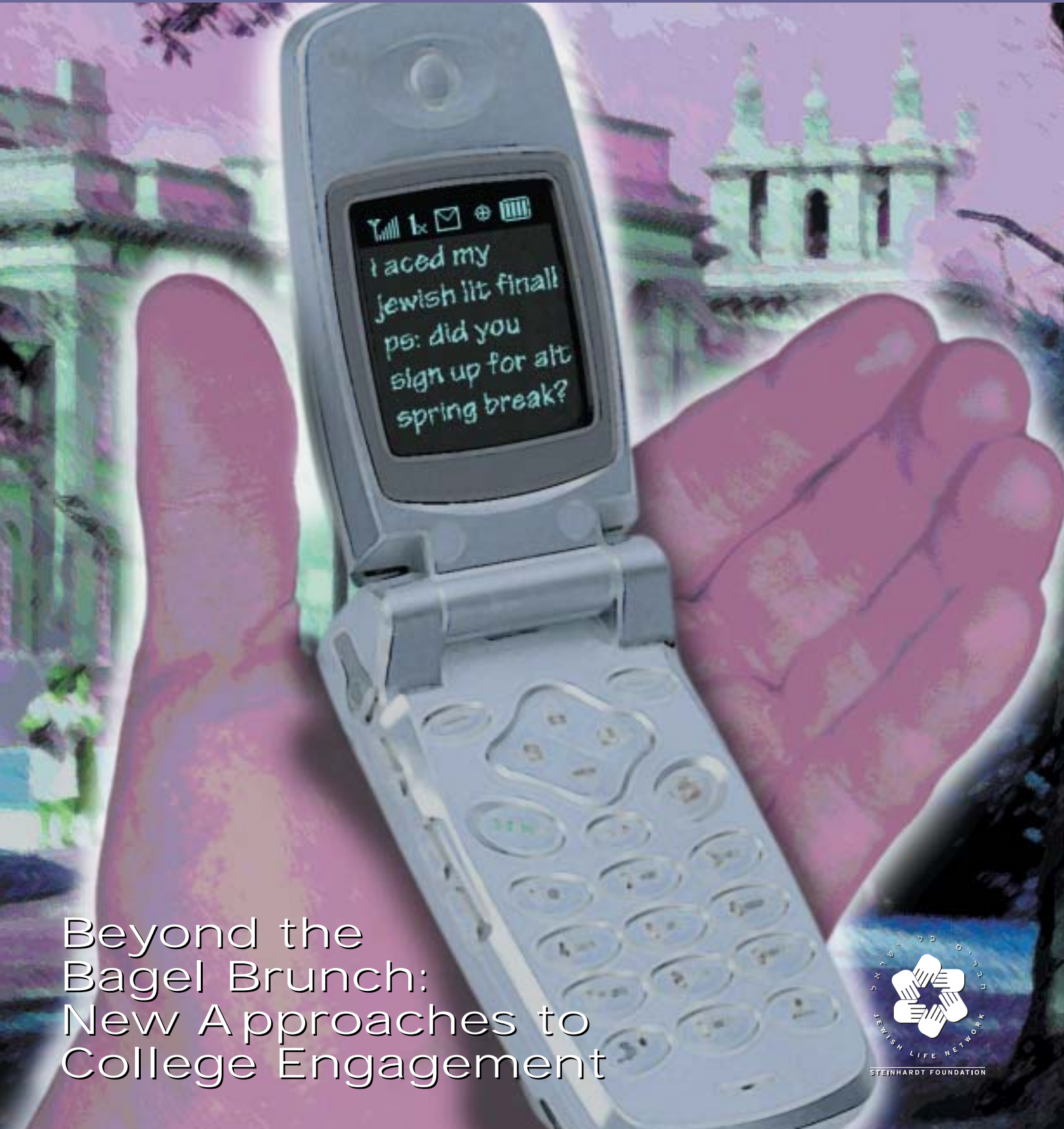


CONTACT

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Beyond the Bagel Brunch:
New Approaches to
College Engagement



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Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewish Life to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

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Beyond The Bagel Brunch: New Approaches To College Engagement

For those seeking to engage the next generation of Jews, the college years present both opportunities and risks. In recent years, the community has turned its attention to the former. Multi-culturalism and self-discovery — two qualities of campus life that sometimes frighten the insular — have the potential to galvanize students towards a rediscovery of Jewish culture. By infusing seemingly non-parochial college activities with opportunities for Jewish exploration, several initiatives have succeeded in engaging Jews in a deceptively simple manner.

From classroom study to extracurricular service, from dorm-based activities to film festivals, new programs view Jewish activities not in isolation from other aspects of campus life, but rather as part of the totality of the Jewish college experience. Articles in this issue of CONTACT explore various ways of intertwining Jewish experiences into campus life.

Because of a unique generational shift, college years represent an additional opportunity. It is often assumed that independence from one's family puts a student at risk of identity attenuation. For American Jews, this might have been true for the first generation that was admitted to universities. But today, American Jews have become so assimilated that separation from family does not necessarily imply a separation from Jewish roots. Indeed, close to 50 percent of Jewish students on campus come from interfaith families. In many cases, students are presented with their first encounters with Judaism once they head off to college. If the experiences are negative — closed doors, haughty attitudes — they might affect students' impressions of Judaism for years to come. On the other hand, if the experiences are positive, the pendulum might swing back towards an interest in Jewish life. For this reason, it is all the more crucial that Jewish options on campus be inviting and dynamic, with the potential to spark a lifetime of Jewish commitment.

Eli Valley

Eli Valley



Social Engagement as Entrepreneurship

by E. KINNEY ZALESNE

To build on the tremendous progress Hillel has made over the last decade in engaging Jewish students, we are developing plans to take the organization to the next level. To do that, we are exploring the latest thinking in nonprofit and business strategy — what leading-edge nonprofit thinkers call “Social Entrepreneurship.”

What is Social Entrepreneurship, exactly? And what could it mean for Hillel?

Social Entrepreneurship

It is best to consider Social Entrepreneurship in comparison to its more traditional nonprofit counterpart, sometimes known as “service provision.” Let me give an example from the non-Jewish, nonprofit world.

Before coming to Hillel, I was President of College Summit, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the college enrollment rate of low-income students. When College Summit started in 1995, most nonprofit organizations in the

college access space were “service providers.” The trajectory of such organizations usually went something like this:

1. See a critical need to help more low-income students go to college.
2. Design programs to offer college access services (tutoring, test prep, college counseling, financial aid) to as many low-income students as possible.
3. Realize quickly how expensive — and varyingly successful — this work is.
4. Scale back the organization’s focus to a smaller group of students — usually the academic top tier.
5. Feel significant ambivalence regarding the rest of the students. Lament that they aren’t being served. Subtly (or not so subtly) start blaming funders for giving too few resources to reach those students in the deep ways they need. Even more disturbingly, start blaming the students themselves — or their schools, parents or society — for the overriding, complex social problems we can’t possibly be expected to solve.

The End Result: Services (often good ones) to the academic top tier. Sporadic, anecdotal services to the rest. Frustration among professionals that although they do great work, they are not truly making change. Diffuse finger-pointing at funders, families and society. And ultimately, failure of the mission: no significant increase in the college enrollment rate of low-income students.

Frustrated by that cycle, College Summit’s founder tried a different approach, called social entrepreneurship. The essence of this approach is as follows:

1. Identify the problem to be solved. (For College Summit, the under-enrollment of low-income talent.)
2. Formulate a strategy, based on in-depth research and experience, to advance a solution. (College Summit went after the mid-tier students, since they had the most to gain in terms of college enrollment and were most likely to influence the overall culture of college attendance.)
3. Set clear measurements of success, to which the organization holds itself

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HILLEL IS AIMING TO STRENGTHEN JEWISH
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accountable. (For College Summit, the lead metric was college enrollment, with a host of “sub-indicators” such as partner school and college return rates, funds raised, employee satisfaction, etc.)

4. Measure success regularly — and adjust, or celebrate, accordingly.

The Results: It worked. College Summit students now enroll in college at nearly twice the rate of low-income high school graduates nationwide, and they stay in college at the remarkable rate of 80 percent. (And these were the *mid-tier* students.)

Funders swooped in. Between 1999 and 2004, College Summit’s budget grew from under \$500,000 to over \$7 million — mainly because we now spoke and acted like the investors we wanted to attract. We always led with the heart — there is no more stirring story than disadvantaged youth beating the odds — but now we could offer funders *more* than just faith.

And, of course, staff morale soared. Professionals had always been drawn to College Summit for the mission, but once they also had a clear sense of what was expected of them and how their roles fit into the larger organizational strategy, employee satisfaction, productivity and teamwork rose to levels that stunned even us.

What Does This Have to Do with Hillel?

Hillel is not starting where College Summit did. Far from it. Hillel is already a

mature organization that has undergone remarkable growth and transformation over the past ten years. But as Hillel thinks through how to move to the next level, particularly with regard to engaging more students, it is valuable to examine the merits, and the limitations, of the Social Entrepreneurship approach.

The parallels are compelling. For example:

- Both Hillel and organizations like College Summit seek *culture change*. College Summit seeks to boost college attendance among low-income youth to the point where students are not asking each other “Are you going to college?” but “Where are you going to college?” Similarly, Hillel is aiming to strengthen Jewish identity to the point where students are not asking “Is Judaism worth living?” but “How do you live your Judaism?”
- In the areas of both college access and Jewish identity, it is tempting to start from student needs, and quickly become overwhelmed by the desire (or sense of responsibility) to satisfy them all. But that approach too often results, as described above, in programs for the easiest-to-serve. It also engenders a maddening cycle — for professionals and funders alike — of hope, frustration, blame, resolve, exasperation and finger-pointing all over again.
- In both cases, social entrepreneurship

brings a great deal to the enterprise. After all, entrepreneurship is about seeing value where others don’t. Just as College Summit works because it sees value in low-income students that colleges don’t see, can Hillel be the engine that shows Jewish college students the tremendous value in Judaism that today they do not see?

But there are limitations to the model, too:

- First, organizations like College Summit had the luxury of choosing their targeted, strategic interventions because other programs already existed that served low-income students. By contrast, Hillel has both the blessing and the responsibility of being the locus of the entire Jewish community’s expectations for services to college students. (If not us, who?)
- Second, college access has a built-in measure of success: college enrollment. We could count within eighteen months of College Summit’s engagement with students whether the students had enrolled. By contrast, it is very difficult to agree on what success looks like vis-à-vis Jewish “intervention” in college.

What Hillel is Doing About It

To wrestle with these questions, among many others, Hillel has begun a comprehensive, year-long strategic planning process involving all of our stakeholders and as many college students as will talk to us.

Given the rapid changes over the last generation both in Hillel and in the Jewish student population, towards what should Hillel deploy its tremendous assets in order to deliver for the future? In other words, what core problem is Hillel trying to solve?

How can Hillel gather the profound, varied wisdom of professionals, funders, advisors and students to determine the most strategic ways to maximize Jewish life on campus?

What is success? And how will we know whether we are on the right path to get there?

These are the types of questions that well-run businesses are very familiar with, and that nonprofits have begun to ask themselves both in order to run better and to compete more effectively before funders who want to engender both community and measurable results.

Stay tuned. Offer up your best thoughts and ideas. Imagine with us what new progress Hillel might achieve in the next decade. Hillel’s ability to answer these questions wisely may well make a significant difference for the Jewish future. 🌸

Engaging the Intellect: Jewish Studies on the College Campus



by **AMY L. SALES**
and **LEONARD SAXE**

At the schools in our study, almost half of all Jewish students (45 percent) had taken at least one Jewish studies course by the time they were seniors.

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If you were walking on a college campus 40 years ago and stopped to ask for directions to the Jewish Studies Department, you would have been greeted with a blank stare. A knowledgeable student might have told you that, aside from some Hebraist scholar in the Classics Department, no such entity existed, although he might have kindly steered you toward the yeshiva downtown. As Brandeis University Professor Emeritus Leon Jick noted in a recent lecture on the history of Jewish studies, “The entry of Jews in American universities as students was early, massive and determined. The entry of Jewish subject matter was late, fragmentary and timid.” While Jews saw the secular university as a ticket to economic and social success in America, they saw Jewish learning as the province of seminaries, yeshivot, and Hebrew teachers colleges.

The landscape today is vastly different. The past few decades have seen a flourishing of Jewish studies. Boosted by the push for ethnic studies in the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish studies programs have taken root and grown on campuses across the country. Schools are happy to have these programs, which — in distinction from Jewish clubs and organizations on campus — directly serve a university’s academic goals. Jewish studies programs round out a university’s course offerings, they serve large numbers of students, and they help students

fulfill their course requirements. On many campuses, Jewish studies programs offer dozens of courses a year that serve hundreds of students. While Hillel organizations and clubs are recognizable from a generation ago, the growth in Jewish studies represents a stunningly dramatic change on campus.

The Promise

Our recent research of Jewish life on college campuses (see sidebar) documented the significant numbers of Jewish students taking one or more Jewish studies courses during their undergraduate careers. At the schools in our study, almost half of all Jewish students (45 percent) had taken at least one Jewish studies course by the time they were seniors. Once students cross the threshold into a Jewish studies program, there is a good likelihood that they will take a second or even a third course. Indeed, half of those who delve into Jewish studies follow this pattern.

Jewish studies courses manage to reach students who are otherwise untouched by formal Jewish life on campus. In our analysis we looked at three types of students: the “unengaged,” who have no involvement in Hillel or other Jewish-affiliated clubs; the “engaged,” who have at least some involvement, even if only minimal; and Jewish student “leaders.” We found that approximately one out of four

Table 1: Engagement in Jewish Organizations and in Jewish Studies Courses

Relationship to Formal Jewish Organizations	Percent Taking a Jewish Studies Course
Unengaged	26%
Engaged	43%
Leader	61%

“unengaged” students have taken at least one course on a Jewish subject (Table 1).

It is true that the stronger a student’s Jewish upbringing, the more likely s/he is to take a Jewish studies course. Nonetheless, a fourth of those who were raised in non-Jewish or mixed households, of those who had minimal Jewish education growing up, and of those who consider themselves secular Jews find their way into these courses.

Why do students who are otherwise not engaged by Jewish life find their way into Jewish studies courses? The principal answer turns out to be pragmatic — to fulfill course requirements. Schools today often require students to take at least one course concerned with women, minority groups or non-Western cultures. Jewish studies courses — even for Jewish students — fulfill this requirement. Moreover, Jewish studies programs are, by nature, interdisciplinary, encompassing history, foreign languages, art, philosophy and even politics and sociology. Credits from a Jewish studies course, therefore, may count toward other undergraduate requirements. Enrollments are particularly high in courses that not only fulfill requirements but also have a campus-wide reputation for their exciting content and teaching.

a corrective to their childhood Jewish education (or lack thereof), or as a safe space for self-exploration.

Challenge

In terms of identity exploration and development, the academic purpose of the courses cuts two ways. On the one hand, it is precisely the academic nature of the course and its perceived seriousness and objectivity that create the safe environment for self-exploration. In the process of meeting requirements and learning to be critical thinkers, students may also learn something about themselves. On the other hand, Jewish studies — unlike Jewish educational programs at Hillel — cannot and do not function as identity-building groups.

Indeed, Jewish studies programs are largely unconcerned with a student’s Jewish identity, religious beliefs or Jewish observance. Rather, courses are offered because of their intellectual value and their contribution to the university’s mission. Faculty are selected for their scholarly excellence — not for their own Jewish practices or their ability to be role models to students on a Jewish journey. At one elite institution, a key faculty member told us that the Jewish studies program refuses

Pragmatic concerns are often accompanied by social, emotional and intellectual motivations as well. Among Jewish students, there are clearly those who use Jewish studies classes as a way to feed their curiosity, as

to be in the service of Jewish identity. “Our function is as critical scholars or teachers,” he said. For faculty, Jewish studies is a matter of the head, not the heart.

Bottom Line

That said, what happens to students who take these courses? Our data show that compared with their Jewish peers who do not take such courses, those who take Jewish studies courses have significantly higher levels of Judaic knowledge; they place significantly higher weight on Jewish values; and they report a significantly greater connection to the Jewish people, a greater pride in being Jewish, and a greater importance of Judaism in their lives. It is difficult to know how much of their Jewish knowledge, values and sentiments can be attributed to college coursework or whether these derive from other experiences (during or prior to college), but it is clear that there is a relationship.

The bottom line is that Jewish studies won’t create Jews. For Jewish students with limited Judaic knowledge, it can serve to correct and augment childhood learning. It can enhance Jewish literacy and thus, indirectly, lower barriers to later participation in other Jewish activities. But it cannot create a sense of Jewish peoplehood or a love of Torah or a sense of obligation to *mitzvot*. For students to achieve both intellectual and emotional growth as Jews, coordination is needed between formal and informal education, between faculty and Hillel professionals, and between the classroom and extracurricular clubs. The full potential of Jewish learning during the college years will happen only when these elements work together and the divide is bridged between knowledge building and identity building. ✿

STUDYING THE STUDENTS

Fifty years ago, Jewish college students were forced to compete with one another for quota-limited slots at many institutions of higher learning. Today, Jewish students are unfamiliar with any such discrimination. Their assimilation into the American college scene is complete. This current reality has engendered a new problem: How to support Jewish students in the development and expression of their ethnic-religious identity. Recent interventions — from reshaped and reinvigorated Hillel chapters

to the birthright israel program — have served to reach out and to engage more Jewish students in Jewish life.

To understand the nature of Jewish identity among young adults, researchers from Brandeis University have been studying Jewish life on the college campus. As part of this effort, we studied 20 colleges and universities with significant Jewish populations. Over 700 students and professionals (faculty, administrators, Hillel staff) were interviewed during site visits. Surveys were conducted with both Jewish and

non-Jewish students. Survey respondents included over 2,000 Jewish undergraduates and an equal number of non-Jewish students.

Data from the study shed light on both the promise and the challenge of Jewish life on campus. What is clear is that the experiences of Jewish students are not monolithic, even at a single campus. Despite a plethora of programs, most young Jews are untouched by formal Jewish life during their college years. The results of the study will be available in 2005. — AMY L. SALES and LEONARD SAXE



The 10th anniversary of Hillel's Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps (JCSC) Fellowship offers an opportune moment to reflect on the concept of Jewish engagement, the Fellowship's growth and its impact to date. Created in 1994 under the visionary leadership of Michael Steinhardt, Richard Joel, Rhoda Weisman and countless others, the JCSC Fellowship was established to reach and relate to the thousands of Jewish students on college campuses who were unlikely to seek out Jewish experiences during their college years and beyond. The strategy of actively engaging Jewish students by meeting them "where they are" (physically as well as spiritually) and perhaps not expecting them to actively participate in Jewish life on campus at any point is the *raison d'être*

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of the JCSC Fellowship.

As the JCSC Fellowship approaches its second decade, maximizing the engagement effort on campus has become more urgent. With recent studies predicting the continued dissipation of the Jewish community — as indicated, in large part, by the lack of Jewish commitment by large numbers of Jews on campus — Jewish campus engagement is more central to Hillel's agenda than ever before.

The first ten years of the Fellowship have provided us with a bounty of lessons. Some of the most important lessons are:

1. Engagement is possible. When the Fellowship was first established, there was doubt as to whether engagement as a Hillel idea would actually work. Were there enough students who would be open to being engaged? If we found them, could we dare imagine an enthusiastic response? The answer to these questions has been a resounding "yes." We have seen a remarkable increase in Hillel's participation levels since the advent of the Fellowship. Aside from birthright Israel, it is arguably the most

A Decade of Jewish Campus Service Corps

by **SIMON AMIEL**



As the Fellowship heads into its second decade, we look to become part of an “engagement revolution” on campuses around the world.

themselves. There are now hundreds of JCSC alumni, many of whom have gone on to additional years of professional or lay service on behalf of the Jewish people.

Finally, the JCSC Fellowship has brought the idea and practice of engagement to the forefront of Jewish communal life. It is not only Hillels but synagogues, Federations, schools and community centers that wrestle with reaching our Jewish constituencies in meaningful ways. The JCSC Fellowship has made engagement part of the vernacular of

significant and successful engagement tool in the Jewish world.

2. The most successful JCSC Fellows build organic relationships with uninvolved Jewish students, introducing them to Jewish life premised on the biblical phrase *ba’asher hu sham* — where he [or she] is. These Fellows are engaging Jewish students on the students’ own terms. They create partnerships with students to determine what those terms are, based on actively listening to what motivates, provokes and interests each individual. The Fellows then seek to connect these students to the most appropriate portal to the Jewish community or, if it is not already in place, to assist in its creation.

These portal connections might include a theater student participating in a Hillel production of a Neil Simon play, a fraternity brother attending a Greeks-only Shabbat dinner or a first-year student playing on the Hillel intramural ultimate Frisbee team. But it cannot be emphasized enough that most of these efforts, if they are to be successful, are predicated on a genuine relationship between the Fellow and the student as well as on the condition that the student has entered the portal on his or her own terms.

A related lesson is that JCSC Fellows who build successful, organic student relationships are able to do so effectively because they are peer-to-peer. The JCSC Fellows are no more than two years out of college and more often than not share similar worldviews and interests as current university students. The proximity of both age and life experience between a Fellow and student creates an almost instantaneous level of trust and understanding. While peer relationships and professional inexperience do not allow for most Fellows to offer spiritual guidance to students, he or she has these resources at

hand through the Hillel director or campus/community rabbi.

3. By partnering with their host universities and campus student organizations, Hillels, primarily through their JCSC Fellows, have succeeded in “normalizing” Jewish experiences so that they become part and parcel of a student’s more typical campus experience. For a growing number of students each year, participating in Jewish life is as normal as going to class, eating dinner and studying in the library.

4. For the same reason that a Fortune 500 company would not give full responsibility for its biggest client to its least experienced professional, engagement should not be placed squarely and solely on the shoulders of the JCSC Fellow. Nor should it be marginalized to a specific set of Hillel programs. If engagement is the strategy that is most crucial to the future of the Jewish community, it should inform every step and every decision of *all* Hillel professionals, lay volunteers and student leadership. Engagement must be the “frontlets between our eyes.” Over the past decade, this has been one of Hillel’s greatest challenges as well as one of its greatest lessons.

The effect of the JCSC Fellowship on Jewish campus life has clearly been enormous. Through its global engagement efforts, the Fellowship has helped create a paradigm shift over the last decade within the Hillel world. Hillels are no longer seen as the “centers” for Jewish life, a term that implies that students must experience Jewish life at a specific campus location in order to be included. Hillels are now, and forever will be, “foundations” for Jewish campus life. They are institutions from which valuable Jewish experiences and relationships become possible.

One success of the JCSC Fellowship that has little to do with students is the impact of the program on the Fellows

many Jewish communities and contributes to the expanding philosophy of how engagement can inform strategy, even among the most traditional and historic Jewish institutions.

As the Fellowship heads into its second decade, we look to become part of an “engagement revolution” on campuses around the world. Hillel hopes to capitalize on its successes with the Fellowship and ensure that the engagement methodology is applied to all aspects of Jewish life on campus at all times, including programming, staffing, student leadership and physical space.

We face a significant challenge in building the capacity necessary to enable most if not all Hillels to hire Fellows. We face a significant challenge in guaranteeing that those Fellows are given the necessary tools to succeed: effective supervision, strategic thinking skills, professional motivation and a Hillel staff, board and student leadership that fully support engagement by ensuring that they do engagement themselves. And we face a significant challenge in ensuring that we do not get too comfortable with our own success. There are far too many young Jews on campus who have yet to connect to their Judaism in a way that is compelling, pertinent and relevant to them.

We see Hillel Foundations with alternative spaces on campus dedicated to engagement, much like the one at the University of Pennsylvania. We see regional engagement training centers, where local professionals go to their peers first for engagement training, as opposed to Hillel’s headquarters. We see Hillel Directors and lay leaders championing the idea that engagement is central to their success.

And we see stories — new, exciting and inspiring stories — of Jewish engagement and revitalization every day. 🌸

JAC & JiLL... and Me

by KATHERINE JORGENSEN



After my first visit to Hillel, I swore I would never go back. It was Yom Kippur during my freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania, and my roommate decided that I would attend services with her. I had grown up in a relatively secular home and had little experience with a formal synagogue setting, but I agreed to be dragged along. Within the first ten minutes of the service, I realized I was in way over my head. Feeling alienated, I decided that Jewish life on campus simply wasn't for people like me.

That very well could have been the end of my story. Fortunately for me, it wasn't. Although I made a point of avoiding Hillel, an enterprising Hillel professional nonetheless continued to invite me to events that were happening around my dorm. And, when an event looked sufficiently non-intimidating, I might even show up. Nonetheless, I considered myself to be "not really" part of the Jewish community at Penn. I simply did not know enough, and I wasn't comfortable enough in a Jewish setting.

Thus, when I was asked to participate in the Jewish Life Liaison program, I thought they must have mixed me up with someone else. Known as the JiLLs, this group of students served as a link between the Jewish students in their dorms and the larger Jewish community. Presented with the opportunity to apply, I looked dumbly at the Hillel professional with whom I was speaking: "Are you sure you mean me?" But, I was assured, I could be a JiLL. All I would have to do is plan fun and engaging events in my dorm that would help create

a Jewish community beyond the walls of the Hillel building. Perhaps it would include hosting a Shabbat dinner in the dorm, or maybe just offering movie nights and snacks. Plus, I would get to attend weekly meetings that would help me through the process and teach me all the "Jewish stuff" I would need to know. Although I was doubtful, it sounded like fun, and I signed on to be a JiLL.

The year that followed was transformative for my Jewish identity. I quickly grew to love the weekly JiLL meetings, which were not only fun but provided information about Judaism I had never known. The network of other JiLLs quickly became my personal Jewish community. But the most rewarding aspect of being a JiLL was the programs that I created. I planned events that varied from a hike in the woods to a lecture by a Jewish author in my dorm. I planned a Passover dessert party and a Hanukkah latke party. These events put me in contact with tons of other people like me — people who were glad to have an outlet for their Jewish identity, but who simply weren't sure that Hillel was the right forum for them.

As my year as a JiLL drew to a close and I realized how much it had done to foster my Jewish identity, I knew that I couldn't let it end at being a JiLL. I decided to become involved in the Hillel community to help create spaces within Hillel for people like me. By the time I graduated, I was the President of the Hillel Executive Board — not bad for someone who originally felt that Hillel was "too Jewish" for her! But, even more important, the JiLL program gave me the vocabulary and confidence to ask for more Jewish knowledge. With the help of some amazing teachers, I set out on a quest to fill in the gaps in my Jewish knowledge. On my

21st birthday I celebrated a *bat mitzvah* in the library at Penn Hillel. The Hillel community that gathered around me on that festive occasion underscored the amazing distance that I had traveled since my freshman year. Hillel's JiLL program had transformed me from someone who found Hillel to be scary and who felt "not Jewish enough" to someone who had ownership and pride in her own Jewish identity.

I haven't forgotten how I felt before I had the opportunity to become a JiLL, and this knowledge shaped the year following my graduation, in which I became the Dospelstein Jewish Campus Service Corps (JCSC) fellow at Northwestern University's Hillel. Among my other responsibilities as a JCSC, I had the opportunity to start a Jewish Life Liaison program at Northwestern, known as JAC (the Jewish Activity Corps). Without a doubt, working with the JACs was the most fulfilling part of my year at Northwestern. I watched as they hosted dozens of programs in their residence halls and connected with their fellow students to form a Jewish community beyond the walls of the Hillel building. But, even more, I saw the transformative nature of the program as I watched each student in the JAC program grow into his or her own Jewish identity.

And as for me, although I am no longer formally affiliated with Hillel, or with a JAC or JiLL program, I find that the lessons I learned there continue to shape my Jewish identity. Now that I have the tools to craft my own Jewish life, I will never again feel "not Jewish enough." I will continue to strive to share that sense of community and acceptance that I learned from being a JiLL. But, above all, every time I light Shabbat candles, I feel grateful that I was offered the opportunity to participate in the JiLL program, and thus take the very first step on my own Jewish journey. ✿

Katherine Jorgensen spent the 2000-2001 school year as a Jewish Life Liaison at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in American History at The Johns Hopkins University.

Artful Engagement

by SHIRA HUTT

By exploring the vast potential of Jewish arts on campus and beyond, the possibilities of engaging more young adults in Jewish life are endless.

I met Michelle during my freshman year of college. She had recently transferred to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst from Syracuse University, where she had been a musical theatre major. We first ran into each other at auditions for the UMass Theatre Guild's production of *Tommy* and instantly became friends. Soon after we met, we decided to audition for *Kolot*, the Jewish *a cappella* group on campus. Michelle was accepted into the *a cappella* group (and, surprisingly, so was I), and at that moment, Michelle embarked on a life-changing Jewish journey. She had grown up in an interfaith home. Her parents were both music teachers, and since Michelle and her brother shared their parents' musical talents, the family religion was essentially music. Within the same year that Michelle joined *Kolot*, she started to learn about Jewish music and culture, she became involved in Hillel and she traveled to Israel on a campus-based trip. Upon graduating from college, Michelle spent a year in Israel on Project Otzma. When she returned from Israel, she spent a summer

facilitating the Jewish arts as a Spielberg Fellow at a California summer camp and then worked in the Jewish community for two years. Although it's impossible to know all the factors that affected Michelle's journey, it is undeniable that Michelle is a Jewish engagement success story. Moreover, I believe that Michelle is a Jewish arts success story. Michelle's story doesn't stand alone. While in college, a number of my peers who were looking for a place to sing auditioned for *Kolot*. This, in turn, started them on their personal Jewish journeys.

Arts have the ability to form and build community, to develop and strengthen identity and to transmit powerful stories. It seems only natural that the arts can do the same for the Jewish community and, more so, for Jewish students on campus. While the Jewish community continues to search for ways to strengthen college students' Jewish identities and Jewish connections, the arts remain an underused tool in accomplishing these goals. College is a place for exploration, reflection and cultural exchange. For many students, it is in college that they first enter a jazz bar, see a ballet, watch a foreign film and discuss their new experiences with others.

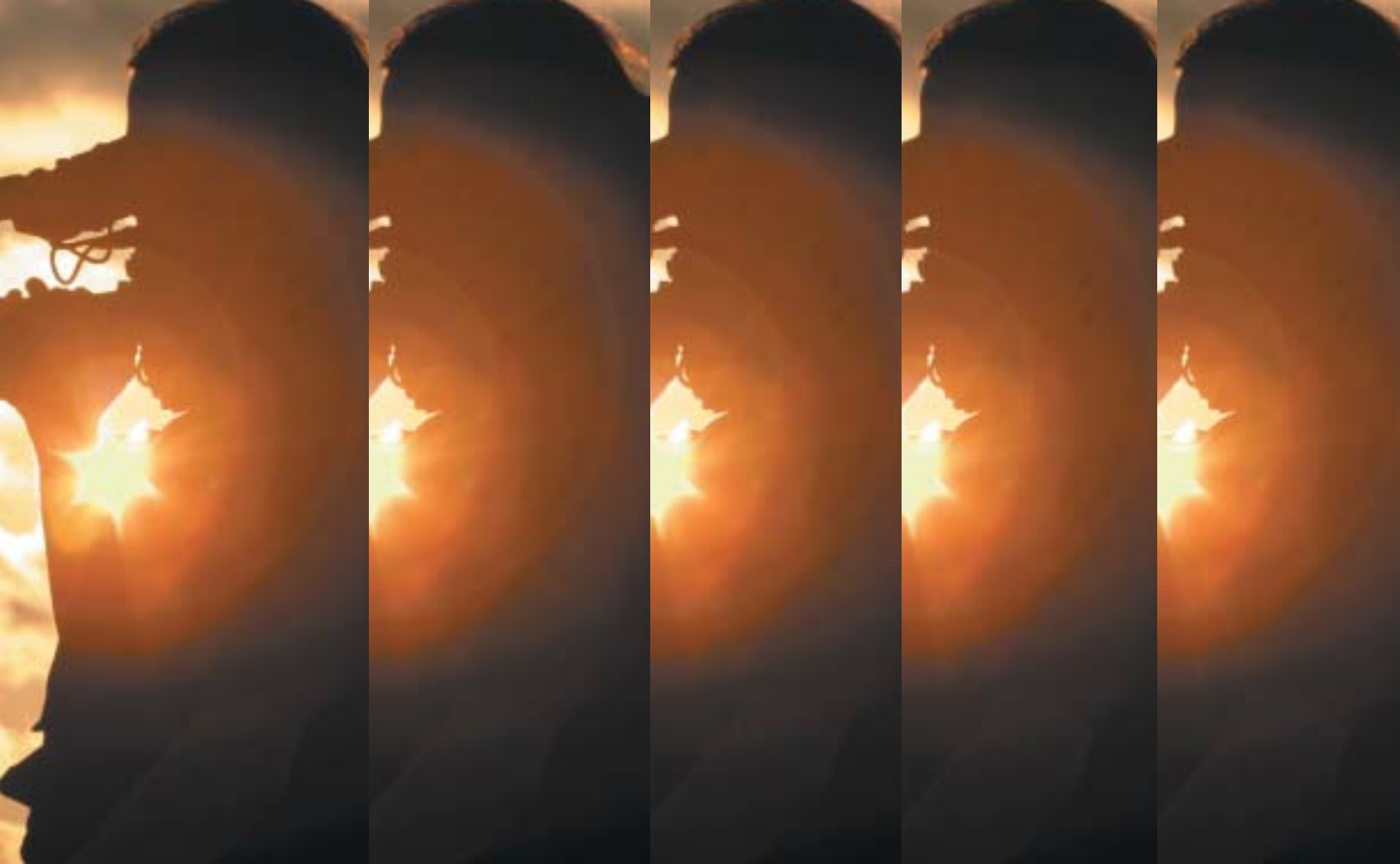
Art is relevant to the lives of college students. If the Jewish community wishes to appeal to students on their terms, art should be seen and used as a significant tool for connecting Jewish students to Jewish life on campus.

Like all art, the possibilities of defining, creating and using Jewish art are limitless. It can be created by a Jewish person, inspired by a Jewish theme or story or contain a Jewish message. Jewish art can be historical or contemporary. The limitless nature of the Jewish arts extends into the range of possible experiences and media that can be used to transmit art. Film, dance, visual art, music, writing, theatre and photography are just a few means of Jewish artistic expression. Because of their relevance to the lives and lifestyles of students, Jewish arts have the ability to inspire profound connections to Judaism on campus.

The Jewish arts, in one form or another, have been used on college campuses for many years. Jewish *a cappella* and theatre groups have increasingly become the norm on college campuses. Student photography has been showcased from birthright israel trips and alternative spring-break trips; Jewish student galleries

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have been created for students to present their visual art work; and Jewish film screenings and discussions have been established to encourage students to explore issues of Jewish identity and meaning. In the last couple years, Hillel as a whole has been exploring its relationship to the arts and, in turn, raising more awareness among the professional Hillel community about the centrality and potential of the arts in the experiences of Jewish students on campus. In addition, organizations such as Avoda Arts were born out of the need and opportunity to use the arts as tools for strengthening the Jewish community. Avoda Arts has emerged as a strong force in the effort to develop and advocate for the Jewish arts on campuses. Last year, Avoda Arts and the Bronfman Center at New York University cosponsored the New York International Jewish Student Film Festival, for which they received 100 submissions from students throughout North America and Israel. Eight films selected as winners were screened in a theatre in downtown New York City, and the winning filmmakers were given unique opportunities in networking and skill development. The film festival was developed with the understanding that the pro-

gram had the potential to draw the interest of Jewish film students in New York City, North America, and from other parts of the world. The work and interests of these student filmmakers were then leveraged to engage other artists and art appreciators through the film screenings. Other organizations such as JDub Records and Storahtelling, along with a number of Jewish performers and artists, have sought out opportunities to share their Jewish art with Jewish college students.

These represent significant steps in the right direction, but unfortunately the organized Jewish community has not adequately embraced such initiatives. For all the right reasons, the Jewish community supports a number of organizations that focus on political activities, social change and community service. These, along with several Israel-based organizations that focus on college campuses, are necessary to strengthen Jewish life in America. The Jewish arts, however, represent another critical piece of the puzzle. Jewish art is relevant. It appeals to college students in a way that can impact their future connection to Judaism and the Jewish community. If the Jewish community neglects to see that Jewish art and culture can strengthen Jewish

life as effectively as other issues and activities, then we are doing a huge disservice to the future of Judaism in America.

By exploring the vast potential of Jewish arts on campus and beyond, the possibilities of engaging more young adults in Jewish life are endless. Just as Michelle found her Jewish connection through music, other students and young adults are seeking both artistic outlets and Jewish connections. Providing more opportunities to student artists like Michelle can have a profound impact on the lives of many other individuals, the general Jewish student community and the greater university community. With the awareness and support of the organized Jewish community, Jewish arts and culture can transform the Jewish community by providing a strong, relevant and exciting entry point to Jewish life that has only begun to be tapped in its potential. Among other things, Judaism is a culture that has produced and celebrated art throughout history. Art is central to our civilization. It is the foundation for how we celebrate life as well as struggle through our challenges. Art should therefore become one of the primary tools for exposing and engaging students in their Jewish experience. ❁

Israel on Campus: Getting Personal

by LISA EISEN

Apartheid walls. Mock checkpoints. Divestment conferences. Intimidation by anti-Israel faculty. Barriers to Israel study abroad.

By most accounts, it would appear that Israel serves primarily as a lightning rod and divisive force on college campuses today. Indeed, the intensification of anti-Israel activity on North American campuses has proven challenging to Jewish college students and to the professionals and organizations that serve them. Yet, more than street theatrics and anti-Israel rhetoric, the greatest challenge lies in engaging the silent majority of Jewish students with Israel. Far too many students lack the knowledge or confidence to speak out, are ambivalent about Israel and the role it plays in their Jewish identity or see Israel as too controversial to become involved.

How can we utilize the same dynamic that makes Israel such a hot topic on campus to capture the attention of these students and engage them in personally meaningful and enriching ways?

Recent experience shows that Israel can be a galvanizing force for Jewish college students, unleashing their creativity, passion and personal engagement. Israel can serve not only as a focal point of advocacy to mobilize committed students, but also as a vehicle to engage many unaffiliated students with their Jewish heritage and to provide them with a base for further Jewish exploration.

Our community is beginning to connect previously unengaged students to Israel by redefining the paradigm for Israel education and advocacy to one of personalization and customization. A one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work with an internet generation that processes information and defines itself with increasing specificity. Long gone are the days when Israel advocacy meant counter-protests and mass flyering. Rather than reflexive reactivity and sweeping mes-



sages, students are pro-actively seizing the agenda and shaping approaches that engage other students in the most personal of ways. Many of today's cutting-edge Israel programs are highly individualized and tailored to reflect the unique interests of each student.

Student initiatives, such as Israel academic journals, music and film projects, and student-faculty study programs, are flourishing because they inspire self-expression, personal investment and, inevitably, greater resonance with the student population. Particularly effective approaches are those that empower students to tell their own personal stories about Israel, that provide vehicles for peer-to-peer conversations about Israel or that offer outlets for students' extracurricular and professional interests. AIPAC, Israel at Heart, Hillel, AEP and others are pioneering personalized peer-to-peer Israel education and advocacy that engage Jewish students emotionally and intellectually and enable them to explore Israel's complexity in approachable ways.

Axiomatic to the need to personalize Israel engagement is the need to ensure that the unique voices of Jewish students are heard and valued. Universities are places for questioning and experimentation, and we must encourage our students to wrestle with their individual Jewish identities and Israel's place within them. Fostering personal dialogue and a safe space for students to express their questions and concerns is particularly

important for students who feel conflicted about Israel. We cannot afford to disenfranchise Jewish students whose views may not be in accord with Israel government policy, be they from the political left or right, at a time when Israel is being vilified internationally and on campus. That is why it is so significant that nearly 30 national organizations, representing the full ideological, political and religious spectrum, are working together through the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) to provide programs, resources and a multiplicity of gateways for students to become involved with Israel. It is incumbent upon our community not only to welcome and embrace these diverse student perspectives, but also to model and facilitate civil and respectful discourse, and even collaboration, among people of divergent views.

Without question, the most powerful tool for personally connecting young people to Israel and engaging them Jewishly is first-hand experience in the Jewish State. Here, the impact of birthright Israel has been transformative, as evidenced by the results of several evaluation studies conducted by the Cohen Center at Brandeis University. In addition to providing students with a meaningful, personal introduction to the country, birthright's real genius has been in its ability to use Israel as the spark to ignite the dormant Jewish identities of thousands of unaffiliated young Jews and to launch them on a

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greatest strategic assets on campus due to barriers to Israel study abroad. Students who have studied for a semester or a year in Israel return with a personal passion and nuanced understanding of Israel that they are committed to sharing with their friends, classmates and professors.

But why are we waiting until college to engage students with Israel? The impact of our work could be immeasurably magnified, and the need for such intensive assistance to the campus mitigated considerably, if only our community would invest earlier in ensuring that our young people develop a personal relationship with Israel. A negligible percentage of Jewish students enter college having been to Israel, and the vast majority — including day school students — have had little formal Israel education, much less Israel advocacy training. We must start early in encouraging students to explore freely the role of Israel in their lives. A number of nascent and promising high school initiatives are underway, and we must multiply their number and their impact. Equally important is linking these initiatives and their participants to pro-Israel campus institutions to facilitate a much more seamless hand-off of high school students and to ensure that we are not starting from “aleph” when students enter college.

Personalized, tailored outreach. Proactive, positive programming. Multiple gateways and approaches. First-hand experience in Israel. Without a doubt, it requires a greater investment of time, staff and resources to engage our young people with Israel in these highly personalized and meaningful ways. But it is an investment that will pay handsome dividends for our campuses, our communities and for the future of *clal Yisrael*. 🌸

Jewish journey that will hopefully last a lifetime. Today, the leadership ranks of Hillel and other Jewish and pro-Israel student organizations are filled with birthright alumni. Our community must commit itself to ensuring that this well-proven program is available to as many students as possible for years to come.

In addition, an array of missions to Israel specially designed for college students with interests including arts and culture, business, community service and advocacy have used Israel as a tool for individual enrichment. They have also helped develop a cadre of pro-Israel campus activists who are among the most informed, strategic and dedicated Israel advocates our campuses have ever seen. By definition, long-term study programs in Israel are even more valuable in enabling students to connect with Israel on their own terms and in cultivating lifelong advocates for Israel. Yet, the number of young people studying in Israel has dropped 75 percent since 2000, due in large part to university-imposed obstacles and outright bans on Israel study. The ICC recently launched a “Let Our Students Go” campaign to ensure that our community is no longer denied one of its

JEWISH HERITAGE PROGRAMS: THE POWER OF NETWORKS

by JOE SHAPIRO

Two thousand students across an entire college campus simultaneously eat Shabbat dinner. Scores of well-dressed Jewish students flow out of buses parked on Wall Street to lunch with senior Jewish executives. Hundreds of Jewish students sprawl on Penn’s College Green and wrap two thousand peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the hungry. These types of activities are commonplace for Jewish Heritage Programs (JHP), a grassroots organization that has spread to thirteen college campuses on the eastern seaboard. JHP achieves such impact by leveraging the power of Jewish social networks.

JHP functions by identifying Jewish social leaders, known as interns, and providing them with the infrastructure to plan and execute Jewish-themed programming for their peers. Organizational action is channeled through community service, mentoring, social activities and Jewish educational initiatives. JHP’s repeatedly successful events are attributable not solely to the group’s effective management and creative programming, but also to the sheer number of social leaders rallying behind every JHP endeavor.

For example, JHP at Penn recently ran its annual Shabbat For 2000. In week one, JHP interns began recruiting students around campus to host Shabbat dinners for their social groups. In week two, JHP interns met for pizza and scrolled through their cell phones to recruit every possible Jewish student to participate in the event. In week three, the recruited students attended Shabbat educational classes taught by JHP interns. The next week, students picked up pre-cooked Shabbat meals, candlesticks, “How to Shabbat” booklets, and wine, and as dusk settled in, over 2000 students observed Shabbat. While not downplaying the significant planning that went into this event, Shabbat For 2000’s ultimate success hinged on the powerful social networks leveraged by JHP interns.

Shabbat For 2000, as well as many other JHP events, brings to mind a remark made in 1963 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” Today, through hosting Jewish socials, facilitating Shabbat dinners and organizing community-wide service projects, JHP interns are enabling groups of Jewish college students to recognize their mutuality rooted in a sacred heritage. JHP is infusing Jewish life into Dr. King’s words.

As a senior looking back upon my JHP college years, I have seen firsthand the power of JHP’s social network. I joined JHP as a Freshman because I had a crush on a nice Jewish girl. I have met a hundred nice Jewish girls. I joined JHP with my best friend from high school. We have formed enduring friendships with many other Jewish students. I now know how powerful the Jewish network can be when it is channeled toward meaningful action. 🌸

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Spring Break in the Deep South

Ever since I was a little girl, my family has instilled in me the belief that community service and social justice activism are critical components of being a Jew.

by LEORA MACCABEE



It's one thing to read about community change. It's a completely different matter to be a part of it. That was one of the reasons I joined 30 other college students during my spring break last year to volunteer with the Hillel/KESHER/*spark* Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program in the small, primarily African-American, low-income community of Utica, Mississippi. Ever since I was a little girl, my family has instilled in me the belief that community service and social justice activism are critical components of being a Jew. My grandparents fondly described the marches for civil rights in the 1960s. My parents told me stories about protesting nuclear power in the 1970s. I've always wanted to live up to their example. So last year I decided to step out of my elite, bubble-like college to see what poverty in the Deep South was really all about, and to try to make a small difference, even if only for a week.

Our team of volunteers was drawn from states all over the country — Texas, California, Wisconsin, Massachusetts and more. Most of us were already hooked on Judaism and on *tikkun olam*. Many of us taught Sunday School or Hebrew School. We participated in community service on campus and with Hillel or KESHER. We gave *zedakah*. But we did all this within the comfort of our closed, tightly-knit Jewish networks or college communities. For the most part, we weren't hitting the streets working for social justice with the multi-ethnic members of our local inner cities. Instead, we would sit at tables in our campus centers, collecting money to

help their causes. The Alternative Spring Break last February gave us a chance to step out of our comfort zones.

That spring break trip was the first time I'd ever been in the South, and the heat, emptiness and poverty were overwhelming. After a long drive on dirt roads past beaten down shacks and mobile-homes with yards out front and laundry blowing in the wind, we arrived at the URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp, an oasis of Jewish life. Over the next few days, the Henry S. Jacobs Camp would become a site for spiritual exploration and textual discovery — through prayers, Jewish sing-a-long sessions along the waterfront, meditation, Israeli dance and group learning. As a Conservative Jew, this was the first time I had ever attended Reform services, and the music was inspiring. I loved the melodies and the commentary in the *siddur*. In the evenings, I spent hours debating Jewish theology and politics with one of the Reform Jews in our group. It was the beginning of a fantastic friendship, and even though he's currently studying in Israel, we still keep in touch.

During the week that we were in Utica, our team of student volunteers worked with a civic organization called the Friends of Utica, which had received a Housing and Urban Development grant to convert a deserted shirt factory into a community center with social services. Some of our volunteers also spent time cleaning up and repairing an old concession stand in a community park, making the area safer for neighborhood kids. Others planted trees, flowers and plants in the center of town, literally bringing new life and energy to the city center. My

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strongest memories are from our work on the old factory.

Armed with paint cans, hammers, scrapers, weed-whackers, brooms and screwdrivers, we led an all-out assault on that building, tearing down entire wooden walls, scraping up old floor tiles, and tearing down pipes, lights and boards from the ceiling. Outside, we weed-whacked along the edges of the building and repainted the white trim, plastering each other with handprints as we went. Taking a break at lunchtime, we compared our tans, which we'd acquired through hard work in the sun, and laughed about how they would be much more interesting than those of our friends who were spending their spring breaks sunning by the beaches in Mexico.

As college students, we rarely get the opportunity to do the kind of work that builds and shapes things. Our summer jobs are often at desks in windowless offices. It was amazing to feel the sun on our backs as we lifted boards and metal gratings, cleaning up the factory. The physical exertion helped us feel connected with the work we were doing. And as we sat on the roof in the sun, scraping pebbles

out of drainage pipes and singing every song we could remember from plays like *Chorus Line*, *Fame* and *Hair*, we knew that we were a part of something greater and more beautiful than we had ever imagined.

During that week of volunteering, we met many individuals from the Utica community who were committed to making a difference. The mayor of the town joined local builders and construction workers to labor alongside us in the dusty factory. The mayor talked to us about his past, his family and the community, and he charmed us by knowing something about every one of our hometowns. When we planted trees and flowers in the center of town, children from the community stopped by, and upon learning what we were doing, joined us to volunteer for the afternoon.

I would have liked to have done more work side-by-side with community members, whether on the factory or in beautifying the town. But after talking to the mayor and other representatives from the Friends of Utica, it became clear that we were intended to be catalysts for change in the community. Our alternative spring break was designed to motivate the com-

munity's own involvement in those projects in the upcoming months. Our initial boost of volunteerism will hopefully lead to many more months of volunteer work from the town's residents. As a result, the Friends of Utica hope that the community center will open within two years.

Looking back on a week filled with so many experiences of friendship, spiritual exploration and physical labor, one message sticks out. We spent our lunchtime and rest breaks discussing Judaism and community service. One of the many passages that we studied was Hillel's observation, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" It's so easy for college students and working adults alike to look at our busy schedules and say, "not now." But there are many things that we can do to help repair our communities, even with the little bit of time that we have to spare. Let us all be catalysts of change in our own communities this year. "It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to desist from it" (*Pirket Avot*: 2:16). ❀



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Our philanthropy seeks to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation was founded in 1994 by Michael H. Steinhardt to strengthen and transform American Jewish life so that it may flourish in a fully integrated, free society.

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The long-term goal of **Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation** is the emergence of a thriving, dynamic and creative Jewish community whose contributions to American culture are informed and inspired by distinctive Jewish values that are fully compatible with life in the open society.

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Please see our website, which includes information on the programs created and supported by Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, as well as past and current issues of Contact.

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