

An Introduction: Celebrating the Past, Shaping the Future

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The HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Service (SJCS) in Los Angeles was founded in 1968, enrolled its first students in 1969, and graduated its first class in 1970. Now 40 years later, the SJCS has established itself, not just as one of the leading graduate programs training professional leaders for the Jewish community but also as a shaper of the contemporary practice of the profession itself. The more than 600 graduates of the program provide informed, experienced, and Jewishly grounded direction, guidance, and leadership to Jewish communal agencies throughout the world; and the research and creative thought reflected in their master's theses has provided insight into the professional experience in the Jewish communal world and led to the exploration of new fields, issues, and constituencies.

I am delighted to serve as the editor of this special issue of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* in honor of the 40th anniversary of the School of Jewish Communal Service. This is not intended as a “tribute journal” to the school, but rather it is a tribute *to the field* on behalf of the SJCS. All (but two) of the articles are written either by alumni or faculty of the school, and all relate to broad issues of concern to Jewish communal professionals wherever they are in the world and for whatever agencies they work. The issue is divided into four sections:

- It's a Field, It's a Profession... It's a Calling
- Things I (Should Have) Learned in School
- Here, There, and Everywhere
- The Millennials are Coming

In “It's a Field...,” two former directors of the SJCS, Steven Windmueller and Marla Eglash Abraham, interview the founder of the school and his wife, Jerry and Ruby Bubis, on the dynamics and values that led to the school's founding. Following this article, and as he has done so often throughout his career, Jerry Bubis contributes a new perspective on the values underlying the field itself, making the case that we need to do an even better job in expressing our professional values as *Jewish values*, and not just those of social work, business, or any of the other professional disciplines that inform our work. Marsha Katz Rothpan's piece on the *Brit HaMiktzoah*, the Covenant of Professional Leadership recently drafted and adopted by the Jewish Communal Professionals of Southern California (JCPSC), provides the beginnings of a response to Jerry's call, setting out Jewish values that should guide our conduct as Jewish professionals. And the next two articles—by the team of Barb Gelb, Ann Hartman Luban, and Rachel Sisk and by Dana Sheanin—provide additional consideration of how we define ourselves to ourselves, as educators and as mentors, respectively. The section concludes with Ron Astor's discussion of how Jewish professional values have informed his career as a professor of social work and a researcher examining violence in the schools, using Israel as an important laboratory.

“Things I (Should Have) Learned in School” begins with two articles reflecting on some of the contributions of the School of Jewish Communal Service. Sarah Benor and Bruce Phillips, two professors in the school, review the history of the SJCS master’s thesis and the impact that many of these papers have had on our understanding of the field. Dr. Phillips then makes some observations about SJCS graduates, based on several theses that surveyed the alumni, identifying trends that may be reflective of where the field as a whole is heading. The following two articles by Howard Weisband and Stephen Donshik, two alumni now living and working in Israel, offer strong arguments for inclusion in the graduate school curriculum of a more profound understanding of the pioneering work of Daniel Elazar on the political structure of the organized Jewish community (Weisband) and more expanded study of the agencies, issues, and personalities of Jewish communities in other countries, particularly in Europe and South America (Donshik). And to conclude this section, there is a transcript of a panel discussion on “Changing Expectations of Jewish Communal Professionals” that was part of a symposium convened at HUC LA in honor of SJCS’s 40th anniversary in February 2009. The reflections of these four highly experienced professionals raise important questions about how we should be educating the next generation of Jewish professional leaders.

In “Here, There, and Everywhere,” several alumni and faculty discuss aspects of Jewish professional practice, including the continued relevancy and criticality of Jewish community relations (Andi Milens), the emergence of the new field of Jewish healing (Michelle Prince), the imperative of collaboration, particularly in an era of scarce resources and complex operations (Sally Weber and Michelle Krotinger Wolf), the responsibility of Jewish communal professionals to support Jewish renewal in communities around the world (Joy Sisisky), and some of the unique characteristics of Jewish communal service in Israel (Javier Simonovich). This section concludes with an article submitted independently to the *Journal* on Jewish life in Cuba by Heidi Heft LaPorte, Jay Sweifach, and David Strug. Although not SJCS alumni, we include their article because of its relevance and contribution to the topic.

“The Millennials Are Coming” both provides some insight into the behaviors and expectations of the generation just entering or about to enter the workforce and presents examples of the research being contributed by professionals in the Millennial generation. All of these articles emerged out of research for SJCS master’s theses. SJCS Assistant Director and alumna, Lori Klein, paired up with her thesis advisee, Shira Liff-Grief, on an article based on Shira’s 2009 thesis, “Integrating the Millennial Generation: A Study of Young Professionals in the Jewish Nonprofit Sector.” The other articles summarize the authors’ theses: understanding the personality and participation profiles of this generation (Miriam Pullman Friedman), the demographics of JDate (Deborah Tuttle), and the Jewish Campus Service Corps (Alicia Cohen).

Finally, we end with a “Benediction” by Rabbi Zoe Klein, who is neither an alumna nor faculty member of the SJCS, but who delivered this “blessing” at the 2008 JCPSC professional conference and brought the house down (or “up,” more exactly).

As I write this introduction, I have just recently been appointed Director of the HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Service. As Interim Director for the

past year and a half, a good portion of my time was spent researching, writing, and gathering support for a new strategic plan for the school (“Excellence in Jewish Nonprofit Management: Educating Jewish Professionals for Leadership and Change”). As we celebrate the school’s 40th anniversary, we are also preparing to ensure that the school can address the very real challenges—structural and motivational—that we, as a Jewish community, are facing and will continue to face in the 21st century.

Although I would be happy to send a copy of the full plan to anyone who wants one, a brief summary of some of the major points should suffice for the purposes of this introduction. With regard to the core curriculum, the balance among the academic offerings in Jewish history, communal dynamics, and nonprofit management; the research undertaken for the thesis; the two years of fieldwork internships; and the Israel Seminar seems pretty well calibrated right now. We may be adding several electives to allow for concentrations in social justice, fundraising, or synagogue administration, but the core pillars of the program will remain intact.

The major change that is being proposed for the graduate school is not programmatic, but definitional. As is underscored by the change of name of one of our sister programs, the Hornstein Program at Brandeis—from Jewish Communal Service to Jewish Professional Leadership—the concept of “communal service” does not have the salience today that it had 40 years ago. What should replace it as the name of the field for which we are providing education is considerably less obvious. After considerable deliberations and discussion, we are proposing to change our name to the “HUC-JIR School of Jewish Nonprofit Management (SJNM).” As the field has professionalized, it has also become more professional in its expectations. Jewish professionals are now managing, directing, programming, fundraising, organizing, and branding far more complex agencies and organizations than ever before. As Jewish professional leaders, we have to be able to apply the most sophisticated and contemporary theory, skills, and training in nonprofit management to help our organizations achieve their missions, which in aggregate is ultimately the mission of the Jewish people. Part of the role of a school that educates Jewish professional leaders is to define the conceptual network in which its graduates will be entering. We believe that in its broadest reaches this network is the nonprofit sector, which aligns with those who seek the public good and the betterment of civil society. Within that sector, we have a special responsibility, a sacred task to bring the values and wisdom of Jewish history, tradition, and culture to enrich the Jewish experience and improve the societies in which we work.

Beyond refining and refocusing the graduate education, however, the strategic plan envisions a new subsidiary enterprise emerging within SJCS (because the name change has not been formally adopted, I will continue to use SJCS in this introduction). One of the clearest and loudest findings from the field survey conducted at the outset of the strategic planning process was that the most pressing professional need right now in the Jewish community is for qualified, experienced, and talented middle managers, both for the critical functions they perform within their organizations and for their potential to move up and assume senior and executive management and leadership positions. For a variety of reasons—including early burnout, low pay, lack of

opportunities for or encouragement of professional development, changes in women's career trajectories, resistance to geographic relocation, and a recalibration of work–life balance—the most difficult positions to fill in the Jewish community right now are in middle management. And with the imminent retirement of the Baby Boomers, we can project that in a few years we will see serious difficulties in filling the large number of senior executive positions that will become open.

In essence, the Jewish professional workforce is more like an hourglass and less like a pyramid, with relatively few professionals competing for positions in the middle. This is consistent with what is happening in the broader nonprofit arena, as reported in the 2009 Bridgespan Group's study, "Finding Leaders for America's Nonprofits," which described and analyzed the "leadership deficit" afflicting the nonprofit sector. This trend—and the looming problem for the Jewish community—is confirmed in the recent Jewish Funders Network monograph, *Executive Development & Succession Planning: A Growing Challenge for the American Jewish Community*, prepared for the Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

In response, we are proposing to establish the Center for Jewish Communal Leadership (CJCL) to elevate the training of Jewish leaders already in the field. Although it will eventually embrace both lay and professional leadership, at the outset the focus of the Center will be on cultivating professional leaders. Jewish professionals, at whatever level, can benefit from professional development—and indeed one of the goals of the Jewish Communal Service Association should be to make ongoing professional education an expectation of the field, encouraged and supported by all communal agencies and organizations. However, there are some particular niches in which focused and structured professional development opportunities can be particularly valuable:

- Professionals in the field for 3–5 years: This is a particularly critical juncture when young professionals make the decision to remain in the field or move into another career.
- Professionals in the field for 10–12 years: Professionals with this much experience are likely to stay in the field; however, having come up through the ranks, they very often do not have the formal training, skill sets, or professional resources needed to assume the next level of senior executive positions.
- Rabbis and synagogue administrators: The synagogue is still the key foundational and gateway institution in Jewish life. Operationally it is a particularly complex institution, with multiple loci of power, overlapping lines of authority and communication, and relatively expensive core programs, particularly in education. Rabbis generally have little formal training in the core skills necessary to translate their visions into effective operations. Synagogue executive directors, in contrast, are not yet recognized—or trained—as the key professionals responsible for the success of the institution in partnership with the clergy.
- Social justice organizers and executives: Although still a marginal subset within the Jewish organizational world, social justice organizations represent one of the fastest growing sectors in the Jewish community. If, as some think, this is a harbinger of a dramatic shift in communal mission and priorities (see Jonathan Sarna's blog on "Communal Life After the Recession" on www.thejc.com), then

we need to figure out how to provide those professionals drawn to this arena with the community organizing, social work, marketing, and financial resource development tools that they need to succeed.

The Center for Jewish Communal Leadership is only in the early stages of development, and we can expect that not all of the projected programs will come to fruition. But the early indications are quite positive, and we will be rolling out some pilot programs over the next few years in cooperation with our partners at the University of Southern California—including the Marshall School of Business, the Annenberg School of Communications, the USC School of Social Work, and the USC School of Policy, Planning and Development—and our partners in the Jewish community, including the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, JCPSC, and Jumpstart.

As the School of Jewish Communal Service completes its 40th anniversary, we look forward to a creative future motivated with the vision expressed in our new strategic plan:

The professional needs of the American Jewish community are changing significantly as a result of a confluence of forces—generational, societal, and structural. On the one hand, established organizations are demanding more Jewishly knowledgeable and business savvy professional leaders, even as they project a severe shortage in senior management with the imminent retirement of the Baby-Boom generation. On the other, a new generation of Jewish social entrepreneurs in the areas of social justice, culture, and religious community is challenging traditional organizational structures and professional expectations.

All Jewish organizations, whether new or established, need and depend on professional leadership to provide sophisticated management in the increasingly complex nonprofit arena, ensure their financial health and stability in an increasingly competitive economic environment, and lead their growth and development in response to the changes and challenges in the Jewish communal world, both in the United States and around the world.

The future health and vitality of the Jewish communal enterprise depends on the recruitment, cultivation, training and empowerment of passionate and talented professionals to lead and transform the increasingly complex Jewish organizational infrastructure. We envision a cadre of Jewish professional leaders who will shape the future evolution of the Jewish community through their:

- *Deep Jewish identity, vision for the future of the Jewish people, and commitment to enhancing the quality of Jewish life,*
- *Skills, training and experience in nonprofit management, fundraising, human relations, and communications and marketing,*
- *Profound understanding of Jewish history and traditions, as well as Jewish communal structures and politics.*

As the School of Jewish Communal Service celebrates its 40th anniversary and contemplates its future contributions to the training and education of professional leaders for the Jewish community, we are delighted to share the reflections of our alumni and faculty in this special issue of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*.

I would like to thank the Editorial Committee that worked with me on preparing this issue: Marla Eglash Abraham, Sarah Benor, Jerry Bubis, Ann Hartman Luban, Jack Mayer, Andi Milens, Bruce Phillips, Joy Sisisky, and Steven Windmueller. Their thoughts on focus, format, themes, and topics were invaluable in shaping the contents, and their assistance in reviewing and commenting on the submissions helped ensure a high standard of style and coherence.

JCSA Executive Director, Brenda Gevertz, in addition to providing us an opportunity to extend our friendship, both encouraged this undertaking and provided insightful and experienced guidance throughout.

My friend and colleague, Bill Aron, generously provided his photographs of LA Jewish life as a visual reflection of the context in which we work at the School of Jewish Communal Service.

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Please feel free to contact me with any comments or corrections at rsiegel@huc.edu. I hope that this issue stimulates robust discussions and contributes to the further growth of our field.

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