

Commentary ignores positive goals of many religious organizations

By members of the Alliance to Advance Interfaith Collaboration at Rutgers University |

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Last Thursday's Daily Targum published a commentary that questioned Hillel's use of its funds. This piece was factually inaccurate and perpetuated Jewish stereotypes about money in a revolting way. As members of the Alliance to Advance Interfaith Collaboration at Rutgers University, we are writing in response to this hateful piece.

The Interfaith Alliance promotes collaboration between particular university-recognized campus chaplains who officially represent their faith communities on the New Brunswick-Piscataway Campus of Rutgers University. Our members are committed to respecting the diversity of beliefs and practices present at the University and work together to enrich the spiritual well-being of students, faculty and staff.

We also support each other in times of crisis. When the New York Police Department was singling out Muslims on campus to monitor, we wrote a joint letter to this very newspaper. So now, when a commentary printed in the Targum uses a nasty Jewish stereotype that "pro-Israel parties are good at getting money into funds," we call out that anti-Semitism and say that our campus paper should not be printing bigoted language like that — even in the context of commentary or opinion.

As Rutgers University-recognized chaplains, we are all privately funded. All our organizations raise their own money to pay for their facilities, staff and programming they provide to Rutgers students. Hillel is no different than the rest of us in this regard. We all raise money and use it to further the missions of each of our organizations. It is not the mission of any of our chaplaincies to pay for streetlights in New Brunswick or build residences for Rutgers alumni, as the author suggests.

Diversity at Rutgers is a value we cherish. Rutgers has a large Jewish community, which is part of that diversity. The commentary suggested Jewish students don't belong on a "historically reformed Dutch college" campus. What about us? We're Muslim and Catholic and other denominations of Christianity. Don't we all have a place here? Each of our recognized chaplaincies offers community, prayer, selfless acts of community service and a welcoming environment to any Rutgers student. We work together on interfaith dialogues and joint programs. We offer counseling to students in need, and, believe it or not, we actually get along with one another. To answer the author of the commentary, "As a non-Jewish person, does the Jewish nature make you feel welcome?" the answer is yes: We all have been welcomed into Hillel, and we and our students will be welcomed

there once the new building is completed.

As members of the Interfaith Alliance, we are most concerned that this author singled out Hillel for attack. When the Catholic Center built its building a few years ago, there was no commentary in the Targum decrying it. When Chabad House built an addition to its building that opened this past fall, the Targum did not print a commentary against it. When the University used its own funds to provide meditation spaces in student centers, in response to the need for Muslim prayer space on campus, there was no outcry. Hillel has a right to use its own funds for its mission: to benefit Jewish students on campus.

Rather than printing hateful language against one of our university's chaplaincies, we expect that in the future, the Targum would write about the positive activities all our chaplaincies provide to the diverse Rutgers population.

This letter was written and submitted by members of the Alliance to Advance Interfaith Collaboration at Rutgers University: Rev. Gregory Bezilla, Rev. Peter Cebulka, Imam Moutaz Charaf, Br. Joseph Donovan, Rabbi Esther Reed, Rabbi Heath Watenmaker and Rabbi Akiva Dovid Weiss.