

Packer's presentation raises questions, spurs debate over solution to conflict

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

how Israel was created and the fact that there is a huge population of Palestinian refugees."

Fox, however, said that in planning the event they wanted Rabbi Packer to be as non-biased as possible during the history portion.

"He accomplished it beautifully," said Fox.

Eric Mortensen, assistant professor of religious studies, praised Hillel for doing "a fine job of bringing to campus someone who endeavored to present as objective a history of Gaza as possible."

"The presentation of the history of Gaza was fundamentally excellent and informative, but as his timeline approached the last fifty years, his editorial choices of what and how to present his version of history were undeniably biased, and misleading," said Mortensen.

When people began to ask questions during the hour-long Q&A, tensions arose, especially when Packer stated that though Hamas' rockets were intended purely for civilian targets, he does not believe that Israeli soldiers ever intentionally killed civilians.

"Mistakes happen and people die," he said.

Junior Nida O Khalaf, a "Palestinian woman independent of any political parties," brought up how a rocket hit the Ramallah Friends School that she attended in the West Bank.

"You would be right if this was one inci-

dent; a mistake is one incident," she said.

Later in the session, after many people in the audience expressed concern over reconciling security and politics with the moral issue of violence, Mortensen posed the question of how the rabbi would feel if the situation were reversed, in terms of casualties. After Packer responded, Mortensen walked out, after having listening for over two hours.

"On one hand I am Jewish and everyone I talk to who is pro-Israel tells me how Hamas wants me dead or something extreme along those lines. On the other hand when I hear about the things that are going on I question it all on a human level. I keep hearing everything from a second-hand source, whether it be the news or someone who is having a presentation."

Ben Macdonald, sophomore

Reflecting on this later in an e-mail interview, Mortensen said: "He explained that he thought it was preferable to inflict one hour of violence on the Palestinians in Gaza so that the Israeli's would suffer zero. At that juncture I walked. He crossed a basic human line of decency, in my opinion, and I felt that it would be immoral of me to continue to justify

his presence as a speaker with my endorsement that his words held humane value."

The interactions between Rabbi Packer as well as people in the audience highlighted the tension between differing views, in which so many people have personal stakes.

"It's a difficult situation because Israel had no other choice—it had to defend its citizens, but it's also not good to have unintended

extent they were, so I agree with the rabbi about 98 percent."

Agreements and disagreements between many in the room caused raised voices when the issue of abuses at checkpoints surfaced.

O Khalaf, who challenged Rabbi Packer by saying that she did not have open access into Gaza as a Palestinian, discussed this conversation in a later interview.

"I have never been to Gaza and when he talked about how it was legal for me to go there in 1999, even if it was, we would have literally been treated like pigs stopping at checkpoint after checkpoint for soldiers to inspect us and our cars," said O Khalaf.

Rabbi Packer's response to her was, "what would Israel say? Is it for security or not?"

At this point, Jada Drew, interim African community director, reminded the audience that the purpose of the discussion was to promote learning and that talking over others was preventing that from happening.

Despite the amount of information presented, as well as the opinions of audience members during the Q&A session, some felt lost about where they stand politically on the issue.

"On one hand I am Jewish and everyone I talk to who is pro-Israel tells me how Hamas wants me dead or something extreme along those lines," said sophomore Ben Macdonald.

"On the other hand when I hear about the things that are going on I question it all on a human level. I keep hearing everything from a second-hand source, whether it be the news or someone who is having a presentation."

PERSISTENCE

Statistics show drop in academic probation rates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The 95 percent persistence rate indicates how many total traditional students returned from fall 2008- spring 2009. The number will be made official on Feb. 1.

"February 1 is very close and the rate for persistence looks to be way ahead," said Doss. "This year we have the best persistence rate in this decade."

Associate Dean for Campus Life and Director of New Student Programs Jennifer Agor said "the most common reason that contributes to lower retention is students who leave because they are academically dismissed or suspended."

According to Fetrow, an estimated one third of students who do not return for their sophomore year left because of academic dismissals.

In fall 2008, Academic Affairs hired Barbara Boyette as Academic Advisor Liaison to help students stay on track with academics.

Associate Academic Dean Steve Shapiro reported that "fall 2008 traditional student academic dismissals/suspension rates were lowest in about a decade, dropping to 3.6 percent this past fall from 4.8 percent in fall 2007."

Likewise, Shapiro reports that

the new traditional student academic probation rate fell to its lowest value since at least 1995, which is the year when the Academic Dean's office began keeping track of this statistic.

The probation rates measure how many students are newly placed on academic probation for the following semester.

"New probation rates for traditional students have dropped about one percent each fall since 2004," said Shapiro.

"The percentage of students on Dean's List has been rather stable during this period, indicating that these improvements in suspensions/dismissals and new probation rates are not due to grade inflation."

Shapiro said that the college is very pleased with this trend and hopes to make more progress in the future. He describes his role in this process as "both the coach and the umpire in a Little League baseball game."

"In Little League baseball when the umpire doesn't show up, often a coach has to be the umpire," said Shapiro. "I want everybody to be successful, but if somebody is out at the plate, they're out."

Shapiro said that while personal effort and "doing the work" is

the responsibility of each student, Guilford should provide them support on many levels—not just academically.

"The student is a whole person with many experiences on campus," said Shapiro. "Students need support in the classroom, the residence halls, in extracurricular activities, athletics and all other areas."

While one third of students leave because they are forced to leave due to poor academic performance, the remaining two thirds leave for a variety of reasons.

According to Associate Dean for Campus Life Bill Woodward, who handles the exit surveys, the top three reasons besides academic dismissals/suspensions are medical reasons, financial reasons and problems with "fit."

"When it comes to medical and financial reasons, you can't debate that because Guilford generally has no control over these factors," said Woodward, "but when it comes to students fitting in, this is something that we can help them with."

As a first step to creating these support systems, Guilford began hiring graduate hall directors. This year all part-time hall directors are graduate students, as opposed to undergraduate Guilford students.

