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26 September 2025

Dear President Sands, Provost Clarke, Dean Belmonte, and Faculty Senate President Lemkul,

The leadership of the Association for Jewish Studies, the largest learned society and professional organization representing Jewish studies scholars worldwide, writes to express concern that Virginia Tech University is planning to dissolve the Department of Religion and Culture which houses its faculty in Jewish studies and oversees the Judaic Studies program and minor. AJS's mission is to advance research and teaching in Jewish Studies at colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning, and to foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public.

Alongside [the leadership of the American Academy of Religion](#) (AAR), we believe that "the study of religion is more than ever before essential to the mission of the university, to the understanding of global challenges." Judaic studies is a foundational component of the study of religion in the United States and globally. At the very moment when discussions about antisemitism occupy a prominent place on college campuses nationwide, the elimination of faculty and/or a program in Judaic Studies threatens to undermine students' ability to learn about the history of the Jewish religion and Jewish people.

We recognize these are difficult financial times. Nonetheless, we urge you to continue your support of Judaic and religious studies and your outstanding faculty in the Department of Religion and Culture as you seek to fulfill your educational mission.

Thank you for your thoughtfulness on this matter,

Laura Leibman, President, Association for Jewish Studies.
Helen Kim, VP of Program, Association for Jewish Studies
Laura Lieber, VP of Publications, Association for Jewish Studies
Hartley Lachter, VP of Membership and Outreach, Association for Jewish Studies
Lila Corwin Berman, Secretary/Treasurer, Association for Jewish Studies
Robin Judd, Past President, Association for Jewish Studies