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### A Look at Faces of Israel

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By Aaron Jacobs, ICB Reporter

We've all been to Israeli culture nights that feature falafel and hookahs – they're fine, but they don't exactly lead anyone to make any new revelations about Israel. And there's nothing wrong with defending Israel when it comes under attack on the quad or in a classroom; standing up for the truth is important.

As long as Israel activism exists on the college campus, these events will happen regularly. But [Amy Beth Oppenheimer](#) decided that they aren't enough, so she developed a new tool that can bring a new approach to Israel programming.

Oppenheimer, created a documentary film, [Faces of Israel: A Discussion about Marriage, State, and Religion in the Jewish Homeland](#), that delves into some of the most interesting and perplexing issues facing Israel and Israelis. The film, which Oppenheimer directed, explores a multitude of Israeli viewpoints.

It includes interviews with secular, Masorti and ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews, openly gay university students, rabbis and others as it explores hot topics related to Judaism and Israel. The 75-minute film consists of 10 themed chapters, each devoted to one topic, which can be watched consecutively or stand-alone.

"*Faces of Israel* can be used as a springboard to discuss many different topics," Oppenheimer said. "Jewish identity, religious pluralism in Israel, civil liberties in Israel, the place of religion in a democratic state, same-sex unions and the GLBT community and a lot more."

Students who have seen the film multiple times say *Faces of Israel* never gets boring because it is different every time. Each audience brings diverse viewpoints and come from various backgrounds. And Oppenheimer does not just screen the film; she engages her audience with questions and discussion topics designed to make viewing it an entirely interactive experience.

"[*Faces of Israel*] runs like a 'Choose Your Own Adventure' book in the sense that it is easily tailored to the interests of the audience," she said.

*Faces of Israel* took Oppenheimer to Emory University in Atlanta in November, where Emory Students for Israel (ESI) organized an event that was co-sponsored by Hillel, MASA, The David Project and Emory College Council. (Read more about the event and how students responded to it [here](#).)

"Every person I encountered at the event was pro-Israel, said Emory junior Charlie Punia. "A majority of the crowd was Jewish; nevertheless I do think that the audience was quite diverse. The event drew a crowd that was more than just the kids you would see at any other ESI or Hillel-sponsored event. There were a number of students that I had never before seen."

Likewise, when "*Faces*" traveled to the University of Arizona last month, it attracted a diverse group of students, community members, and professionals.

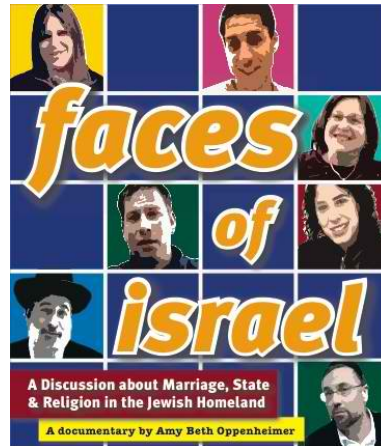
"We brought *Faces of Israel* to Arizona because we felt that it could be used as a great way to engage pro-Israel students on an educational level, but different from your typical 'Israel Advocacy' event," said Joel Kanter, a senior and David Project Intern, who helped organize the event.

"*Faces of Israel* is most useful as a tool for awareness," Punia said. "I don't believe that the average college student knows nearly enough about Israel. This program is unique in that it comprises a documentary video. Students have an amazing opportunity to listen to the thoughts and opinions of such a diverse cross section of Israelis."

"A lot of Israel events fall into one of two categories: political advocacy and 'the conflict' or 'let's sit and eat a falafel,'" Oppenheimer said. "Both are important, but there is so much in between and that is where *Faces of Israel* comes in."

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