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[EDUCATION](#)

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New Jewish group at ASU

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IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURES

[Leading Up North: A chance to finally help](#)

[Phoenix Jewish Film Festival goes global](#)

COMMUNITY

[Star-crossed missionaries](#)

[Rabbi starts learning center in Scottsdale](#)

[Coming to Town](#)

[Tile tourney](#)

PROFILE

[Peace in Iraq remains elusive](#)

HEALTH

[Finding online romance safely](#)

When ASU junior Aaron Rosen arrived in Arizona three years ago, he was uninvolved with the Jewish community and not interested in becoming a part of it.

However, things changed after he met more Jews, attended a Phoenix Community Kollel class and took a birthright trip to Israel in December 2005.

Now he's the student event coordinator and president of a new student group at Arizona State University called Jewish Arizonans on Campus (JAC), which was launched last summer. JAC, a project of the Phoenix Community Kollel, provides students with social interaction and Jewish educational opportunities.

Rosen likes the JAC emphasis on education.

"If you remove education, you won't get people committed to Judaism," says Rosen. "I find it depressing to see the thousands of Jewish students at ASU who are willing to forget that they have a Jewish background. And I know this because I used to be one of those people. (JAC) wants to remind them that they are Jewish and not to forget."

The group is headed by its founder, Rabbi Jordan Brumer. "Our main trademarks are the trips that we run to New York City, California, London and Israel during the school breaks," says Brumer. The trips offer social and educational experiences. "Students have a great time doing all of the 'touristy' things, but it's also a chance to explore their Jewish heritage."

The rabbi, who also helped to establish JAC at the University of Arizona two years ago, led a group of Arizona students to Israel Dec. 17-Jan. 7. A total of 15 students took JAC winter-break trips to Israel, London and New York.

Generally, students on JAC trips spend mornings taking classes and engaging in lively discussions on Judaism and Israel. Afternoons are spent touring historic and cultural sites.

"The way I describe it to students is that it's a good opportunity to feed their bodies and feed their souls at the same time," Brumer says. JAC is open to students from all backgrounds and denominations, "whether they know a lot or they know very little."

ASU junior Ben Foster's second trip to Israel in December was with JAC. "I loved Israel, the people, the places," he says. The JAC trips "afford you the opportunity to explore Judaism and to actually learn something at the same time while you're meeting new people in a college environment."

Foster, who grew up in Glendale and was a member of Beth El Congregation in Phoenix, now serves as a JAC trip recruiter at ASU. Brumer notes that students from any Arizona university or college are welcome to join any JAC trip.

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Focus on Families[Great grandparents](#)[Get 'em while they're young](#)[Finding balance](#)[Love in the desert](#)[Overnight camp: Ready or not?](#)[To fill an empty nest](#)

The next trips are to New York and London during the ASU and U of A spring break, March 11-18. The cost of the New York trip is \$50 and cost of the London trip is \$649. Both trips include airfare and accommodations.

ASU is also one of the first college campuses in North America to start the Heritage Scholars program, says Brumer. Approximately 25 students participate in four weeks of classes about Judaism, one evening per week as well as one Shabbaton. Upon completion of the program, JAC provides each student with a \$150 fellowship stipend because "they are taking time out of their day when they could be working."

Last semester, JAC at ASU offered a variety of social events like barbecues with Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity and a Jewish hip-hop night, both attracting 50 to 60 students. This semester, JAC is offering a trip to a Coyotes hockey game as well as a basketball game between Alpha Epsilon Pi and Sigma Alpha Mu, ASU's two Jewish fraternities, to raise funds for projects in Israel.

Other Jewish groups at ASU are the Hillel Jewish Student Center, which has had a presence on the campus since the early 1940s, and Chabad at ASU, which started in 2003.

"We are very proud of the fact that we are adding something to the existing organizations on campus," says Brumer. "We are in no way looking to compete. There are so many Jews on campus, so this is just another option for students to get involved."

Visit myjac.org or contact Brumer at 480-390-6173 or rjordan@myjac.org.

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