

# The Jim Joseph Foundation Education Initiative

## Evaluation of the Jim Joseph Foundation Education Initiative

### Summary of Year 1 Findings

Submitted to the Jim Joseph Foundation

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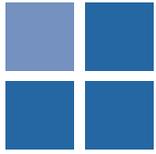
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# INTRODUCTION

One of the strategic priority areas of the Jim Joseph Foundation is increasing the number of high-quality Jewish educators who can provide effective and compelling learning experiences in a variety of Jewish education settings. The Foundation's Education Initiative was established based on the premise that high-quality certificate and degree programs, financial assistance, and opportunities for job placement will encourage individuals to consider careers in Jewish education or to receive additional training for deepening their current work in Jewish education. By attracting talented young people interested in becoming professional Jewish educators, training experienced and effective educators to become mentors and role models, and equipping Jewish educators to provide first-rate instruction in their workplaces, other priority areas of the Jim Joseph Foundation will be addressed; namely, expanding effective Jewish learning and building a strong field of Jewish education.

Under the Education Initiative, three leading higher education institutions, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), and Yeshiva University (YU), developed a multiyear plan to attract and train the next generation of Jewish educators and education leaders. The three institutions developed new certificate and graduate degree programs covering a broad spectrum of issues in Jewish education, from early childhood education to management skills in education environments. By the end of the Initiative in 2015–16, more than 1,000 educators should receive degrees or credentials in Jewish education with the support of the Jim Joseph Foundation. Of these, more than 200 graduates will likely complete full-time graduate degree programs and will fill open positions in the Jewish education workforce.

The Education Initiative has five measurable goals:

**Goal 1.** Increase the number of highly qualified individuals (including experienced Jewish education professionals, new professionals, and career changers) who enroll in preservice and inservice Jewish education programs.

**Goal 2.** Make programs available that prepare educators and education leaders to teach, inspire, and enrich education experiences in a variety of settings.

**Goal 3.** Identify areas of programmatic and inter-institutional collaboration that can improve program quality and make improvements sustainable.

**Goal 4.** Develop institutional capacity and infrastructure that will support future educator programs.

**Goal 5.** Increase the number of educators and education leaders placed, retained, and promoted in a variety of settings.

## SERVING ALL ASPECTS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The Jim Joseph Foundation believes that to ensure that Jewish education fulfills its mission, Jewish education programs must be of the highest quality and must build on the best practices in education. Quality education programs are expected to be enriching, engaging, and integrated into a positive and caring school climate in which all students are nurtured and teachers work collaboratively to learn, reflect on current practice, and plan for instruction. Schools and programs also must strive to meet the multiple goals of Jewish education that go beyond knowledge

acquisition by seeking to engage students and their families and to promote a Jewish sense of belonging (Cohen, 2008; Weissman & Weinberg, 2011).

Jewish education is important and has lifelong effects. Participation in Jewish education programs, including day school/yeshiva, supplemental programs that meet at least once a week, and other regular modes of learning, as well as a variety of experiential Jewish educational experiences—Jewish summer camps, Jewish youth groups, and travel to Israel, to name a few—is closely associated with significant aspects of a strong Jewish identity, such as in-marriage, in-group friendships, synagogue membership, emotional attachment to Israel, and the expressed importance of being Jewish (Cohen & Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004; Sheskin & Dashefsky, 2011). Jewish education builds lifetime Jewish connections that are likely to be passed on to the next generation. For example, parents who have received Jewish education are more likely to enroll their children in formal, informal, and early childhood Jewish education programs than parents who have not attended Jewish education programs (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2005).

## OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Jim Joseph Foundation Education Initiative is a \$45 million grant program designed to increase the number, quality, and type of programs and support available to students who enter and graduate from three premier Jewish education institutions. The Foundation's Initiative supports activities at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University. The Foundation has awarded \$15 million to each of these institutions to expand educator preparation programs and to build their capacity to place and support currently practicing and newly trained educators. Approximately \$3.5 million of each grant is designated to support and, in some cases, expand scholarships for existing degree programs. The institutions will serve both preservice and current educators who seek additional training. The grantees are expected to collaborate on shared priorities and program areas and to develop a plan to sustain the most successful newly developed programs after the funding ends in 2016.

The Education Initiative aims to provide a wide array of graduate-level and certificate programs, each designed to meet the needs of a targeted audience of professionals, including day school teachers, camp directors, heads of Jewish day schools, and education program directors. To make programs affordable and feasible, the Education Initiative funds scholarships and offers a variety of programs tailored for the different needs of prospective students (e.g., accelerated programs, online courses, blended onsite/online courses). About one quarter of the students are in full-time residential programs supported by the Initiative. Approximately one third of the programs sponsored by the Initiative are part-time, allowing teachers and education program directors to continue their careers. Finally, the Initiative is supporting a wide range of certificate programs targeting both early career and experienced professionals. These certificate programs currently enroll about two fifths of students supported by the Initiative.

## THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Education Initiative aims to increase the number and quality of Jewish education professionals through five main types of effort conducted by each institution:

1. **Recruitment and Financial Assistance.** All of the grantees proposed increasing the number of qualified students applying for and enrolling in their new and existing

programs. Meeting these targets required additional recruitment and marketing strategies, including design of web-based and print materials, development of a messaging strategy, and leveraging dissemination opportunities, such as national conferences, to raise awareness of the programs available. The grantees increased the number and dollar amount of scholarships available to attract talented applicants.

2. **Educator Programs.** The grantees developed, piloted, and implemented degree and certificate programs for new and veteran educators and individuals aspiring to educational leadership roles. Some of these programs were established in partnership with schools and organizations and were piloted in alignment with the educational context of these organizations. Program development involved hiring new faculty to develop and direct the new programs; consulting with experts, advisory committees, and partnering organizations; and piloting new modules and technologies. Development of new programs and enhancement of existing curricula involved strengthening other parts of each institution's infrastructure, including online application and student information systems.
3. **Placement and Induction.** Both job placement and support for newly placed program graduates are important components of the Initiative. Placement refers to assistance provided by the institution in matching recent program graduates to employers. Placement support took different forms, from individual consultation to job preparation courses to an online job search platform. Induction includes activities such as mentoring, coaching, professional development, and networking to help new graduates succeed as educators and, in doing so, to encourage them to develop careers in Jewish education. In some cases, induction programs helped new teachers adapt to their positions and assisted schools in creating a welcoming environment for new hires.
4. **Collaboration.** The three institutions identified a common area for collaboration; namely, the use of technology for course development and instruction. In addition, the faculties of the three institutions have begun communicating about experiential Jewish education. HUC-JIR and JTS jointly developed a leadership institute for early childhood education.
5. **Sustainability.** The three institutions began working on strategic plans, long-term fundraising campaigns, and upgraded data systems to enable better decision making for program sustainability and capacity building.

## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Jim Joseph Foundation asked American Institutes for Research (AIR) to evaluate the extent to which the five goals of the Education Initiative have been reached. Essential aspects of the AIR evaluation involve tracking and assessing the Jewish educator pipeline assisted by the grants; collecting information about student experience and the impact of the Education Initiative on that experience; documenting the knowledge, resources, and collaboration that have developed from the Initiative; and monitoring the progress of the grantees in creating the conditions to sustain these programs as support of the Initiative winds down.

The purpose of the Year 1 report is to provide an overview of the two-year program development phase of the Education Initiative. Future reports will consider a wider variety of data drawn from employer and faculty surveys, interviews with students and alumni, and other sources and will provide a deeper examination of pipeline data (such as number of applicants, matriculating and graduating students, and job placements) over the course of the Education Initiative.

This Year 1 report uses data obtained through interviews conducted from December 2011 through March 2012 with the presidents, deans, and project coordinators of the three grantee institutes, as well as administrative data received from grantees and an online student survey administered in November 2011. The Year 1 report addresses the following four questions, which are aligned with the goals of the Education Initiative:

1. **Recruitment:** What marketing and recruitment activities did grantees undertake or expand? What were the outcomes?
2. **Student Experience:** How do students perceive the impact of the programs on their personal and professional growth?
3. **Collaboration:** How has inter-institutional collaboration evolved since the start of the Education Initiative?
4. **Sustainability:** What initial steps have grantees taken to ensure the sustainability of these programs?

## RESULTS

### 1. RECRUITMENT

**FINDING 1:** Strategic planning and outreach of all grantees leveraged existing relationships with schools, camps, organizations, and alumni.

The most effective recruitment strategies were those that built on grantees' established connections and networks to announce the new programs and scholarships. According to student survey results, 43 percent of the survey sample learned about grantee programs and scholarships from a rabbi, program director, school head, colleague, or friend.

**FINDING 2:** A rigorous review process identified top-quality candidates who not only had the requisite academic qualifications for admission, but who also demonstrated the skills and experience needed to ensure program completion and the successful application of skills in the workplace.

Equipped with the capacity to offer financial assistance, grantees were able to attract talented prospective students who otherwise would not have applied. All master's degree students and most certificate program students (76 percent) reported that the availability of financial assistance was an influential factor in their decision to apply to their current programs. With a larger pool from which to choose, grantees aimed to identify top-quality candidates who not only had the academic qualifications for admission, but also the skills and experience to ensure program completion and the successful application of skills to transform Jewish education in their workplaces. Candidates were expected to understand the time commitment needed to meet the rigorous program requirements. Employers of part-time students were required to demonstrate readiness to support their employees. Employers were expected to relieve employees of some responsibilities at their workplaces to enable completion of program requirements.

**FINDING 3:** Outreach efforts attracted individuals who otherwise would not have considered preservice or inservice learning opportunities.

Not all of the prospective students who applied and enrolled in the programs sponsored by the Initiative were actively seeking graduate programs or professional development programs at the time they were recruited. Only one third (34 percent) of the students and alumni surveyed reported that they would have sought other learning opportunities had they not been accepted into the program.

## 2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

**FINDING 1:** Across programs, the top goals of students were to improve pedagogical knowledge, learn about curriculum development, and transform Jewish education in their communities.

Most often, students came to the program to gain practical knowledge for working in education settings. The top four goals of both current students and alumni included improving their pedagogical knowledge (68 percent), increasing their knowledge of curriculum development (63 percent), transforming Jewish education in their communities (58 percent), and gaining professional skills that could be applied across a variety of settings (53 percent). The fifth most highly ranked goal across all students was to broaden their knowledge of Judaism for personal growth (50 percent).

**FINDING 2:** Across programs, students reported positive impacts on their workplace practices, their knowledge of Jewish education, and their attitudes toward working in Jewish education.

Most students reported that they benefitted both personally and professionally from their programs, and some were already using the knowledge they acquired from their courses of study. More than 80 percent of current students agreed or strongly agreed that their programs affected them professionally in three areas: increasing their knowledge of Jewish education (93 percent), changing their thinking about Jewish education (82 percent), and increasing their interest in getting others involved in Jewish education (79 percent). One student commented:

*The program strength is in the wealth of information I am receiving about education—what works and what doesn't, in particular, teaching myths that I had bought into. It is also the networking opportunities to share and learn teaching techniques from the experiences of my classmates and professors. (Graduate student, YU School Partnerships Master's Degree program)*

More than 80 percent of students rated their programs as effective or very effective in developing the knowledge and skills they needed for their work.

*My classes have transformed the way I think about Jewish education, given me a more sophisticated Judaic and educational vocabulary, both figuratively and literally, and given me concrete skills that I have taken right back into my school and that I am now sharing with colleagues in my professional organizations. I feel I have been given such a wonderful gift. (Student, JTS Davidson School of Education)*

*I teach Jewish Studies to middle schoolers, so every day I use the Judaic content I learned in the MAJE [Master of Arts in Jewish Education] program. I also use, every day, the ways of thinking about organizational culture and leadership development to navigate my way around my school and make myself into the leader I want to be. (Alumnus, HUC-JIR Master of Arts in Jewish Education program)*

*I personally gained a tremendous amount of hands-on knowledge, which has been put to use in my classroom. My perspectives have been focused and I am able to identify myself as an educator with a clear mission in my classroom. (Alumnus, YU Educational Technology Certificate program)*

**FINDING 3:** Students have already put their knowledge to work at their current workplaces or practicum school sites.

All surveyed alumni and nearly all current students (92 percent) reported that they had applied knowledge and skills gained from their programs to their jobs. Specifically, they applied new learning and skills to curriculum planning (43 percent), aligning instructional practices in the classroom with students' needs (31 percent), revisiting school or organizational practices (15 percent), leadership and management work (13 percent), and creating a positive learning environment at the school (7 percent).

*I have been able to apply most of the knowledge I have learned in my classes to my program. Some specifics include: text study, creating professional learning community, writing priority goals, creating a mission statement and value statements, etc. This learning has been invaluable!!*  
(Student, Executive Master's Degree program, HUC-JIR)

**FINDING 4:** Overall, students were satisfied with the knowledge of their instructors and their relationships with faculty.

About 76 percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed that their faculty members were knowledgeable and that they modeled Jewish life and pedagogical skills. Students assigned a particular value to personal attention by instructors, mentors, advisors, and other influential faculty members. About 79 percent agreed or strongly agreed that an influential faculty member was accessible and responsive, interested in their well-being, and caring about their academic progress. A current graduate student at JTS Davidson School of Education noted that:

*Davidson School does a great job at making me feel like I am truly missed when I miss class or an activity. That is a great thing because most organizations, especially schools, don't give off that feeling of communal commitment. Having staff/faculty who are so committed to the success of individual programs and the students. I know I am valued as a participant in this program, and I know that because the faculty and staff go above and beyond what is expected to make me feel that way.*

### 3. COLLABORATION

The grantees identified a common interest in developing their understanding and use of education technology and proposed the eLearning Fellowship Program as a collaborative project. The program will allow selected faculty members, eLearning staff, and administrators from HUC-JIR, JTS, and YU to dedicate a percentage of their time to study distance learning, as well as the wider fields of e-learning and educational technology.

As part of the Education Initiative, the YU president, the HUC-JIR president, and the JTS chancellor have met annually. The leaders set clear limits on these meetings to ensure that their collaboration not be interpreted as ideological or religious agreement. Nonetheless, they expressed the belief that these meetings are of potential historical significance. All leaders believe that even more important is the fact that the three institutions' faculties regularly meet and engage in ongoing conversations.

Other types of collaboration have taken place in parallel with these conversations. The Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute (JECLEI), jointly developed and led by HUC-JIR and JTS, launched in 2012. Also, as YU, JTS, and HUC-JIR have developed new programs in the field of experiential Jewish education, they have initiated communications among program directors and presented side-by-side in shared conference sessions about experiential Jewish education.

## 4. SUSTAINABILITY

The Education Initiative has expanded the operation of the schools of education at HUC-JIR, JTS, and YU, including adding new programs, hiring new staff, providing more scholarships, developing new recruitment initiatives, and offering greater support for placement and new teacher induction. Interviews with grantees revealed that they have considered fundraising, new business development, and reducing program operating costs as ways to sustain these developments after the end of the grant period.

The Education Initiative has been a presidential priority at all three institutions, and the presidents have expressed their high level of support for the continuation of the programs if they are able to cover operating costs. All three grantees assume that only a small portion of revenue can realistically be obtained from student tuition. Most students will probably take up teaching positions with relatively low salaries; therefore, assistance in the form of student loans would not promote recruitment of talented candidates. In addition, budget cuts have reduced the ability of day schools and congregational schools to support the professional development of their staffs. Consequently, annual giving and endowment funds are crucial to successfully sustain and scale up programs.

New business development can potentially increase revenues. All grantees have explored e-learning options that could potentially change existing costs and revenues and have developed at least one online or blended (online learning supplemented by in-person seminars) course as part of the Education Initiative. Online learning allows for recruiting from a larger pool of geographically remote students who are otherwise unable to take classes at the institutions' campuses. However, online instruction is not necessarily less expensive than traditional instruction. Interview data indicates that all grantees have concluded that students enrolled in distance learning need a customized curriculum, personal attention from instructors, and individualized academic support. Consequently, instructors have dedicated considerable time to monitoring what students have created and used in their classrooms and responding to student postings. To ensure adequate support to all students, all online courses developed by the grantees have limited the ratio of students to instructors to 20:1 and sometimes 10:1.

The unique nature of Jewish education programs prevents grantees from purchasing existing online courses from external service providers, which places additional burden on grantees in terms of program development and piloting. When calculating operating costs, additional personnel, such as programmers or database managers, must be accounted for as ongoing operational costs, not as developmental costs. This is because programs typically need ongoing technical support and new technology to ensure student satisfaction. These obstacles do not mean that online learning is an ineffective strategy in terms of cost. It means, rather, that this high-promise strategy should be carefully considered in any long-term plan to better understand where cost savings may be found.

Revisiting tuition rates and financial assistance might result in more revenue, making programs more sustainable. Directors of Education Initiative programs are continually appraising tuition and financial assistance within their programs. For some programs, tuition may increase next year and financial assistance may be somewhat reduced.

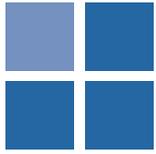
However, changes to tuition and financial assistance could adversely affect enrollment rates. Many students would not have enrolled in their programs without financial assistance. Generally,

students thought that current tuition levels were not affordable. On average, JTS master's degree students were willing to pay up to 38 percent of current tuition. HUC-JIR master's degree students were willing to pay up to 62 percent, and YU students enrolled in Differentiated Instruction and Educational Technology certificate programs were willing to pay up to 36 percent and 32 percent, respectively, of total program tuition. YU students enrolled in the Experiential Jewish Education certificate program were willing to pay up to 49 percent of the program's total tuition.

Students indicated that these costs were the maximum amounts they could pay without taking out loans, cutting back on other important expenditures, or creating family hardship. Some students have only recently completed their undergraduate studies, rabbinical/cantorial training, or graduate programs, and already have loans that must be repaid. In addition, nearly one quarter of survey respondents (24 percent) thought that current tuition fees were too high based on their knowledge of tuition in other graduate schools, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

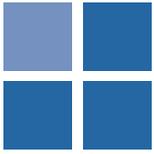
## CONCLUSION

The Education Initiative has employed extensive strategic planning to improve the number and quality of its program applicants. In addition to expanded outreach and recruitment efforts, the design of new programs and the availability of programs and courses in online format have also helped attract prospective students who otherwise may not have considered obtaining a degree or certificate in Jewish education. Extended recruitment efforts have reached out to both current and future educators and education leaders. Across the board, students have reported positive experiences with their programs, both professionally and personally. In alignment with the philosophy of the grantees, students have perceived individualized attention as contributing to their academic progress and self-growth as educators. To maintain high-quality programming, institutions may need to continuously invest in personalized learning environments. However, more staff time translates into greater operating costs in both traditional and online learning models. Identifying ways to contain program costs may be an inevitable component of financial sustainability of the programs covered by the Education Initiative.



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