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Revitalizing a building and a student culture



Rabbi Karen Silberman, center, laughs with students Sydney Kruger, left, and Jordan Liderman as they prepare dinner at Hillel. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill
Mary Knox Merrill

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Jewish student life at Northeastern University is going in dynamic new directions thanks to a revitalized Hillel House and increased student programming, which are strengthening the student experience and presenting exciting new avenues for synergy with the [Jewish Studies](#) program.

Northeastern recently acquired the Hillel building on St. Stephen Street through a gift from the Northeastern Hillel Advisory Committee Inc., an agreement that highlights a shared commitment to support the Jewish community on campus and maximize opportunities for students. Through this partnership, the building

has undergone significant renovations, including new lighting, flooring, windows and significant roof work.

These improvements have transformed Hillel into a vibrant center of Jewish life at Northeastern, with increased space for services, a renovated library with supervised evening study hours and a living area for visiting Jewish scholars.

Meanwhile, more students are attending social events such as film screenings, dinners and community service days than ever before, and they are building strong relationships by gathering after classes to cook dinner or relax in the game room, according to Rabbi Karen Silberman, executive director of [Northeastern Hillel](#).

"There is more participation, and there is more energy," Silberman said.

The group is also cultivating new collaborations with the Jewish Studies program and other student groups. Silberman has invited Jewish Studies professors to speak with students between meals and Shabbat services on Friday nights. Student participation in birthright trips to Israel has also risen dramatically in recent years; at least 120 students are expected to be involved this year.

"This has reenergized everybody, and the renovations have provided a sense of renewal," said Northeastern Hillel Advisory Committee president Nathaniel Rickles, an assistant professor in the [School of Pharmacy](#). The advisory committee is currently comprised of faculty and alumni, and Rickles said he expects it to grow and include student representation.

Last year, renowned scholar Lori Lefkowitz joined Northeastern as the first full-time chair of the Jewish Studies program, becoming the inaugural holder of the Ruderman Professorship of Jewish Studies. Lefkowitz brings a diverse background of interdisciplinary training in Jewish Studies and program development, and she is expected to reinvigorate the program through new activities and experiential learning opportunities, while working with faculty to expand the curriculum.

Northeastern University Hillel was established by a group of faculty and students in 1962. Hillel is the world's largest campus-based Jewish organization in the world, and it strives to enrich the lives of Jewish students through spiritual services, community service, social events and Jewish learning.

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