

# Berkeley Bridging Fellowship Program

The Berkeley Bridging Fellowship Program, a forum and community-building space of the College of Letters & Science, organized by the Center for Middle East Studies and the Center for Jewish Studies, and co-sponsored by the Othering and Belonging Institute and the Greater Good Science Center, invites applications to join our inaugural cohort of undergraduate fellows. The Bridging Fellowship Program is a unique undertaking focused on cultivating a space and community for meaningful and supported conversations about Israel and Palestine. It will run through both the fall and spring semesters, meeting every two weeks for three hours with expected readings and reflections in-between meetings. Participants selected for the program will have an option to receive course credit.

This program is a radical and hopeful undertaking during a moment in which the escalated violence of the last nine months in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and the region more broadly has caused immense grief, anger, and despair, deeply dividing many on our campus. So many of us are looking for spaces in which we can grieve and process, and openly discuss the range of emotions brought about for us by the situation in the region. Many of us have personally experienced loss and trauma directly connected to the recent and historical violence in Palestine and Israel, or have faced uncomfortable encounters with fellow students or others in our campus community, including episodes of Islamophobia, antisemitism, anti-Palestinian racism, and anti-Israeli discrimination. We feel trapped under the extraordinary weight of all these developments and yet we often lack the capacity to discuss our experience, seek out the experiences of others, or attempt to build bridges through deeper understanding.

The application is submitted through Google Forms: <https://forms.gle/KnsZ18iFJk4MxErg6>

A rolling review of applications will begin on Aug. 12th.

Full details can be found at [cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows](https://cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows)

*Before applying, please read carefully below to understand the commitments involved in this program.*

Berkeley | CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES



center for middle eastern studies  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY



Othering  
& Belonging  
Institute

## Berkeley Bridging Fellowship Program

The Berkeley Bridging Fellowship is an experiment in what might be possible when we come together with intention. Following an intro session for the fellows on Zoom in late August and an all-day retreat in-person on September 8 for the fellows with the facilitators and conveners, participants will have three-hour meetings every two weeks (mostly on Zoom), throughout the fall and then spring semesters.

We seek to create a unique space on the Berkeley campus for a diverse community of students who care deeply about Palestine and Israel. The immediate takeaways of the program will be fivefold:

- Building relationships and community among groups of students from different cultural and political perspectives who are struggling to come to grips with the terrible violence in Palestine and Israel that has unfolded since October 7, 2023, with acknowledgement that the current moment unfolds within much longer histories – of periodic violence targeted against civilians, ongoing military occupation, stark asymmetries of power and resources, violent ideologies of hatred and elimination, and shifting international politics.
- Encountering and learning from a wide range of perspectives and direct experiences of the history and contemporary situation in Israel and Palestine.
- Learning about Jewish, Muslim, Arab, Israeli, and Palestinian cultures, traditions, and histories.
- Acquiring a set of tangible skills and practices for having meaningful discussions about not only the situation in Palestine and Israel but highly fraught and sensitive topics more broadly.
- Finding ways to apply immediately the experiences as Berkeley Bridging Fellows through direct conversation with senior administrators and an initiative-building capstone through which each fellow will be supported in trying to begin new conversations within and across communities.

We will begin by building a container in which participants can process together and sit with each other's lived and secondary experiences of the violence and trauma. We will invite this through a range of participatory group modalities, including circle work, storytelling, listening, and somatics. One avenue that will be particularly valuable early on as we explore the overwhelming challenges and emotions of the present is arts and culture. Participants will have opportunities for artistic creation, interpretive conversation, and the sharing of evocative music, poetry, and visual art from various traditions. As we deepen our capacity to engage with a range of experiences and vantage points, we intend to eventually also expand our historical knowledge of the region.

The program aspires to build a community of students who can help engender more connected, generative, and transformative discussions on our campus and, in time, far beyond. In the spirit of transformative dialogue processes in other regions and conflicts throughout history, we hope to come together with deeper knowledge, empathy, and mutual respect, embracing a multiplicity of visions in which all people, in Palestine, Israel, and everywhere, can exist with human dignity, equal rights, safety, and freedom.

## Berkeley Bridging Fellowship Program

This will be a facilitated experience that mixes participatory group modalities, arts and culture, and educational content with expert instructors. At the conclusion of the program, the fellows will have an opportunity to apply their learning in two avenues for direct action: (1) They will be invited together to an in-person, extended meeting with UC Berkeley Chancellor Rich Lyons where they will be asked to share their opinions about what campus can or should do better to address the needs of various facets of the Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, and Israeli communities on campus, or to facilitate greater opportunities for conversations across communities. (2) As a Capstone final assignment, each student will work with the facilitators, faculty conveners, and program sponsors to take their experience as Bridging Fellows into spaces or groups on or off of campus and create a viable initiative for better conversations within or across communities. The idea is that this is a way to carry the work of the fellowship forward to maximize the tangible impact of your experience and share it with others. Thus the hope is that such initiatives would unfold in the summer or fall following the completion of the program.

The program can be done as part of a two-semester sequence course, which will count for 1 credit each semester (pending university approval). The course component is highly encouraged but optional. This first cohort of the Berkeley Bridging Fellowship will welcome between 12 and 15 UCB undergraduate students. The program makes no demands for any predetermined ideology, experience, or background. Given the nature of the work, those with personal connections to the region are particularly encouraged to apply.

### **Application Instructions**

The brief application is submitted through Google Forms: <https://forms.gle/KnsZ18iFJk4MxErg6>  
**A rolling review of applications will begin on Aug. 12th.**

Faculty members may nominate students they feel would be particularly interested through this link: <https://forms.gle/kbJNLmRdCC3WzPyh8>.

Full details can be found at [cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows](https://cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows). Questions about the program or the application process can be directed to [cmes@berkeley.edu](mailto:cmes@berkeley.edu).

### **Program Facilitators, Conveners, and Consultants**

This program is a partnership of the Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) and the Center for Jewish Studies (CJS), co-sponsored by the Othering and Belonging Institute (OBI) and the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC). Each session will be led by two facilitators with deep experience, knowledge, and care about Palestine and Israel. These are Alia Lahlou and Dorit Price-Levine. The faculty conveners of the group will also play an important role in program design. They are Professor Asad Ahmed (CMES) and Professor Ethan Katz (CJS). Julia McKeown, Campus Bridging Project Specialist at OBI, will also provide expertise on the program. Bios can be found at [cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows](https://cmes.berkeley.edu/bridging-fellows).

The facilitators and conveners are committed to expanding the circle of those involved in shaping the program as widely as possible. As we develop the program's content, we are working with a wide range of faculty at Berkeley for their content expertise. Eventually, many of these faculty may participate as presenters in individual sessions of the program.