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THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLS OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

Rela Mintz Geffen

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Defining a Profession

The foundation stones of professional status in North American society include specialized, lengthy, and often expensive training, recognized expertise in a particular body of knowledge, and strong organization of workers in the field. Thus, medical doctors, who have high status, undergo many years of expensive, rigorous schooling, perform tasks which those lacking such training would not presume to undertake (such as surgery), and are highly organized through the American Medical Association to protect their group from encroachment by untrained or under-trained persons.

Within the Jewish community, the professional status of rabbis within movements most closely parallels that of physicians. Rabbinical training is specialized, lengthy, and (though the degree of expertise in a particular area such as Talmudic study may differ from program to program) graduates of the recognized schools are accepted as specialists. Professional associations such as the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), the Orthodox Union, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) carefully monitor membership requirements for applicants who did not graduate from "their" schools and tightly control placement.

On a continuum of professionalism among occupations in North America, most Jewish communal service workers would be found at a far different point from that of physicians, college professors, attorneys, or rabbis. The reasons for this disparity include but are not limited to: the lack of a recognized curriculum for training; disagreement as to the correct base discipline of the field; an absence (except in specialized situations, e.g., provision of counseling or other psychological services in family service agencies) of required minimum competencies or of particular credentials for employment, whether in Judaic studies, management, or social and interpersonal skills. Some other factors contributing to uneven professional status are the ease with which volunteers become transformed into paid professionals, and the inability or lack of interest of those in the field to restrict membership in the profession to people with particular training. A structural factor endemic to many Jewish agencies and institutions which has uncertain impact is the power to manage and even to micro-manage decision-making wielded by volunteer officers and

board members who may choose to define even the most high level professional managers as facilitators rather than as initiators of policies and programs.

Sometimes, the flexibility created by this amorphous definition of the field of Jewish communal service enables gifted outsiders to bring their talent to bear for the good of the community. In-service training and mid-career educational enhancement can both initiate and formalize expertise for auto-didacts as well as for those who have had pre-professional specialized training. However, it is also the case that lack of clear standards may result in uneven provision of service, unstable career ladders, murky definitions of who is and is not a "member" of the profession, low morale, sub-standard salaries, and a growing sense of frustration for professionals in the field.

The On-Going Mission of the Graduate Schools and Programs in Jewish Communal Service

During the fourth quarter of the twentieth century, the schools of Jewish communal service have had as part of their on-going mission the transformation of the definition of professionalism in Jewish communal service. Beginning with two formal programs, each with its own model, a slow, uphill battle has been waged to define appropriate training, to fund that training, and to find and keep faculty able to create and deliver a high-level integrated curriculum focused on Judaic studies and the building of interpersonal, group, and organizational skills along with professionally supervised field experience. More recently, management techniques and technological skills have been added to the curriculum.

The founders and later directors of these schools and programs have also seen it as part of their obligation to convince sometimes hesitant volunteer and professional elites that specialized knowledge and training is necessary to foster the kind of Jewish civil service needed to create and sustain a vibrant Jewish community in the open society. They have also urged the institutionalization of career ladders along with monetary rewards that acknowledge the expertise of alumni of their programs.

Models of Training for Jewish Communal Service

The first program model, growing out of a school of social work, and the assumption that the "union card" or core discipline for Jewish communal service should be the Master of Social Work (MSW), including field placements in Jewish institutions and with Jewish studies courses available in the same academic setting, was developed in 1957 at the Wurtzweiler School of Yeshiva University.

The second model, that of a self-contained, integrated Master of Arts degree in Jewish Communal Service (MAJCS), was begun in 1969 at Brandeis University through its Hornstein Program, and is now available at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles and in Philadelphia at Gratz College. The University of Michigan model started in 1989 and, coordinated by Project STaR, is something of a cross between models 1 and 2. It is a collaborative effort of the Michigan School of Social Work and the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies through which all students earn an 18-credit certificate in Jewish Communal Service and Judaic Studies, in addition to the MSW degree. They participate in internships in Jewish communal service settings in the United States and abroad.

A third model, that of a partnership between a college or university of Jewish studies and a school of social work of another university in the same community, began with a tripartite cooperative effort of the Baltimore Institute, the Baltimore Hebrew University, and the School of Social Work of the University of Maryland. Joint graduate degree programs followed between the

Irwin Daniels School of Jewish Communal Service at HUC-JIR in Los Angeles and the University of Southern California (1968); the Jewish Theological Seminary of America with Columbia University's School of Social Work (1977); and Gratz College with the School of Social Work of the University of Pennsylvania (1989).

A fourth model is now emerging as schools of higher Jewish learning negotiate new relationships and offer joint graduate degrees in Jewish Communal Service paired with Masters of Business Administration or Public Policy that focus on the not-for-profit sector. For example, the Irwin Daniels School at HUC-JIR offers the option of an MA in Jewish Communal Service and a Master of Public Administration (MAJCS/MPA), an MA in Jewish Communal Service paired with a Master of Science in Gerontology (MAJCS/MSG), and an MAJCS together with an MA in Communications Management with the Annenberg School for Communications of the University of Southern California. Within the Brandeis University structure, Hornstein students may now combine their MAJCS with a Master in Management of Human Services degree at the Heller School. In some cases, individual, entrepreneurial students have negotiated dual programs combining Jewish studies with law or study of the arts.

Another version of the dual credential program is found within the broader framework of schools of higher Jewish learning. Just as some rabbinical students simultaneously earn Jewish education, music, or other degrees, some communal studies students are also completing dual Jewish studies credentials in Jewish education, Jewish music, or in a field of Judaic humanities. Gratz College and the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies offer 18-credit graduate Certificates in Jewish Communal Service which may be added on to other degrees earned at those institutions. The Lieber School of Graduate Studies at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles offers the option of a Certificate in Jewish Communal Service along with its free-standing MBA program focusing on the non-profit sector.

Integration of the content of dual programs at "partner" schools, and even of social work and Judaic studies programs within the same university framework, has been a major concern of directors and faculty. Field placements in Jewish agencies as well as practice classes and professional seminars that meet regularly with the express purpose of providing synthesis have offered partial answers to the dilemma of integration.

Special Initiatives

The Federation Executive Recruitment Program (FEREP), founded more than twenty years ago by the Council of Jewish Federations, created a "fast track" for a small number of gifted future executives of Federations throughout North America and constituted the first important national effort to utilize the schools and programs to raise the sights of the profession. The idea was to lure some of the "best and brightest" Jewish college students into Jewish communal service by providing them with substantial stipends, opportunities for interaction with top professionals in the field, and specialized internships while they attended approved graduate programs. In return, the awardees had to devote the first two years after graduation to work in Federations. Overall, FEREP has been a success story, attracting excellent candidates and producing fine professionals.

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Hornstein Program, HUC-JIR in Los Angeles, and the Baltimore Institute pioneered specially designed trips to Israel for their students. These trips include formal classes and encounters with social workers and educators in agencies similar to those in which the students are placed in their home communities. During these same decades, increasing numbers of students have attended regional and national professional and volunteer conferences including the annual General Assemblies.

Funding from a program development grant provided by the Wexner Foundation enabled faculty of all of the programs to meet regularly over a period of three years in the mid-1990s to engage in a curriculum development effort coordinated by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Utilizing the concepts of Jewish political studies, a new field developed by Professor Daniel J.

Elazar, as the core discipline, a 400-page handbook was created which includes texts, exercises, case studies, and bibliography for use in professional training. Preliminary attention was given by this working group to the development of sophisticated websites and other Internet technology for the schools and programs. In this regard, the University of Michigan STaR program website and innovative curriculum to encourage student initiative through technological projects has become the model to emulate.

After more than a decade of planning, persuasion and step-by-step consideration by volunteer leaders of the then-Council of Jewish Federations through its large city budgeting committee, a plan for funding the programs in Jewish Communal Service was adopted and implemented for the first time this academic year. Contributions by communities are put into a central fund administered by UJC and paid to the schools according to an agreed-upon formula. These funds provide scholarships and support for student activities such as retreats and attendance at annual General Assemblies. The realization of this fund, more than any other act, has demonstrated a firm continent-wide commitment to professionalization of the field.

Far From Finished

There is much more to be written about the history, effectiveness, and impact of the graduate programs in Jewish communal service on individual graduates and the communities they have served. Clearly, the task of professionalization of the field cannot be left to the schools alone, though an important milestone will be achieved when a critical mass of those moving swiftly up the career ladders of various agencies and institutions are alumni of these programs. In some communities, the strong professional esprit de corps and positive working relationships resulting from the presence of a cohesive group of alumni is already being felt. The Wexner Fellowship Program, in its wise use of regular intensive institutes and seminars for its Fellows across award years, schools, and professions has provided a model of how to foster strong social circles as part of the socialization of professionals — an effort that will surely redound to the good for future Jewish community cohesion.

Many more actors will play parts in determining the status of Jewish communal service in the new century. Volunteer elites, influential professionals at the top of their fields, agency associations through requirements set by their national accrediting bodies, and search committees will all play roles in the on-going process. However, the directors and faculty of the graduate programs will continue to hold pivotal roles in the sometimes painful, often exciting, occasionally exasperating, but ultimately rewarding process of creating a Jewish civil service.

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Dr. Rela Mintz Geffen is Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Programs in Jewish Communal Service at Gratz College in Philadelphia. During academic year 1999-2000, she is on sabbatical at Harvard University as a Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of World Religions, and is also a Visiting Professor at Boston University. She is a Fellow of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and Director of Studies of the Center for Jewish Community Studies in Philadelphia. She would like to thank Professors Marsha Bryan Edelman, Dean for Academic Affairs of Gratz College, and Sherry Israel of the Hornstein Program at Brandeis University, for their critical reading of an earlier draft of this article. This article previously appeared in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (Fall/Winter 1999).