JIM JOSEPH FOUNDATION

SHIMON BEN JOSEPH
Senior Jewish Educator and Campus Entrepreneur’s Initiative

Two-Year Evaluation Summary Report

Hillel
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Shimon ben Joseph
DEAR COLLEAGUE

Five years ago, with generous support from the Jim Joseph Foundation, Hillel embarked on an experimental path intended to dramatically increase the number of Jewish students who are involved in Jewish campus life. While many organizations embark on a strategic path for the purposes of increasing impact and scale, what we believe makes this worthy of sharing with our colleagues is Hillel’s approach – leveraging student peer networks and deploying educators within those networks. This strategy gave rise to new ideas internally on how to educate young adults in informal settings, build diverse and decentralized young adult communities, and develop non-institutional leadership among young Jews.

This report offers findings from a two-year evaluation of the Senior Jewish Educator and Campus Entrepreneur’s Initiative as well as lessons learned from five years of experimentation on campus. Today, actively deploying networks in service of inspiring Jewish growth and learning is at the core of Hillel’s strategy to expand and enrich Jewish campus life.

It is our sincere hope that findings extracted from the evaluation and from the deep experience of field professionals on campus will contribute to the growing sophistication of educators working in the space of emerging adulthood in the Jewish world. We look forward to the ongoing conversation.

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Hillel’s Strategic Approach to Growing Involvement in Jewish Life

In an era of so-called “emerging adulthood,” where personal interests and social networks reign over institutions and organizational membership, Jewish organizations are challenged to define new ways to connect the next generation to Jewish life. With 85% of American Jews attending university, the college years represent a tremendous opportunity to engage the next generation and to help shape the Jewish future.

In 2006, Hillel conducted a national survey of Jewish college students1 which showed that a majority of Jewish students were proud of their heritage, but only one third were actively involved in Hillel. Motivated by this finding, Hillel committed to significantly grow both the number of Jewish students who are involved in Jewish life and the number who have meaningful Jewish experiences. This two-fold target necessitated two complementary strategies: reaching increasing numbers of Jewish students and providing relevant, compelling Jewish experiences and learning opportunities to facilitate students’ Jewish growth. The Senior Jewish Educator and Campus Entrepreneur’s Initiative (SJE/CEI) was one of the boldest outgrowths of that strategy. This effort, which attempts to build Jewish life and to increase commitment to Jewish learning within students existing peer networks, represents a paradigm shift in mainstream Jewish institutional life.

In 2012, Hillel again conducted a national survey of Jewish college students. The survey revealed that student involvement with Hillel had increased from 34% in 2005 to 48% in 2012. This considerable increase reflects the success of local Hillel’s ability to adopt, adapt, and establish infrastructure for effective peer-engagement and meaningful Jewish education on an increasing number of campuses. In the next five years, with a vision “to inspire every Jewish student to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning and Israel,” Hillel intends to scale these strategies across its field, increasing Jewish involvement, growth, learning, and leadership on campuses and in communities around the world. SJE/CEI will be a major component of that work going forward.

1 Two national student surveys of over 1200 undergraduate and graduate students were conducted by the polling firm Penn, Schoen, Berland in 2006 and 2012, that point to these changes among Jewish Millennials. The first survey results are discussed in a Hillel-published monograph “Distinctively Jewish, Universally Human,” Dr. Beth Cousens, 2007
THE SENIOR JEWISH EDUCATOR/CAMPUS ENTREPRENEUR INITIATIVE

In 2008, Hillel launched the Senior Jewish Educator and Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative as two complementary campus initiatives. Supported by a $10.7 million, five-year grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation, this was the largest single investment ever made by a foundation or an individual to impact Jewish campus life. The grant allowed Hillel to pilot a cohort of educators who work in tandem with student engagement interns on ten campuses. Together, the interns and educators were charged with meaningfully connecting significant numbers of students to Jewish life and learning.

The Senior Jewish Educators (Educators) are authentic Jewish personalities who act as mentors, teachers, pastors, and community organizers in a variety of campus contexts. They use a relationship-building approach to introduce students to Jewish opportunities and compelling Jewish ideas. Additionally, they serve as a Jewish resource to the Hillel staff and student leadership, participate in Taglit-Birthright Israel and other immersion trips, and facilitate post-trip engagement.

The Educators work in tandem with the Campus Entrepreneur Interns (Interns) - students who develop relationships with peers and connect them to Jewish opportunities. Interns are campus influentials who are not already active in Hillel but who have a strong Jewish story and demonstrated curiosity. The interns tap their personal social networks (such as fraternities or sororities, business majors, foodies, artists, or graduating seniors) to connect friends and friends of friends to each other and to launch student-run Jewish initiatives on campus. As opposed to just planning events for their peers, they seek first to know and understand them and then co-create Jewish experiences and offerings that will foster Jewish growth, learning and a new connection to Jewish life.

By working together with the Interns, the Educators seek to have a “force multiplier” effect: influencing not only the students they meet personally, but every student who an Intern or other campus student leader reaches as well.

PEER ENGAGEMENT AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER FOR JEWISH GROWTH

THE EDUCATORS INVEST DEEPLY IN THE JEWISH GROWTH OF THE ENGAGEMENT INTERNS WHO CAN THEN PROMOTE STRONGER AND DEEPER JEWISH TIES AMONG THE NETWORKS OF THEIR PEERS.
WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

The early success trajectory of this project has had implications for the entire Hillel movement. During the four years since this intervention made its debut on campuses, the addition of Educators who work in tandem with student interns has become more than just a signature program offered on ten campuses. It has changed Hillel's approach to building Jewish life on campus and shifted how Hillel approaches its work as an organization. As Hillel moves ahead, key lessons-learned from the experience of field professionals over the past five years are shaping its approach to building Jewish life. These include:

• **Embrace a network-centric approach to build Jewish life.** Young adults organize themselves through a multiplicity of social networks, both online and off. Organizations that are porous and allow fluid involvement will be more successful at diversifying and growing those engaged in Jewish life.

• **Identify and employ social connectors.** Every community, no matter how formal or informal, has that person who knows everyone and takes great pride in making connections between their friends. Hillel's CEI Intern program rises or falls on employing the right interns who build Jewish life as a natural extension of who they are.

• **Invest deeply in the network hubs.** Students who are charged with activating their networks need ongoing training and support. So do the Hillel professionals who mentor and hold the students accountable. Hillel spends increasing amounts of time and resources to build learning communities and offer training both locally and nationally.

• **Convey content through relationships.** Hillel's educators are deeply proficient and authentic Jewish role models whose primary function is to facilitate substantive Jewish experiences and conversations for students. These interactions are predicated on relationships they have built on campus. The Educators must be authentic representatives of what they are attempting to teach. Similarly the most successful student interns are those who are themselves exploring and growing Jewishly, and bring their friends and peers along to share their Jewish journey.

• **Allow the substance of students' lives to dictate the content.** Jewish literacy is a goal, but educators primarily use the texts and learning experiences as a mirror on students' lives, enabling them to see tradition speaking to the questions most pertinent to their lives, and inviting them into the ongoing dialogue of generations.

• **Learn from local adaptation and translate across the institution.** While there are certainly common practices across all campuses, local Hillels did not integrate the educators and interns in their current program configurations all in the same way. Hillel's national staff learned as the program developed and translated core practices and local variants broadly across the field. Communities of practice and a partnership between Hillel's national body and local campuses were essential to this effort.
CO-OP SHABBAT AT BERKELEY

At Berkeley, an existing network not traditionally associated with Hillel became a focal point for Jewish life on campus. For years, Berkeley Hillel staff had tried to make inroads into the Co-Ops, a system of alternative campus housing with a significant Jewish population. An engagement intern who lived in the Co-Op spearheaded an effort to mobilize her peers. She created a “Co-op Shabbat”, recruiting other students to help her, with the support of Rabbi David Kasher, the Educator. He describes it:

“There were well over a hundred students there, of all types, most of whom I’d never seen before. They had just finished an abbreviated service and made kiddush and then someone announced that the Klezmer band was about to perform. They let loose with a wild Klezmer tune and soon there was a huge circle of people, some in bathrobes and some in mohawks and some in kippot, all dancing the hora together in this funky old campus building. I was particularly struck by how this seemed like an authentically Jewish event, but also a truly “co-op” event.”

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘NETWORK STRATEGY’?

Social networks, defined simply as a collection of people connected by relationships, are not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1970’s, sociologists determined that the people we know only tangentially through social networks impact our identities, knowledge acquisition and relationships more than those people we know intimately.

Today we are seeing the “network effect” of this phenomenon: as networks have grown in visibility and size, networks have become not only a reflection of social structure, but also a tool for achieving that structure. An actively curated network can enable participants to propagate diverse perspectives, to crowd-source joint work, and to establish and rewrite community norms.

Networks can be fostered and cultivated to reach and engage significant populations otherwise unreach or uninspired by existing events and activities. Simultaneously offering roles of follower and leader, teacher and student, connector and expert – networks facilitate belonging and connectedness and a mechanism for sophisticated community organizing. Organizations that embrace and master a network model are positioned to successfully connect Jewish young adults to Jewish tradition, community and values.

Deploying networks to build commitment to Jewish learning and Jewish engagement is at the core of the SJE/CEI program. This work happens in concert with what is considered ‘traditional’ Hillel programming. Moving forward, Hillel believes working via Jewish campus networks has become central to all Hillel activities.
DOES THE ADDITION OF AN EDUCATOR AND INTERNS EXPAND HILLEL’S REACH ON CAMPUS?

The Interns and Educators together expand Hillel’s reach. On average an Educator and 12 student interns collectively engage almost 750 students annually. Over the initial five years of the grant, Educators and Interns will have reached over 22,000 students on 10 campuses.

*APPROXIMATELY 60% OF 7,460 CONTACTS WERE NEWLY ENGAGED STUDENTS

HOW DO THE EDUCATORS AND INTERNS AFFECT A STUDENT’S JEWISH LIFE?

Educators and Interns make a measurable difference on the students they meet. But they have different effects on a student’s Jewish growth and involvement. Educators are particularly effective in promoting Jewish learning activities while Interns promote the density of Jewish friendship.
IS THERE A KEY ACTIVITY THAT CONtributes MORE TO A STUDENT’S JEWISH GROWTH?

The study highlighted the importance of “Jewish talk,” discussions involving Jewish topics or themes that promote Jewish growth among students. As might be expected, Educators are particularly skilled at Jewish conversations. Interns had varying levels of comfort when engaging peers on topics that went beyond school, work and relationships. The Educator’s work is primarily focused on preparing interns to discuss Jewish topics with their peers.

NUMBERS REFLECT GROWTH FROM LAST YEAR IN PERCENTAGE

CREATING JEWISH CONVERSATIONS AT OHIO STATE

At The Ohio State University, Educator Rabbi Ben Berger prepares each student intern to lead a Jewish conversation among fellow interns about a topic of his/her own choosing. This training helps to build the interns’ confidence and skill at Jewish talk. Ben also brings particular topics to the interns and invites them to bring the discussion to their networks.

For example, in commemoration of Yom HaShoah, Ben and several students created a haggadah exploring themes of memory, story and responsibility. They studied the haggadah with the full cohort of interns who then hosted Yom HaShoah seders across campus, engaging over 200 peers in a common conversation.
WHO ARE THE STUDENTS THAT INTERNS AND EDUCATORS REACH?

At the project’s outset, Hillel sought to reach students uninvolved in Jewish life on campus. The evaluators examined students’ prior Hillel involvement as well as prior Jewish backgrounds to assess success against this benchmark.

The evaluation found that the Educators’ and Interns’ contacts were equally divided among “involved,” “moderately involved,” and students “on the periphery” of Hillel involvement. Similarly, student contacts’ Jewish backgrounds were also equally divided between students with strong, moderate, and weak backgrounds. The evaluators point to the fact that the original goal – to reach primarily uninvolved students – is harder to attain.

DOES THE FREQUENCY OF INTERACTION WITH THE EDUCATOR AND INTERNS AFFECT A STUDENT’S JEWISH GROWTH?

The more face time a student has with an educator or an intern, the greater the correlation with growth in individual Jewish behaviors.

Numbers represent a comparison in Jewish activities between this year and last year.
DOES THE EFFECT OF AN EDUCATOR OR INTERN DIFFER DEPENDING ON A STUDENT’S JEWISH BACKGROUND OR INVOLVEMENT?

The effect of an educator is much greater on a student with little or no prior involvement with Hillel or for those with weaker Jewish backgrounds from childhood and the teen years. The evaluation also found that it is most difficult to identify and build relationships with those furthest from Jewish life. This is one explanation for why the contacts reached by both Educators and Interns underrepresented less involved students, relative to the goals of the initiative.

In practice, educators found that facilitating the path to Jewish growth and ownership was more complex than the calculus of Hillel involvement and Jewish background. Experience on campus showed that even current student leaders at Hillel were struggling with the same sort of questions around the relevance of Jewish life that the “uninvolved” students had and also desired the resources of the educator.

Those already involved or who have strong backgrounds become Jewish leaders. Evaluation data concluded that students engaged by an educator or intern, who were previously involved in Hillel or who came to college with a strong Jewish background, did not exhibit much personal Jewish growth. However, their relationship with an educator was correlated with them becoming Jewish connectors who link other students to Jewish life and Jewish organizers who undertake collective Jewish activities.

Educators also grew leaders among the less involved. One striking finding was the growth of leadership among those with the least prior involvement. 33% of those who had only occasional Hillel involvement in the prior year but who knew an Educator saw themselves as Jewish leaders.
HOW ARE THE INTERNS AFFECTED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF BUILDING JEWISH LIFE?

During the internship year, interns exhibited the highest levels of Jewish growth relative to the students they engage. This was even more pronounced on campuses where an Educator was present.

Interns demonstrate even higher feelings of Jewish ownership, a composite of attitudes that are believed to be indicators of long-term Jewish commitment. This effect was magnified after the internship was complete. All Interns demonstrated increased commitment to Jewish life beyond the internship year. When an Educator was present, this effect was greater.
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TAGLIT-BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL?

Taglit-Birthright Israel recruitment and follow-through is integral to the work of both the interns and the Educators. Many Interns are recruited to their role after participating in Taglit-Birthright Israel trips and many more recruit peers to attend future trips. Educators regularly meet one-on-one with students returning from Israel and provide additional follow-through activities.

The data shows that this personal follow up by the interns and educators significantly magnifies as student’s Jewish growth.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

The evaluation of the Senior Jewish Educator / Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative, conducted by Research Success Technologies (ReST) and Ukeles Associates led by Drs Steven M. Cohen, Jack Ukeles, Ezra Kopelowitz and Minna Wolf set out to determine answers to two key questions during the first two years of this initiative’s implementation:

1. Do greater numbers of students engage with Jewish life as a result of the Senior Educators and student Interns?
2. Do students grow Jewishly as a result of this interaction? How?

To explore these questions, the research design included surveying 15 diverse campuses with both Educators and Interns, with just the Interns and with neither component of the program. On all campuses, students who had extensive contact with Interns and Educators as well as those students who had never met either an Intern or Educator were interviewed. Additionally, the evaluators conducted 13 focus groups and 70 in depth interviews with Hillel staff and leadership. In all, over 2800 students were surveyed or interviewed.

While the findings are very promising in terms of their inference for the field, it must be stated again that this report is based on a program evaluation. The students do not represent a true random sample, and bias cannot be ruled out entirely. Estimating the effectiveness of the Educators and Interns depended in large part on comparisons between their contacts and those students whom they had not met.

Since the ‘comparison’ set of students was generated by Hillel professionals, it is likely they have more engagement in Jewish life than a randomly selected sample may exhibit. A true random sample may show that the effect of the Educator or Intern would be higher. At the same time, the lack of a random sample may also overestimate the level of penetration this effort makes into the least engaged populations on campus. Where bias is likely, attention is drawn to it in the full report.

Finally, the evaluation data covers only two years of activity on campus. Two years is a very short time to evaluate a complex program that attempts to foster individual student Jewish growth as well as into change (or redirect) the culture of an organization. The outcome statements here are limited to the data found in the evaluation of individual student Jewish growth. The lessons learned draw from both the evaluation and the four years of field experience.
THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIP BASED ENGAGEMENT AND INCREASING RELEVANCE OF JEWISH LEARNING

The evaluation and four years of field experience all point to the value of relationships – with peers and with authentic teachers – as well as the power of Jewish learning that is contextual and relevant to the lives of young Jews today. Most importantly, it suggests a new set of organizing principles for those engaged in Jewish education for young adults focused on delivering substantive content through relevant social networks.

During the four years since the SJE/CEI Initiative made its debut on campuses, it has become more than just another program offering. It has changed Jewish life on campus and how Hillel approaches its work. No longer positioning itself as the focal point of Jewish life on campus, Hillel acts to connect multiple networks and provide mentorship and resources for leaders throughout the network. Through the work of Senior Jewish Educators and Campus Entrepreneur Interns, Hillel enables students to engage their peers to create deeper and more meaningful relationships among themselves and with the Jewish community.
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