

**Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry
Brandeis University**

Opening Reception

Faculty Club, Brandeis University

19 November 2009

The reception celebrating the opening of the Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry (BGI) was, in a few words, a great success. Borne out of many weeks of planning and hard work, the event drew upon members from the academic, student, executive, communal, and institutional spheres.

Attendees consisted of 15 of the 16 BGI fellows; representatives of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC); members of the Russian-Jewish community in Boston; senior staff and faculty from Brandeis and other local universities, most notably, Harvard; community religious leaders; Brandeis Chabad; Ilia Salita, director of the Genesis Philanthropy Group of North America; Provost Marty Krauss; and Dan Terris, vice president of Global Affairs, among others. The BGI opening reception of 19 November 2009 accomplished its primary mission. That is to create awareness of BGI in an atmosphere that afforded guests an evening of introduction, food, drink, music, and conversation. The evening constituted the first large-scale 'advertising venture,' promoting the existence, mission, future undertakings, and partnership development as set out by the BGI at Brandeis University. Although still in its infancy, the BGI made great strides in advancing its visibility as a potentially thriving association of resources and outreach intended for the Russian Jewish community at home and abroad. Here, the BGI fellows represented the most essential function of the institute - the opportunity to create Jewish leaders at all levels.

For the reception, BGI reached out to approximately 300 persons in the hopes of reaching our targeted attendance level of 100. We succeeded – and even surpassed – this number. The event kicked off with a series of brief speeches by Provost Marty Krauss, Anna Ronell, Dan Terris, Ilia Salita, and BGI fellow, Julia Rabkin. Beyond this, those in attendance had the opportunity to mingle, forge relationships, and discuss their hopes for the future of the Brandeis-Genesis Institute. Here, members of the Board of Trustees and senior staff showed great enthusiasm toward both the fellows and the leadership initiatives of the institute. Moreover, the fellows had the opportunity to meet with chair of the Board of Trustees, Malcolm Sherman, and his wife Barbara.

More than celebrating the opening of the institute and creating visibility within the larger community, the reception was also intended for the BGI and staff to build partnerships with local, like-minded organizations and academic affiliations; for example, the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University and the Russian Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Boston.

In planning the opening reception, an expansive database was developed, including some 500 individuals and organizations. From this, we shall continue to build so as to reach others for subsequent public events. Many of those in attendance favorably responded to the evening by email, phone, and even some personal encounters on the university campus.

The BGI staff has begun the follow-up process by connecting to three important Russian-Jewish constituencies. On 20 November, Anna Ronell visited Vladimir Foygelman and the Makor Center at the Bnei-Moshe Conservative Synagogue. Center Makor is home to many clubs and organizations for all generations ranging from a Sunday school, WWII veterans group, Torah study group, and even ping-pong and chess clubs. During the follow-up visit, it became clear that the fellows should visit the center at the earliest opportunity during the spring semester to be introduced to various possibilities for involvement. Anna Ronell also visited Rabbi Dan Rodkin at the Jewish Russian Center and Synagogue of Greater Boston. The Rabbi manages a private Jewish school with an advanced Judaic curriculum, with special emphasis on math and sciences and full Hebrew proficiency. The rabbi is very interested in forging a partnership with the BGI, establishing a connection between the fellows and the school, and can provide the fellows with opportunities to volunteer in education, fundraising, and community-building efforts. Also, a working meeting with Irina Belozerskaya and Jim Morgan of the CJP is planned to follow-up on the conversation initiated during the reception.

In sum, the opening reception of the Brandeis Genesis Institute of Russian Jewry exceeded expectations. Its mission to introduce the institute and fellows to a varied audience of local leaders will certainly lead to increased co-operation, the development of global leaders, and to the vision of a vital center upon which we may continue to build.