuts at businesses operated by Digital First Media. Lunzer asked that Price reconsider Duke’s accepting donations from Heath Freeman, managing director of the hedge fund that purchased Digital First Media in 2010 (Lunzer 2018a). Freeman, son of the Freeman Center’s eponymous donors, is a Duke alumnus, a member of the Center’s advisory board, and one of the Center’s ongoing benefactors. In a second letter to Price, Lunzer argued that the behavior of Freeman’s company contradicted the intellectual and moral ethos to which Duke University subscribed (Lunzer 2018b). Lunzer’s appeal reflects a trend to force universities around the world to examine donors’ business practices, the sources of their wealth (Bennett 2019), their political agendas (Dodgson and Gann 2018), and even their personal comportment (Feeney 2014). Do the recipients of charity share the liabilities—civil, criminal, or moral—of their benefactors? In this case, Duke’s representatives answered no (Gronberg 2018). But considering most Jewish Student Centers’ reliance upon private financial support for their physical existence, future fundraisers may have to work with alternative methods, closer oversight, and reduced expectations in order to assure alignment with Jewish Student Centers’ religious and social missions.


6.1. Historical Background

As a more recently established public university, University of California, San Diego (UCSD) would appear to have little in common with two schools founded to serve the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the story of UCSD’s development by state officials and its reception by the local community also includes an account of religious sectarianism that persists even to this day. Attempts by the university’s Hillel Foundation to develop a vacant parcel of land have been resisted by a handful of nearby residents for almost two decades. The religious bias underlying neighbors’ complaints has been so slightly
veiled that even the judge hearing their objections called them “evocative of Eastern Europe and not appropriate” in the United States (The Times of San Diego 2018). With the legal case recently settled, and with its architecture in the design development phase, the Glickman Hillel Center for Jewish Life illustrates how Jewish-American identity continues to grapple—through its physical environment, including its buildings—with the valence of sectarian identity even at public universities.

Established in 1960, UCSD was originally conceived as a graduate-level research institute, focused on the STEM fields that were in high demand at the height of the Cold War (Walsh 1964). San Diego’s politicians and business leaders supported the choice, which was received with ambivalence by local residents. La Jolla’s homeowners expressed fear of falling real estate values and of a threat to “their historically close-knit community” were a new university to hire “foreigners and Jews” (Stratthaus 1996, p. 214). For decades La Jolla had maintained its exclusivity by covenants and real estate practices that prevented Jews and other ethnic minorities from purchasing homes there. But Roger Revelle, Director of the nearby Scripps Institute of Oceanography, had already faced staffing problems at Scripps due to such practices and was vocal about La Jolla’s need to change. Unafraid of antagonizing local residents, he told them, “You’ve got to make up your mind. You’re either going to have a university or you’re going to have an anti-Semitic covenant. You can’t have both” (Stratthaus 1996, p. 215). When the future university’s beneficial economic impacts were understood by La Jolla realtors, most of the discriminatory practices were quietly put aside.

UCSD accepted its first students in 1964 and has since become a major research university. The architecture of the campus reflects, in large part, the institutional modernism characteristic of the mid-1960s. The central feature of the campus is Geisel Library, designed by William L. Pereira and Associates, whose exposed concrete frame is a structural tour de force (See Figure 15a).

Figure 15. The Architecture of University of California, San Diego, and its Neighbors. (a) Geisel Library, UCSD (1970); (b) Offices, Salk Laboratories (1963); (c) Single Family Residence in La Jolla (circa 2019). Image Credits: © 2019 Jeremy Kargon.
Perhaps more influential is Louis Kahn’s famous Salk Institute Laboratories, located just to the west of the campus. Its material palette of wood, exposed concrete, and stainless-steel may be found in UCSD buildings being built even today. On the other hand, buildings in the residential neighborhoods surrounding the campus are different, if entirely characteristic of southern California; single family houses of one or two stories, with prominent roofs, behind thick foliage or solid walls (See Figure 15b,c).

UCSD’s Hillel unit liaises with other schools in San Diego, including the University of San Diego, CSU San Marcos, and San Diego State. As a result, the Hillel organization maintains close community ties throughout the region. The Hillel at San Diego State commissioned a purpose-built facility that opened in 2014. Since then, that facility has become the de facto center for Hillel’s activities in San Diego. Yet years before that, in the mid-1990s, staff at the UCSD Hillel decided that their own programming had outgrown spaces leased from the university itself. As Neal Singer, vice president of the UCSD Hillel’s board, said in 2002, “we decided that we really needed a facility of our own, a place where kids could come study or use the computer or research stuff in the library or have counseling sessions” (Grimm 2002). Their first priority was proximity to the UCSD campus. Hillel quickly identified a suitable parcel—Site 653, a triangular, vacant lot bounded on three sides by roadways. The parcel was owned by the city of San Diego, which issued a request-for-proposals (RFP) to solicit development bids in 2000. After a city-appointed committee reviewed the proposals, the City Council voted to negotiate with Hillel for the parcel’s purchase. In reaction to this decision, however, a coalition of neighbors (who had responded unsuccessfully to the RFP) filed a lawsuit to prevent the sale. In May 2006, the San Diego City Council approved anyway the sale of the property to Hillel for $940,000, after which the neighborhood coalition renewed their objections (Batterson 2011). Through years of court-ordered environmental impact statements, traffic studies, and repeated review by the City Council, Hillel’s right to develop the property was finally acknowledged by the San Diego Superior Court in 2018 (Batterson 2018).

6.2. Site Context

Site 653 lies on the south side of La Jolla Village Drive, opposite from the La Jolla Playhouse, situated on the southernmost extension of the UCSD campus. A spur of La Jolla Scenic Drive separates the property from residential properties to the south. To the west, with views of the Pacific Ocean, is a natural landscape managed by Scripps Institute (See Figure 16).

Figure 16. Glickman Hillel Center at UCSD, Location Plan. Image Credits: map data © 2019 Google, TerraMetrics, DataCSUMB SFML, CA OPC; reuse according to Google’s Terms of Service. Annotations by the author.
Due to the legal sensitivity surrounding the project, architects and planners M. W. Steele Group first approached the UCSD Hillel’s design as a problem of site planning, of context, and of massing. As architect Mark Steele explained, to accommodate the neighbors’ objections, his team made all automobile traffic enter from La Jolla Scenic Drive, at the east, and made the buildings smaller in scale and size to conform to the residential surroundings (Steele and Paluso 2019). The project’s scope was eventually cut in half to about 6500 sf, but the design remained one of three small buildings organized around an open courtyard. The westernmost part of the property, highest in elevation and closest to La Jolla Village Drive’s main pedestrian crossing, would be designed as a publicly-accessible garden. In this manner, the project’s development would provide an amenity for local residents and UCSD students alike.

The project’s pedestrian entrance will be located on the site’s north side, along La Jolla Village Drive, so that foot traffic into the UCSD Hillel will not enter the neighborhood to the south. As a further planning consideration, movement around and into the project’s central courtyard will be informal, off-axis, and guided by complex geometries. The passageways between buildings will be narrow and intimate, different from the surrounding, wide-open La Jolla suburbs. As Steele explained, “there’s a sense of an old-world quality about it, of these forms; they’re sort of tight and come together” similar to a traditional town (Steele and Paluso 2019).

6.3. The Glickman Hillel Center’s Design

Like the previous examples of Jewish Student Centers, the future Glickman Hillel Center will seek to fit in, but not with respect to UCSD’s modernist campus architecture. Instead, the Glickman Hillel Center will look like its residential neighbors. The building’s design will be accentuated by its roof forms, which cascade over the site and extend in multiple directions (See Figure 17).

A lively roof-scape is common among nearby La Jolla residences; a restrained material palette is, too (See Figure 15, bottom). One difference will be the Glickman’s Center’s judicious use of so-called Jerusalem stone on some exterior walls and paving. This material, heavier and more substantial than the project’s other materials, evokes the “old-worldliness” that the architect has associated with Jewishness in this building and others in his portfolio (Steele and Paluso 2019). Functionally, the Glickman Center will be divided into three parts:

- The Hospitality Building, containing a reception desk, lounge seating, and additional casual seating, all within a single open space that faces the Center Courtyard.
- The Leadership Building, containing a seminar room, bathrooms, and storage space, surrounding a second large space facing the Center Courtyard.
- The Community Building, including the largest open space, a kitchen, bathrooms, and a second-story suite for administrative functions.
The Center’s courtyard will function both as welcoming foyer and as usable space for activities throughout the year. The ensemble will be built to LEED Silver standards, including water conservation and solar energy collection supplying up to 50% of the building needs (Hillel UC San Diego 2018).

But the Glickman Hillel Center will not include many of the following spaces that Jewish Student Centers often include: A dedicated chapel, a library, or extensive dining facilities. Instead, the emphasis in the Glickman Center will be activity, variously defined and variously accommodated within the different kinds of spaces provided by the design (See Figure 18). This approach was intentional. Mark Steele and his team toured other Hillel buildings and found that “[Hillel’s leaders] really … want students to come in and see activity … Not a real, overly-stodgy religious place. They want them to see pool tables and coffee bars ... To bring [students] in, so they feel comfortable wanting to just being there” (Steele and Paluso 2019). Worship may be held in any of the three open spaces, depending on the number of participants and the needs of the service. Architect and client have considered a movable bemah and aron kodesh to allow even greater flexibility.

Figure 18. Site and Building Plans, Glickman Hillel Center at UCSD. Image Credits: © M. W. Steele Group, used by permission.

The building’s interior design has not yet been developed, but the architects anticipate that Jewish-themed ornament will be subtle, if present at all. Steele explained that, in synagogues he has designed, congregations commissioned work from local artists; this is likely to be the case here (Steele and Paluso 2019). As currently designed, the Glickman Center will display no Jewish iconography on the exterior (See Figure 19). In part, the lack of explicit symbolism has to do with security concerns, heightened locally in the wake of a recent attack on a San Diego area synagogue only a few miles away from the UCSD campus (Medina et al. 2019). Access to the Center Courtyard will be controlled by gates between each of the three buildings and all visitors will have to enter through the north-facing entrance and (potentially) subjected to a security check.
In advance of the building’s construction, it is impossible to determine its future reception among UCSD’s students or the community at large. But the success of the project’s legal case in 2018 has confirmed the importance of the project’s mission for San Diego’s Jewish community. Local supporters have evoked, in San Diego as in New Haven and Durham, the trope of home and belonging. In this case, “home” is expected to mean a pluralistic community under Hillel’s stewardship. As UCSD student Elliot Yamin has said, “That means a place where everyone feels welcome, no matter their background ... with Orthodox Jews and Reform Jews, Israelis and Persians, Americans and international students and students who are really, really Jewish and students who are just Jew-ish” (Stone 2018). At UCSD, “home” will mean an environment very different from that of the university campus nearby. What the architecture of the Glickman Center promises is, in fact, a kind of sophisticated domesticity, set adjacent to yet apart from the neighbors. Apparently, fitting in is seeming fit, but at a comfortably secure remove.

6.4. Reception of the Glickman Center’s Design

In retrospect, the common metaphor of home is an unlikely one for Jewish Student Centers on university campuses. No one is expected to live in them, and a meal commons is not a family dining room. Furthermore, in contrast to residences, these buildings are designed to be public edifices. Why, then, have students and others consistently referred to home when speaking about Jewish Student Centers? As these case studies have illustrated, Jewish students do not identify these buildings as home-like because they are marked with Jewish symbols, and so somehow familiar. Rather, students feel at home because of certain architectural characteristics and ascribe Jewishness to them through their cumulative personal experiences. This would not happen in more visibly institutional settings; architects for the Yale Slifka Center indicate that comfort, intimacy, and familiarity have been an important catalyst for students’ associations of Jewishness with their surroundings (Roth et al. 2019). Nor would this happen as effectively within a building built for a different purpose, whether a college recreation center or an off-campus synagogue. Jewish Student Centers nurture Jewish identity through the scope of activities—prayer, dining, study, play—that they are uniquely suited to support (Gordon 2019). Moreover, common spatial tropes (openness, interconnectivity, and the presence of related functions) reinforce students’ attention to their activities’ Jewish content. Such tropes embody an architectural type, perhaps more so than exterior style, interior décor, or applied symbolism, even if they are not as easily identifiable by sight alone (Colquhoun 1969; Herdeg 1985).

Architect Percival Goodman touched upon this phenomenon when he placed the “congregational sense of the Jews” (Goodman and Goodman 1949) at the core of their identity and their visual culture, including architecture. As he wrote elsewhere, “If there is anything true in religion that is specifically
Jewish, it is this integrating of the individual actors and their community” (Goodman and Goodman 1947). Goodman had sought to link the obvious persistence of Jews’ religious traditions with new architectural forms, but he did so through an emphasis upon functional analysis rather than the application of religious symbol. For Goodman, only well-planned relationships among a synagogue’s ritual spaces could inspire profound spiritual connections among members its congregation. Ultimately, however, a Jewish Student Center is expected to signify, not to sanctify. Through its architectural design, the building is expected to express certain concepts, values, and even feelings. To judge from the examples presented here, Jewish Student Centers convey three interrelated messages:

- **arrival** (of Jewish students) to the university, its intellectual tradition, and its social legacies;
- **settlement** (of Jews) within the university’s surrounding neighborhood;
- **belonging** (of individuals) to a Jewish community.

The substance of these messages differs on each campus, just as the narratives of arrival, settlement, and belonging differ from place to place or person to person. Each of these universities admits Jewish students with past records of high academic achievement and, in doing so, obscures among them students’ differences due to ethnicity, class, or geographical origin. But a successful Jewish Student Center may positively reinforce those aspects of a student’s identity. The Slifka Center, for instance, certainly does so. By its exterior façade, its architecture celebrates the intellectual play of connotation and interpretation; by its interior spatial interconnectivity, its architecture emphasizes the multifaceted nature of contemporary Jewish identity. At Duke, the Freeman Center’s message depends upon (literally) how you look at it. From one angle, the building is first and foremost akin to others at Duke; from another, it is uniquely suited to its site and to the Jewish activities of its occupants. At UCSD, the Glickman Center’s design will announce above all else its students’ right of settlement in residential La Jolla. Yet each building eschews reliance on explicit Jewish symbols and instead deploys materials, light, and effective spatial organization to project its message. Taken together, the effectiveness with which such messages can be conveyed by architecture addresses, in part, the question of a uniquely Jewish architecture (cf. Gruber 2004). Jewish Student Centers are, as a group, stylistically and functionally syncretistic; indeed, syncretism may be their fundamental characteristic. There is no need of irony to observe that Jews’ tradition of textual exegesis might also operate in their experience of architecture. Where Jewish Student Centers are concerned, each architectural design becomes an opportunity for interpretation, wrought in space and physical materials. This intentional characteristic is certainly as typologically significant as any visible style.

To be sure, campus facilities serving students of other faiths have shared some of these traits, especially in the years after Second World War when Modernist architectural practice was ascendant. As architect Phillip James Tabb has written, “Denominational identity was occupying new territory in American religious architecture with the coexistence of pure modernism and selective historicism. The suburbs and university campuses were the primary recipients of expansion and experimentation ... [S]piritual life seemed to flourish through the function of the interiority of religious practices and the fellowship among the congregation members” (Tabb 2019, p. 301). On those college campuses, religious fellowship had necessarily to take on multiple dimensions among all students, including Jews. As the story of Jewish Student Centers suggests, students’ belonging to multiple communities affords them opportunities for extra- and intra-sectarian dialogue, made nevertheless easier by a physical, nurturing home.

Nevertheless, architecture alone cannot assure that dialogue. Arguments about the Hillel Foundation’s authority to sanction or to forbid certain forms of political activity have led some to question the organization’s commitment to pluralism. At the same time, student activism hostile to Israeli cultural and academic programming has posed a renewed challenge to Jewish groups’ equal participation within university communities (cf. Shire 2017). And, ever more frequently, acts of violence against Jewish students (and their buildings) have come from inside and outside university campuses (Jaschik 2018). If these trends continue, future Jewish Student Centers will tend towards...
exclusivity, not ecumenism. What that means for their architecture is two-fold, as follows: Increased concern for security and, paradoxically, less of the intimacy that has characterized these buildings until now. Paul Goldenberg, a security consultant affiliated with Rutgers University Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience, has warned about the practical consequences of this transition: “Security has come with a tremendous cost to the Jewish community… Our institutions should not be surrounded by copper tin wire and bars” (Sales 2018). Alternatively, in the future, ecumenism may transform into opacity, whereby fitting in becomes once again—for Jews, and perhaps other minority religious groups—hiding in plain sight. Considering the prevalence of such trends in the history of Jewish architecture elsewhere, Jewish Student Centers in the United States could eventually embrace that long-standing, if troubled, tradition.

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