

UT Shabbat Across Campus has record fall turnout

By Jordana Hoffman

On Oct. 26, 315 students came together to celebrate Shabbat in houses, apartments and dorm rooms across Austin. Shabbat Across Campus started four years ago when J-Tribe and Chabad at UT teamed up to spread a little light in the darkness after the Har Nof shooting in Jerusalem. Their response to this horrible event was to create a DIY interactive Shabbat event for students to bring into their own homes, allowing it to be as small or as large as the student wants. There, students had the opportunity to take this tragedy and use it to build a Jewish community around themselves. Four years ago, Shabbat Across Campus had 50 students; the year after, it more than doubled with 120 students participating; and the third year, they reached a record of 235 participants. In fall 2018, a record was set with 315 students.

A large part of the continued success and growth of this program is due to of Chabad at UT Rabbi Zev Johnson's belief and support of Shabbat Across Campus. He was there at its inception and even designed a quick and easy prayer

service for students to take home and use for future Shabbats.

It started as a clapback against terrorism, but in the past few years it has grown and developed as a guide to building a personal Jewish community outside of the synagogue. Students were able to bridge the gap between Shabbats in and after college and could create personal Shabbat traditions that would last a lifetime. While Chabad is there to guide Jewish students during their time in college, after graduation it can be difficult to figure out traditions for oneself. The DIY program is a starter kit. "While having [students] at Chabad is important and meaningful, Judaism starts in the home," said Johnson.

Shabbat Across Campus is a student-led program and an ever-growing undertaking. UT sophomore Alex Herschmann was undaunted. As the Shabbat chair on the J-Tribe board, this is exactly what he had signed up for. J-Tribe, a subsidiary of Jewish Heritage Program, is a Jewish student-led grassroots organization whose mission is to unite Austin's college-aged Jewish community.

Herschmann is actively involved with both J-Tribe and Chabad at UT and strongly supports their combined efforts to bring Shabbat Across Campus to as many students as possible. He believes that this event is a great way to help others feel more comfortable and find meaning in their religiosity. Thus, he was in charge of getting people signed up, organizing Shabbat kits and scheduling pickups. Chabad worked with Herschmann to assemble these kits, which included kosher Shabbat meals for the smallest to the largest of groups, grape juice, mini challahs and of course Rabbi Johnson's prayer service. Besides organizing the largest Shabbat Across Campus at UT yet, Herschmann has set another record: he hosted his own humble Shabbat Across Campus dinner with 40 students, the largest individual Shabbat dinner. "Shabbat Across Campus was one of the most remarkably fun and experimental nights of my year. With my close friend, I hosted a Shabbat dinner and had 40 people in attendance. It was beautiful to see such an amazing turnout from members of the UT Jewish

community. It is amazing to see how many students are willing to put their weekend plans on hold to be part of something bigger than themselves," Herschmann said.

All students who participated, whether at that incredibly large table or at smaller tables of their own, agree that this was a significant program with lasting effects. Morgan Chapman, a UT senior, said, "It was so much fun having my friends over for a meal in our own home. It foreshadowed our traditions after college for Shabbat meals."

While this is the only program of its kind at UT, both J-Tribe and Chabad at UT are proud to sponsor this and other similar programs throughout the the entire school year. The winter semester has already begun and both organizations have a stunning semester planned for Jewish students. To find out more about both of these marvelous organizations, please visit www.jewishlonghorns.com. Those interested in supporting Chabad at UT are encouraged to provide contributions throughout the year through Chabad Shares, which allows for monthly donations



Photo: Rabbi Zev Johnson
Avital Gurman dishing out matzah ball soup for Shabbat Across Campus

that help Jewish students of all denominations to learn, thrive and connect with one another. Events and activities like the one described here are supported in part by the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas.

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