THE ROAD TO JEWISH LEADERSHIP

Applicants for Wexner Fellowships, 1988-1992

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The Wexner Essays

The Wexner Graduate Fellowship Program Application Form consists of two parts. Part one asks for six pages of short answers to questions that can be coded for quantitative study. This is the data that forms the basis for Steven M. Cohen's analysis of applicants for Wexner fellowships (1988-1992) in a parallel paper. Part two asks for much longer answers (2-3 pages each) to two multi-part questions that probe the life, leadership experiences, and future career goals of applicants. The resulting highly personal and often deeply revealing essays form the basis for this paper, a qualitative analysis of the factors that shape Wexner Graduate Fellowship applicants.

The precise wording of the essay questions used on the Wexner application form changed three times between 1988 and 1992. Through 1990 the application requested one essay describing (1) the evolution of the applicant's interest in his or her projected career; (2) the applicant's personal Jewish leadership goals; (3) the applicant's career goals; and (4) how the program of study selected by the applicant will lead to the realization of these interests and goals. A second essay requested a description of "the major books, thinkers, and professional role models which have most influenced the applicant's Jewish identity and his/her decision to pursue his or her projected career." In 1991 and again in 1992, the questions were reformulated so that the first essay asked candidates to focus on <u>how</u> they came to their career choices, and the second essay probed their experiences and goals as <u>leaders</u>. These changes, however, resulted only in minimal differences in the essays that were actually submitted.

Taken together the two application essays provide us with a great deal of fascinating autobiographical information concerning the formative experiences that shaped Wexner applicants. Many applicants wrote at length in response to the essay questions, revealing intimate details of their lives and offering reflective insights into what prompted their career choices. Due caution must be observed in utilizing these sources, since some applicants doubtless fashioned what they wrote to reflect what they believed the Foundation wanted to hear. Given the open-ended nature of the essays, however, no systematic bias is likely. If anything, some applicants seem to have welcomed the chance to share their story in writing with the Foundation. Having resolved, often after intense inner struggle, to devote their lives to the Jewish community, these applicants may have found the opportunity to recount their experience to sympathetic outsiders something of a catharsis.

The process of analyzing these essays involved three separate steps. First, I read a sample group of essays to determine

the major themes that applicants considered in their narratives, and the contours of this study. Second, my graduate assistant, Mr. Yaron Peleg, read the entire group of essays and summarized the central themes of each one on a cover sheet. Almost all quantitative data found in this paper are based on Mr. Peleg's tabulations. Finally, I myself read each of the essays, taking careful notes and copying into my computer quotations that seemed to me particularly apt or suggestive. The analysis that follows is based upon this research. So that readers may obtain a feel for the original applicant essays, I have sprinkled verbatim quotations from them throughout the text, set off by italics. For purposes of analysis, aplicants are identified throughout by sex, professional area, and by the highest level that they attained within the fellowship process (applicant, semifinalist, finalist, fellow).

The Spectrum of Jewish Leadership Candidates: From 'Groomed' to 'Bloomed'

As many as one-quarter of all Wexner Fellowship applicants attribute their primary interest in Jewish leadership to the fact that their parents are (or were) professional Jewish leaders. Raised in the homes of rabbis, educators and other Jewish communal professionals, these young people grew up with the expectation that they might become Jewish leaders. The son of one Reform rabbi, for example, claims that "the possibility of entering the rabbinate has been with me since birth." The parents of these leaders-in-training have painstakingly groomed their offspring, sending them to Jewish schools, Jewish summer camps, tours of Israel and the like. While their children have ultimately made their own career decisions, and we have no way of knowing how many rebelled, those who did eventually follow in their parents' footsteps enjoy distinct career advantages. Not only are they well prepared for their future professions, but their passage from parental home to professional school, at least as they describe it, seems to have been relatively painless, without the diversions and crises that characterize so many other fellowship applicants.

> *"I grew up in a community which was largely composed of Jewish educators, and various aspects of Jewish education were a common topic of conversation in our home. To the youngsters in our community, it seemed as if everyone in the world was somehow involved in Jewish education. It became a common "joke" among my friends and myself that someday "we, too, could go into Jewish education." ... The two people who had the largest influence on me were, undoubtedly, my parents."*
>
> -- Female Finalist, Jewish Education

"My father. . .exerted an early and powerful influence on my ultimate career plans. Having served his entire adult life in Jewish education, both as teacher and administrator, he communicated to me his concern for the perpetuation of Jewish knowledge almost implicitly. Though my parents never pushed me in the direction of Jewish service, and allowed me to make all my major educational choices. . .on my own, I imbibed a sense of responsibility and tradition simply from being raised in an atmosphere of Jewish awareness and commitment."

--Male Semifinalist, Orthodox Rabbinate

The existence of a sizable multi-generational leadership pool within the American Jewish community deserves far more attention than it has heretofore received. While perhaps no surprise to insiders or to students of the professions -- doctors and lawyers, after all, groom their children in a similar way -- the phenomenon does raise significant questions both for the Wexner Foundation and for the American Jewish community as a whole. Should, for example, additional resources be devoted to training and maintaining this cadre of potential Jewish leaders? Should greater resources be devoted to widening the pool of Jewish leaders by recruiting those <u>without</u> prior roots in the field? Do leaders of one type or another function better? Should special efforts be made to fashion a mixed leadership pool? No consideration of these and related policy questions can be undertaken here, but they must in time be addressed.

The percentage of "groomed" young people who ultimately decide to make their career in Jewish life may also serve as a barometer of job satisfaction within the Jewish communal field. Impressionistic evidence suggests that the percentage of Jewish professionals following in their parents' footsteps has risen steadily since World War II as opportunities for advancement within the Jewish community have grown increasingly attractive. Careful monitoring of this trend over time would serve as measure of the profession's continuing health. At the same time, it should indicate areas of weakness where low pay and general job dissatisfaction discourage even those "groomed" for a particular field from entering it as a career.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from those "groomed" for Jewish leadership stand those who might be termed "late-bloomers": individuals not previously connected to Jewish life who find their way to Jewish leadership, often after an extensive personal odyssey. Both the application essays and the figures of Steven M. Cohen indicate that about a quarter of all Wexner applicants fall into this category, most of whom "bloomed" during their college years. The "Road to Sinai" for these "late-bloomers" inevitably entailed some measure of "discovery" when the idea of a career in Jewish leadership became a conscious option in their lives, followed by a moment of resolution when they

settled upon this life course. Frequently, particularly in the case of rabbinic candidates, the decision to devote one's life to Jewish communal leadership entailed outright rejection of the world of their parents.

> *"A turning point in my spiritual focus came during my junior year in college, when I traveled to Israel for the first time. I returned home with a mixture of awe and pride in the power of my people's strength and dedication to recreating the Jewish land. I wanted to somehow maintain the connection that I had experienced there, and was fortunate to be asked by a fellow student to a Shabbat dinner, so as to share my Israeli experiences with her room-mates. Throughout the rest of that year, I spent many quiet Shabbat evenings with this group of people, and began to learn about daily observance, and a little about Jewish philosophy in a more formal way. I also moved into a house with a kosher kitchen, and stopped working on Shabbat. I returned that year to synagogue; to Conservative services for the Yamim Noraim, and found there, in spite of the formality, a spark of the richness that I had been searching for spiritually. It is from this time that I really began to publicly identify myself as Jewish."*
>
> --Female Semifinalist, Reconstructionist Rabbinate

> *"My chosen career and lifestyle differ greatly from the interests of my family and childhood friends. Recognition that Jewish communal service is actually a career opportunity was sparked during college and gained sophistication while working for the American Jewish Committee. More recently, my increased religious convictions have substantially strengthened my dedication to the field."*
>
> --Female Finalist, JCS

The phenomenon of "late-blooming" may be compared to the well-known Protestant experience of being "born again," and to the phenomenon of <u>baalei teshuvah</u> (penitent or returning Jews) among the Orthodox. Looking back, late-bloomers express the same sense of having been spiritually "lost" or "at sea" during their teenage years. They report that Jewish life, and by extension Jewish leadership, now provide them with the spiritual meaning and the feeling of community closeness that was missing from their former lives. If the career path of late-bloomers distinguishes them from other Wexner applicants, however, the factors that awakened them to Jewish life, notably experiences in college and in Israel, are not different at all. Late bloomers may be less well prepared for Jewish leadership than their peers, having received no Jewish training in their youth, but they are subject to the same sorts of communal influences.

Those who "bloom" relatively late in their development and those "groomed" for Jewish leadership almost from birth represent

together roughly half of the applicants for Wexner fellowships. The other fifty percent stand somewhere in the middle. Neither born to Jewish leaders nor remote from Jewish life, these young people span the spectrum between them. Some come from families with extensive lay involvement in Jewish life. Their perspective and upbringing differ from those whose parents served the Jewish community in a professional capacity, but they still see themselves as carrying on in their parents' tradition:

> *"My family had the greatest impact in developing my devotion to the Jewish community. My mother and father continue to be extremely active in the Jewish community, working in areas ranging from actively supporting the religious school to fundraising for Israel. . . Having been raised in this environment, where meetings for these groups were often held in my home, and where I attended many lectures and events in which my parents were involved, the desire to be involved in the community 'rubbed off' on me."*
>
> --Female Finalist, JCS

Others grew up with some involvement in Jewish life, fell away, and then rediscovered their Judaism during their college years:

> *"The onset of my senior year at Berkeley represented not only a rediscovery of Judaism as an important factor in my life, due to an inspiring summer spent at Brandeis Camp Institute, but also the realization that I would like to mesh my desire to be in social work with my desire to remain involved with the Jewish community."*
>
> --Female Semifinalist, JCS

Whatever the case, it is this broad middle group that represents the largest cohort of future Jewish communal leaders on the North American continent. Open to a panoply of potential careers, these young people choose Jewish communal leadership of their own accord, often without parental encouragement. As their essays indicate, no single factor motivates them. Their decisions are shaped instead by a wide range of people, institutions, and experiences. Many of these same influences impact upon other young Jews as well, for they are among the principle forces working to promote Jewish continuity among young North American Jews today.

Making Leaders

What motivates applicants to the Wexner Fellowship Program to seek positions of leadership within the Jewish community? The application essays shed a great deal of light on this question, since in all cases they ask both about "the evolution of the applicant's interest in his or her projected career," and about the most influential books, thinkers and professional role models who influenced the applicant's Jewish identity and career choice.

While applicants responded to these questions in a wide variety of ways, six factors (listed thematically) emerged as centrally important: (1) Family influences; (2) Role models and mentors; (3) the College environment; (4) Alternative environments (Israel, summer camp & youth group); (5) Professional experience; and (6) Well-placed suggestions. Each of these factors has implications both for leadership development and for Jewish communal planning.

1. Family influences

Including those "groomed" for leadership, roughly one-third of all applicants (and more than two-thirds of all Orthodox applicants) cited family members as having played a critical role in shaping their career choice. There is, of course, a distinction (as Charles Liebman has pointed out after reading an earlier version of this report) between 'family influence' as a source of Jewish commitment and 'family influence' as a force propelling applicants to become Jewish professionals. Most candidates, however, portray their decision to become Jewish professionals as an expression of their Jewish commitment. By strengthening their initial commitment, they imply, family members made the subsequent step up into Jewish leadership training possible.

Parents, unsurprisingly, featured most prominently in these essays. Female applicants in particular praised their parents as role models and gave them credit for raising them in the kind of Jewish environment that they would now like to help others experience. One female fellow in the field of Jewish Communal Service summarized the "greatest influences" on her life in sixteen words: "my parents, the environment in which they raised me, and the opportunities they provided for me."

> *"[H]aving exposure in my own home to a variety of viewpoints and personalities was a significant element which influenced my decision to devote my energy to work on behalf of the Jewish people. . . .Beneath and beyond school and the extracurricular activities lies the impact of my Jewish upbringing in my home. . . Together we celebrated traditions, and examined our interests in Jewish causes. My home was an environment that served to first initiate and then underscore my connection to Judaism in all its forms."*
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> --Female Finalist, JCS

Several applicants also described how grandparents, siblings and Jewishly eminent relatives had a decisive impact upon them. The following comment from a female applicant for the Conservative rabbinate is particularly revealing, since in describing the influence of ancestral heritage upon her -- including the fact that she descends from a famous Hassidic rabbi -- she legitimates her enthusiasm for a career that none of these illustrious ances-

tors would probably have sanctioned:

> *"My greatest source of Jewish identity as a child were my paternal grandparents. Zaide was well-respected in the Orthodox community as a Talmudic teacher...My grandmother was a remarkable woman, a source of strength and unconditional love. . . My grandparents emphasized that we had 'yichis,' more valuable to them than any treasure. . .And anytime I got into trouble, I was told never to forget that I am the eighth generation directly descended from Reb Levi Yitzchak, the Berdichever Rebbe."*
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> --Female Applicant, Conservative Rabbinate

2. Role Models and Mentors

Since the Wexner application specifically asks candidates to discuss the influence upon them of "professional role models" it comes as no surprise that over half of the applicants did so, rabbis, teachers, and university professors being most frequently singled out. Male applicants almost invariably pointed to male role models; women selected both males and females. Sustained discussions of <u>how</u> these individuals functioned as role models, however, proved few and far between. Of these, a surprisingly large number lauded their role models for successfully reconciling worlds that seemed to the candidates to be irreconcileable -- for example, Judaism and secularity, different segments of the American Jewish community, even the practical rabbinate and Jewish scholarship.

> *"During my high school and college years, I met and became attracted to Rabbi Mordechai Willig, the professional role model who had the greatest influence and impact on me. We became very close during the two years and six summers that he was my "Rebbe." His emphasis on practical Jewish law, 'Halacha,' and on learning toward a halachic resolution became an important aspect of my own learning. This approach complemented his other role as Rabbi of the Young Israel of Riverdale. As my life's goals also involved bridging these two fields, I saw in Rabbi Willig a person who could teach me to succeed in both simultaneously. In addition to his knowledge, I was attracted to his personality and his ability to develop a personal connection with many of his students and congregants, making him more effective as an educator and Rabbi. Finally, I saw Rabbi Willig as a man who was able to command the respect of many segments of the Jewish community through his knowledge and through his devotion to his congregation. I realized that to emulate his achievements I would have to follow his actions."*
>
> --Male Finalist, Jewish Education

> *"Dr. Aviva Zorenberg, an orthodox woman. . .exemplified for*

me the ideal of excellence in scholarship complemented by a sincere devotion to traditional Jewish values. Having synthesized her religious training at Gateshead Seminary and her secular training at Cambridge University, Dr. Zorenberg had the courage to confront Biblical texts in ways radically different from any I had ever encountered in traditional Jewish circles."

--Female Finalist, Jewish Studies

"Stuart [Camp Ramah unit head] and I spent many hours discussing various religious and educational issues with which I was struggling that summer. Stuart helped me to incorporate the Jewish lifestyle that I thrived upon at Ramah into my life in the 'outside world.' Stuart made every discussion an educational experience for me, challenging me to achieve all that I could, and to always search for, and strive to achieve, the most ideal solution to every problem. The dedication and commitment to Judaism and to Jewish education that he demonstrated became the model to which I strive to achieve. Many of my own ideas about religion and education have been greatly influenced by his. Since that summer, Stuart has continued to be my role model, teacher, and close friend. . . ."

--Male Fellow, Conservative Rabbinate

3. The College Environment

In several widely publicized essays written in the late 1960s, Rabbi Irving Greenberg characterized the American college campus as "a disaster area for Judaism, Jewish loyalty and Jewish identity." Reviewing studies dating back to 1931, he concluded that "whatever the nature of the student's commitment, observance or loyalty, it tends to decline in college."[1]

Greenberg's analysis is widely presumed to hold true even today, and perhaps it still does for many Jewish college students. One of the most significant findings of this study, however, is that the college campus is anything but a disaster area for applicants to the Wexner Fellowship. In fact, they characterize their college years in overwhelmingly positive

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1.Irving Greenberg, "The Jewish College Youth," in *The Jewish Family in a Changing World*, ed. Gilbert S. Rosenthal, (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970), p.202; idem, "Jewish Survival and the College Campus," *Judaism* 17 (Summer 1968), pp.260-81. In fairness, Greenberg observed (in parentheses) that "there is a minority which responds to the challenge [of college] by deepening its Jewish commitment. But it is a very small percentage and it hasn't been studied."

terms. Rabbinic applicants, even more than others, describe the college experience as critical to their spiritual development.

> *"My decision to enter the rabbinate stems from my growth as a Jew during my four years at Dartmouth College. . . .Strangely enough it was in this environment, away from a home and a community which were 'automatically' Jewish, that I made a conscious choice to pursue Jewish life as I never had before. As I started to become involved in the Dartmouth Jewish community, Hillel events and Shabat dinners became regular fixtures in my weekly calender. By the end of my sophomore year I had gone from attending events to organizing them."*
>
> --Male Semifinalist, Conservative Rabbinate

> *"[M]y perception of Judaism transformed drastically during my years in college, so gradually that I didn't realize it was happening. The catalysts of this process were several classes I took in the Religion Department at Wesleyan. For the first time I saw religion defined not as a composition of particular laws, texts and rituals, but as a means of fulfilling a particular spiritual hunger that we all share."*
>
> --Female Semifinalist, Reform Rabbinate

College, as these and other applicants define it, means the full range of college experiences: from formal courses to informal interactions with others students, to organized Jewish student activities at Hillel and at kosher eating clubs. Valuable as it might be to gauge the relative weight of these different experiences, students tended to view them all as parts of an undifferentiated whole. No one factor in college emerges from these essays as more important than the others. Presumably, students who commuted to college were less affected by all of this than their peers, but this too cannot be demonstrated by the evidence at hand.

What the essays do clearly indicate is that the time has come to reevaluate the whole question of college's impact on Jewish youth. For all that the universe of Wexner applicants is self-selected and unrepresentative, our evidence does conclusively demonstrate that the college experience is not irredeemably negative. In fact, far from being a "disaster area," college would seem more to resemble the biblical wilderness -- a place where sojourners wander, sometimes rebel against their past, and sometimes also find Torah and redemption. As Steven M. Cohen demonstrates in his essay, a select group of colleges (those with top-rated Hillel houses and Jewish Studies programs) have excellent records of producing such transformations. At one such college, the University of Pennsylvania, one candidate recalled how she began to explore Jewish observance through the programs offered by Hillel:

"I participated in Passover seders, and started attending Friday night services. I took on more of the laws of Kashrut and began a self-study course to explore Judaism and my Jewish identity."

--Female Semifinalist, Conservative Rabbinate

Other undergraduate institutions seem at the very least to provide environments that make it possible for individuals who develop Jewish leadership interests to pursue them. A good example of this was offered by a female finalist in Jewish communal service whose undergraduate education took place at William Smith, a small college in Geneva, New York. There, in response to apathy and antisemitism, she became a Jewish activist. She looked back on her last year at the school as "without a doubt the most formative in terms of my Jewish identity." Another female student, a semifinalist in Jewish Education, discovered Judaism even later in her college career when, as part of her graduate training in folklore at Indiana University, she undertook a study of women in Judaism. That project, she writes,

became my M.A. thesis at Indiana, and the beginning of my academic and personal involvement in Jewish things. . . By the time I completed my thesis, I felt completely drawn to traditional Jewish observance and set out to learn as much as I could.

Applicants interested in pursuing careers in campus Jewish work seemed particularly zealous about the potential of college to shape and transform Jewish lives. "It is exciting to work with college age youth who are curious, concerned, and oftentimes passionate about their Jewish identity," one explained. Another, describing the college years for some students as being "a time of serious speculation and spiritual searching," argued that the campus environment provided "a unique opportunity for a Jewish reawakening."

4. Alternative Environments

Many applicants, in their essays, cite influential experiences outside of their home environments that inspired them to careers in the Jewish community. Israel, to a lesser extent summer camp and to a still lesser extent youth groups supplied these kinds of alternative, or 'counterlife' environments. All three offered candidates a retreat from their day to day schedules, as well as an opportunity (under carefully planned conditions) to try out life run according to Jewish rhythms and conducive to religious awakening and change. This is not to say that the three "alternative environments" are precisely interchangeable; judging from the essays, Israel had the most significant impact by far. In terms of the function they played in stimulating and inspiring applicants, however, the three do seem to have been roughly comparable.

There is an historical irony here. American Jews of an earlier generation looked upon college as their foremost "alternative environment." It provided those raised in Orthodox Jewish homes with the opportunity to try out life run according to secular rhythms. Many found the experience transforming and left traditional Judaism behind forever. Today, college no longer serves this function since most American Jews are already raised in overwhelmingly secular environments. Instead, college-age Jews find "alternative environments" that are intensively Jewish and run according to Jewish rhythms. This reflects more than just another illustration of Hansen's Law -- "What one generation seeks to forget, the next generation seeks to remember." It also reflects ongoing dissatisfaction among young American Jews with the world they inherit, and a ceaseless quest for a better world -- a counterlife.

The impact of Israel in this regard comes as no surprise. Applicants describe their time there as having been a "formative experience," "a turning point in my studies and life direction," and "an important impetus which later impacted on my career plans." One female candidate who visited Israel for the first time in college, looked back on the experience as having been nothing less than "my personal Sinai."

> *I was absolutely overwhelmed and fascinated by Israel; by the people I met and argued with about Zionism, by the work I did on kibbutz, and by the Orthodox shabbatot I experienced for the first time in my life. It became instantly clear to me that 'this'- Israel, Judaism and Jews was what I wanted to devote my life to."*
>
> --Female Finalist, Conservative Rabbinate

> *"[In Israel] my Jewish identity and the forms through which I articulated my quest for self-understanding began to grow together. The diversity of Jewish culture, the passion of the Israelis and their dedication for creating a Jewish homeland drew me in. Israel awakened within me the knowledge that Judaism could change and something new could emerge out of the cultural and religious traditions."*
>
> --Female Semifinalist, Reconstructionist Rabbinate

Candidates with strong Jewish backgrounds also benefited from time in Israel. Semesters spent in Israeli educational institutions seem to have reinforced and heightened commitments that had been made earlier. One candidate in the field of Jewish education, for example, described how her life was changed by a year spent at Michlalah, a Jerusalem teachers college for women:

> *"In Michlalah I found that the spark of loving and living a Jewish life was imparted with fervor and dedication. There*

was a feeling of altruism and total sincerity that I never witnessed before. I then decided that for as long as I had the strength, I would also try to better my little corner of the world. I would dedicate myself to the education, and improvement of education, of Jewish children. . . .I left Israel more committed to Jewish Education and communal work than ever before."

--Female Semifinalist, Jewish Education

None of these candidates expected to settle in Israel or became inspired there by Zionist ideals. It was instead the experience of a different, totally Jewish lifestyle that inspired them. They saw in Israel an alternative vision of how their own lives might be lived, a vision that they hoped, as Jewish professionals, to realize both for themselves and for others.

What this group of applicants found in Israel, others found at Jewish summer camp, particularly the Conservative movement's Camp Ramah. Camps made their impress earlier -- in elementary or high school, as opposed to Israel which most applicants experienced in college -- but judging from the essays, summers spent in the "alternative environments" that they created were just as influential. One applicant still recalled what it was like to "first encounter. . .life steeped in Jewish culture" as a ten year old camper at Ramah in the Poconos:

"It was at Ramah, during Kabbalat Shabbat, that I had experiences that theologians term 'radical amazement.' It was a feeling that I can not describe; it is a feeling that is deeply connected to how I perceive God. Over my four summers as a Ramah camper I learned logistics of Jewish prayer, I picked up a fascination with Hebrew, and I fell in love with Shabbat. It was as early as my Ramah experiences that I knew that I would someday work to influence other Jews toward a love of Torah and of The Jewish People."

--Female Applicant, Conservative Rabbinate

Another former camper who went on to study for the Conservative rabbinate described in his essay how, at age 14, Ramah gave him "a completely new exposure to Judaism. . . I was surprised at how Judaism could be an active force and give new meaning to my life." Jewish education and Jewish communal service candidates wrote less in their essays about the transforming power of summer camp, but some still found their summers there to have been highly influential.

"[Camp] Alonim led me to become active in the Jewish community." "Through my experience as the Program Director. . .I grew not only as a leader, but also as an individual."

--Male Fellow, JCS

The impact of youth groups is more difficult to gauge. Only a small number of the candidates who belonged to them mentioned them at all in their essays, and most of those who did formerly held top leadership positions within their organizations; three had served as international presidents.

> *"Throughout my four years of high school, I was very active in the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. I was involved on the local, coucil , and regional levels, and ultimately was elected by my peers as International President. . .I travel[led] around the world, meeting with members of the BBYO, officers of B'nai B'rith International, Federation directors, and other Jewish leaders. . .As a result of these experiences, I have decided to pursue a career in Jewish communal service."*
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> --Male Finalist, JCS

Youth groups did prove influential among young people from smaller communities. One applicant from Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, traced his interest in the rabbinate to "one morning in the social hall of a small shul in my hometown," when as president of United Synagogue Youth he "had to address the congregation during the shabbes morning service." Another candidate credited his youth movement, the National Federation of Temple Youth, with introducing him to a Jewish world that he had never previously encountered:

> *"My decision to become a rabbi is a tribute to the power and success of Jewish youth movements. . . .[Through NFTY] I had learned a broader concept of the modern world, with all of its wonders and horrors. I had learned the role of the Jewish people in that world, and how our ancient heritage continues to guide us as we face life's challenges. . .I had learned the value of creating meaningful, personal relationships with those whom I was leading. I also encountered the first important 'Teacher' of my life."*
>
> --Male Fellow, Reform Rabbinate

By their very nature, however, youth groups had trouble creating an "alternative environment" for their members. Only the most dedicated young people might devote more than a few hours a month to them. By contrast, Israel and summer camp provided young people with "total experiences" -- a Jewish environment that surrounded them twenty-four hour a day. The impact they made on the lives of applicants was, as a result, both qualitatively and quantitatively greater.

5. Professional Experience

Experience in their chosen areas plays a highly significant role in shaping the career decisions of applicants in every Jewish communal field except for the rabbinate. Positive profes-

sional experiences, in fact, rank above every other factor that these candidates mention. By contrast, candidates for the rabbinate bring substantially less experience to their career choice; such experience is much more difficult for them to obtain. This may be one reason why, as we shall see, the essays of rabbinic candidates are so differently focused.

The field of Jewish education is the easiest one in which to obtain experience. Numerous teaching positions are available to college students, and every serious candidate for a fellowship was able to describe, on the basis of personal experience, why teaching had become his or her career of choice.

> *"Just before the school year. . .my younger sister told me that there were at least two openings for teachers assistants at our synagogue. I decided that it was worth a try. So, in September of 1985 I found myself looking at a group of fifteen nine year olds and helping to teach Jewish ethics. By the end of the year I knew that I wanted to teach for the rest of my life. I have not stopped teaching or counseling since. . . .Upon receiving my masters of education from the Unversity of Judaism and smicha" from the Jewish Theological Seminary, I hope to be far better prepared to continue to create innovative programming that will increase both excitement and knowledge among our people."*
>
> --Male Fellow, Jewish Education

Most Jewish Communal Service students likewise justified their career decisions on the basis of what they had learned from their experience in the field. Many of these students appear to have taken time off after college to work in a service agency before deciding whether to go on for professional training. Having found satisfaction and enjoyment in helping others, they resolved to make Jewish communal service their career.

> *"More than anything else I have done, my experiences in working with and helping others -- Jewish youth, handicapped children, college students -- have been the most enjoyable and satisfying; and, if a career is supposed to be something that meets these two criteria, then communal service seems the most fitting choice."*
>
> --Female Finalist, JCS

Significantly, those few prospective rabbis who did have the opportunity to serve as interns and in other quasi-rabbinic positions described these experiences, in their essays, as having been highly influential.

> *"I attended the Para-Rabbinic training program sponsored by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and am now certified as one of American Reform Judaism's first fifteen Rabbinic Aides. I had hoped that being able to dabble as a*

Rabbinic assistant and fill-in would quell my desire. All it did accomplish was to convince me that I needed to make it a full time career."

--Male Finalist, Reform Rabbinate

It would seem, then, that greater emphasis on creating rabbinic internships designed to help potential candidates gain practical experience would enhance recruitment. A comprehensive program for college students aimed at creating summer internships at synagogues as well as Jewish communal agencies might prove particularly effective.

Approximately five percent of all Wexner applicants trace their career decisions not to formal experience in their chosen field, but to informal experience acquired in a community where they were among the only Jews in town. These candidates describe how, without adequate preparation, they functioned as rabbis, communal leaders and educators among both their fellow Jews and local gentiles. Looking back, they now realize that what they learned from these experiences motivated them to become Jewish professionals worthy of the name.

Note, in the following two accounts, how candidates experienced living at a distance from most other Jews in diverse ways. Where the first candidate, a prospective Conservative rabbi, learned to feel responsible for his fellow Jews in the community where he lived, the second, a candidate in the field of Jewish Communal Service, learned to assert her Jewish identity in the face of hostility from neighboring gentiles.

"[B]eing Jewish in Wyoming is a responsibility. If our family did not go to the community services, picnics and study sessions, they would not have occurred. . .If we did not teach others to read Hebrew or study Chumash, or even how to sing Jewish songs, it would not have happened. That feeling of responsibility stayed with me when I went to UCLA."

--Male Finalist, Conservative Rabbinate

"My professional interest in the Jewish community arose in response to my distance from such a community while growing up. . .As the only Jewish child my age in school, I was mocked for missing class during the High Holidays and ridiculed for my mother's complaints to the school board when we sang Christmas carols in chorus. Yet, with each time I explained to someone what a certain Jewish holiday meant, or wiped a swastika off of my locker, a strong Jewish identity was being formed within me."

--Female Semifinalist, JCS

6. Well-placed Suggestions

Candidates in all fields, and especially the rabbinate, note the impact that well-placed suggestions from Jewish professionals, friends and family members had upon their career choices. Even where such suggestions were initially rejected, essays indicate that those who made them 'planted a seed.'

> *"Rabbi Yedwab walked up to me. . .and said. . .'Let's talk about rabbinical school.' Had this suggestion come from other people in my life, I might have laughed it off. But coming from a man who had shown a vested interest in my future right from the start, it was the beginning of a process which would determine the course of my life."*
>
> --Male Fellow, Reform Rabbinate

> *During this time my rabbi, Dr. Samuel Porrath, zichrono liv'racha, had been observing my activities closely. When he heard of my desire to become a cantor, he met with me and proposed the rabbinate as a possible career. . .Through my continuing discussions with Rabbi Porrath during high school, I solidified my decision to become a rabbi."*
>
> --Male Semifinalist, Conservative Rabbinate

Education and Communal Service applicants differ from rabbis in that they received career guidance from supervisors and co-workers while they were gaining experience. Whatever source they originated from, however, these kinds of suggestions, or "nominations" were taken as a high compliment. They played an important role in inspiring potential candidates with the confidence that they could succeed.

In enumerating these six factors that Wexner applicants stressed as most critical in shaping their career choices, many of the central institutions of North American Jewish life have been slighted. Only a small number of applicants, for example, mentioned their synagogue or their religious school as prime motivators; none credited their federation. Instead, as we have seen, most felt that the decisive influences upon them were people (family members, rabbis, educators, other role models), life experiences, and the challenges of living in new or alternative environments. However actively Jewish institutions operated behind-the-scenes -- funding, planning and administering -- they went unrecognized. While understandable, this disjunction between candidates' perceptions of how the Jewish community shapes lives and the more complex institutional reality that they overlook should sound a note of caution. It suggests that the factors that attract young people to Jewish professional life are not the same as those that make a career in Jewish professional life successful.

Journies and Passages

In describing the evolution of their career interests, Wexner applicants do more than simply cite individual factors that motivated them. They also unfold the tale of their own lives, recounting a journey that originated at some indefinite point in the past and reaches forward toward its triumphant conclusion just as the candidate stands poised to begin his or her Jewish professional career. No two stories are the same, of course, but common motifs abound. Of these, two are already familiar to us: the experiences of those "groomed" from a young age to follow their parents' into Jewish professional careers, and the experiences of those who "bloomed" later in life after a childhood far removed from communal concerns.

In this section, we focus on a different set of commonalities, the applicant narratives characteristic to each career area. Like Steven M. Cohen in his essay, we find significant internal variations here, with rabbinic candidates being particularly distinctive. As a group, however, these narratives are pervaded by accounts of three kinds of "journeys": the "sacred pilgrimages" characteristic of rabbis, the passage "from general education to Jewish education" undertaken by some Jewish educators, and the journey "from experience to vocation" that aspiring Jewish professionals of every kind recount, rabbis excepted.

The Rabbinate

Rabbis (leaving aside those "groomed for leadership") tend to recount in their essays the saga of a spiritual journey through the wilderness of young adulthood. These "sacred pilgrimages" are marked by a multiplicity of experiences and influences -- some wondrous, others frightening -- and always lead inexorably to a hallowed, redemptive resolution, often reached in Zion or its surrogate, to dedicate life to the Jewish people.

> *"After years in the 'religious wilderness,' an event occurred that changed my life. After beginning the University of Louisville in 1979, I was introduced to my future wife. . .and through her influence, I was able to 'return to the fold.'"*
>
> --Male Applicant, Reform Rabbinate

> *"[M]y decision to enter into the rabbinate was made for me one August morning in Jerusalem. I woke up and knew that this was what I had to do with my life. . . I had been in Israel, learning at Pardes Institute and taking ulpan at Hebrew Union College. . .Before that summer in Jerusalem, I had been journeying for a number of years."*
>
> --Female Finalist, Reconstructionist Rabbinate

Rabbinic candidates seek to demonstrate through their applications their seriousness of purpose and ability to move others, but not necessarily their vocational competence in terms of the basic skills that rabbis need to master. They thus explain their resolve to become rabbis not on the basis of how much they love 'rabbinating,' but rather on the basis of their love for Jews and Judaism. For them, the rabbinate is a vehicle for transmitting that love and for inspiring others as they themselves have been inspired.

> *"My mission. . .is to help individuals find their own spiritual selves and their own best means for expression of their spiritual selves within Judaism. A lot of my life has gone into my own spiritual explorations and my own spiritual discoveries. I want to share the hard-earned wisdom as well as the joy."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Reform Rabbinate

Two rabbinic applicants for Wexner fellowships described having undergone a supernatural "religious experience. One went so far as to describe a specific divine call:

> *"I began an in-depth exploration of Judaism vis-a-vis my well-established and fulfilling relationship with G-d, as well as a serious investigation and discernment of what G-d intended me to make my life's work...One result of this process was HaShem revealing to me the need to acknowledge to others that He was the 'source' of everything in my life. This revelation led me faithfully on the path to my decision to pursue a career in the rabbinate."*
>
> --Female Applicant, Conservative Rabbinate

Revealingly, neither this candidate, nor the other to write in this vein, a male applicant for the Reform rabbinate, received serious consideration from the Fellowship Committee. In fact, the whole concept of divine "calling" to the rabbinate plays no role in contemporary Jewish thought. Evocation of this theme suggests instead the influence of Christianity where the relationship between divine calling (*vocatio*, in Latin) and religious vocation (the Catholic priesthood or the Protestant ministry) is seen as scripturally based.

Jewish Education

As we have seen, aspiring Jewish educators gain a great deal of educational experience without any professional training at all. Indeed, all serious candidates for Wexner fellowships in Jewish education have taught in some Jewish educational setting by the time they apply. Their goal in making Jewish education their career is not to enter the field of Jewish teaching, but to become educational professionals, to move from "experience to

vocation." This significantly distinguishes their essays from those of prospective rabbis.

> *"During my two-year experience as principal [of a newly established regional Hebrew school], I came to regard more seriously the possibility of continuing a career in Jewish education. . . .Now I see that in order to become a professional Jewish educator, I must have more focused academic training."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Education

In addition, education is a vocation that exists in similar (but not identical) forms in both the secular and Jewish realms, with relatively easy passage between them. About one-third of the applicants for Wexner fellowships in Jewish Education have made this passage -- "from general education to Jewish education" -- and the journey is central to the story they have to tell. There is, of course, no parallel to this phenomenon in the rabbinate, for it has no "secular equivalent" at all. This difference too is reflected in important ways in the essays.

> *"I was a successful math teacher, but now it is clear to me that my passion is Jewish Education."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Education

These two journeys -- "from experience to vocation" and "from general education to Jewish education" -- embrace the central themes discussed by candidates in the autobiographical sections of their essays. Other factors that we have encountered before -- college as wilderness, Israel as redemption, the experience of living among non-Jews, and so forth -- do still appear, and about a third of all candidates also credit as formative experiences their childhood educations, the task of educating their own children, their experiences at camp and youth group, and the influence of particular mentors.

> *"Teaching Torah and helping run programs for youth in formal and informal settings were part and parcel of my free time in college. Weekends were often spent on educational retreats for unaffiliated Jewish youth, with summers left for teaching in various Jewish camps and leading volunteer programs to Israel. The love for this calling and the sense of responsibility pushed me to enter the field of formal Jewish education after completing Rabbinical school."*
>
> --Male Applicant, Jewish Education

> *"I had always been interested in education; as a child and as a college student my dream had been to 'start my own school.' My own children were older now, and I began to think in terms of work which would in some way impact on the lives of Jewish children. In 1980, around the time I entered my daughter in a Jewish dayschool, I began to actively*

explore career opportunities in the field of Jewish education."

--Female Semifinalist, Jewish Education

These experiences, however, all seem less important for educators than they were for rabbis, and almost no educators describe their path to careers in Jewish education in terms of the "sacred pilgrimage" that is so characteristic of rabbinic narratives. Instead, the testimonies they recount derive from their actual classroom experiences as Jewish teachers -- appropriately so, since it is these experiences above all that stand behind their decision to become professionals in Jewish education.

Jewish Communal Service

Like educators, applicants in Jewish communal service stress their positive experiences in the field as the most important influences upon them. The great majority of applicants, having sampled the rewards of a career in Jewish communal service (through jobs, internships, volunteer experiences etc.), now seek the professional competence that will permit them to do their work better and advance into new realms.

"In college, I served for two years as president of Chaverim, the only Jewish student gruop on campus. I transformed a dormant organization into a vibrant and highly visible group. . .This led to my strong interest in leadership development. . . .My experience [in Israel], including meeting newly arrived Ethiopian immigrants, strengthened my resolve to pursue a career serving the Jewish people. . . .There is value in learning from experience, but too much of this can hinder creativity, productivity, and effectiveness. In pursuing a graduate education I am making a commitment to the field and to equipping myself with as many resources as possible, in preparation for diverse responsibilities throughout my career."

--Female Finalist, JCS

About 13% of applicants describe a transition from general social work to Jewish social work (the parallel figure among Jewish education applicants is about 33%). Applicants also cite other influences that shaped their careers. Although they are the same ones that we have already seen operating among rabbis and educators, the emphases are different. Communal servants are more likely to cite the importance of youth groups and camps, and less likely to discuss personal religious experiences. Also, their career choices evolved over time, rather than resulting from 'conversion experiences.' While Israel played a role in the shaping of many communal service applicants, it was not a source of "redemption." A few applicants (especially recent immigrants) suggest the one theme that we have not seen before -- the sug-

gestion that their interest in communal service stems, in part, from a desire to 'repay' the Jewish community for what they or their families received when in need.

> *"[As a Jewish Communal professional] I will be challenged to give back to the community all that I have taken, while at the same time leading the way for others to follow."*
>
> --Female Fellow, JCS

Jewish Studies

The Wexner Foundation only began accepting applicants for Jewish Studies programs in 1991, and it made known that it was looking for a particular kind of aspiring Jewish scholar -- one who had the potential to develop into an academic leader or intellectual force within American Jewish life. How this affected applicants' essays cannot be known for certain, but it is safe to assume that many attempted to tell the Foundation what they thought it wanted to hear. Nevertheless, the essays do make possible some conclusions concerning the evolution of applicants' interest in this area.[1]

The college experience is unquestionably the prime influence upon Jewish Studies applicants. Many cite love of academics and success in their undergraduate classes as critical motivating factors. Over half of the applicants describe precisely what field they seek to pursue within Jewish Studies, and in some cases even what questions they hope to explore.

> *"My determination to continue my studies in Modern Jewish History and place them in the larger context of Judaic Studies has influenced my decision to enter into a Jewish History PhD program. . . .I want to further my understanding of what prompted the Jews to migrate, the means by which their departures were possible, and the ways in which their assimilation processes were shaped because of gender and generation."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Studies

One-third of the applicants point to specific professors who have served as 'mentors' opening up new intellectual worlds to them. A small minority, none of whom became fellows, discuss how Jewish Studies brought them back to Judaism, or replicate the themes found in the education essays and emphasize their love of teaching. There are also a number of female candidates, particularly

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1.In 1991, the Foundation also undertook to admit prospective cantors. Since a total of only fifteen candidates applied in two years and not one was selected for a fellowship, cantorial applicants have been excluded from this study.

Orthodox women for whom the rabbinate is not an option, who see Jewish Studies as a means of advancing the position of women within the Jewish community.

> *"[M]y goal is to use the knowledge and credibility I will gain [as a Jewish scholar] to broaden the horizons of women's Jewish education.. . .I feel that I can articulate and define the inchoate perception among thinking Orthodox people that some change must take place in the way we approach Torah learning for women."*
>
> --Female Semifinalist, Jewish Studies

For the most part, however, Jewish scholars, like applicants in Jewish education and social work, have been influenced by successful experience in their future careers. Above all else, they describe their decisions as having been shaped by the joy that they have found in research, learning and teaching.

> *"I feel privileges to have encountered teachers and research situations that have allowed me to develop my relationship with the Hebrew Bible. By enrolling in a Ph.D. program for Biblical Studies, I hope to continue nurturing this relationship, while passing on to others my love for the Bible as an unending source of literary aspirations."*
>
> --Female Finalist, Jewish Studies

Leadership and Career Goals

Since the Wexner Foundation seeks to identify not just ordinary Jewish professionals, but the most promising future Jewish leaders, questions about the leadership and career goals of applicants have always been part of the Wexner Essays. How much credence to place in what applicants write is difficult to gauge. Many, in their eagerness to win a lucrative fellowship, presumably tell the Foundation what they think fellows ought to say rather than more banal truths. No candidate, for example, so much as hinted that he or she harbored the goal of becoming rich, or powerful, or just plain secure.

What these essays do once again reveal are significant differences between applicants in the major career areas. In addition they suggest (even taking into account the Foundation's expressed interest in this goal) that the generation of Jewish leaders now in training is primarily focused internally on the needs of North American Jewry. However much candidates may themselves have been inspired by Israel, memories of the Holocaust, experiences of antisemitism, and interactions with non-Jews, very few intend to devote their own professional energies to these areas. Instead, the goals that they express heavily revolve around the crises that they perceive both in general society and within the American Jewish community, and their hopes to effect

social and religious reforms in response to them.

The Rabbinate

Prospective rabbis view the rabbinate as a means rather than as an end in itself. Through the learning and the practical skills acquired in rabbinical school, they hope to realize a series of goals, the three most frequently mentioned being spiritual fulfillment, tikkun olam, and religious revitalization.

The first of these goals is essentially therapeutic: candidates seek to find spiritual fulfillment for themselves and to help others to achieve it as well.

> *"[B]eing a successful rabbi is what has meaning for me and what will give me satisfaction in life."*
> --Male Fellow, Orthodox Rabbinate

> *"Now that I have seen how fulfilling my spiritual growth has been, I know that what I must do is help others to grow spiritually as well."*
> --Male Semifinalist, Reform/Reconstructionist Rabbinate

Defined in these terms, the rabbinate is an extension of logotherapy. It offers a cure for society's ills in the form of a regimen of psychological and spiritual healing that enhances the lives of both rabbis and those whom they touch. One candidate thus expressed his rabbinic goals in terms of a quest "to help others find the strength and peace which I have found in God and Judaism." Another felt that her life would be "beautiful and meaningful" if she could "touch and motivate people" in the ways that she had herself experienced and witnessed. Unsurprisingly, spiritual fulfillment motivates Reform and Reconstructionist rabbinical candidates more than others. As the quote from the Orthodox candidate above demonstrates, however, echoes of this theme are found among more religiously traditional applicants for the rabbinate as well.

The second goal of rabbinic candidates, often expressed in the Hebrew term tikkun olam (which one Wexner Fellow nicely translated in his application as "to Jewishly fix the world"), speaks directly to the aim of effecting social and religious change.

> *"As a Rabbi I hope to inspire, support, teach, and empower others to do tikkun olam individually and as a Jewish community."*
> --Female Applicant, Reconstructionist Rabbinate

> *"The essential matter is to fulfill our Jewish mandate of pursuing justice and acting with kindness toward those less fortunate than ourselves."*

--Female Finalist, Reform Rabbinate

"As a rabbi, I want to engage the American Jewish community in sustained responses to pressing social issues from a Jewish perspective."

--Male Finalist, Conservative Rabbinate

The specific social justice projects promoted by candidates range from responding to racism, anti-Semitism, and the environmental crisis, to issues of poverty, homelessness and hunger, to the causes of human rights, religious freedom, civil liberties, and feminism. Again, it is the Reconstructionist and Reform rabbinical candidates whose essays focus most directly on these goals, followed by Conservative candidates. Most Orthodox candidates make no mention of tikkun olam at all.

Finally, rabbinic candidates seek to respond to a perceived crisis within the American Jewish community. The "crisis," characterized by one finalist as "the critical predicament that faces Judaism in the current hour," embraces the gravest problems faced by contemporary Jews, including assimilation and intermarriage, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the problem of "rampant secularism."

"[T]he Jewish community of North America has entered a critical phase. In terms of sheer activity, the Jewish community is thriving; but the busy exterior often conceals a hollow core. Most Jews are only marginally connected with the community, if at all. The low level of even basic learning will, if not corrected, prove the community's undoing."

--Male Fellow, Conservative Rabbinate

"Forty years of comfort has been the most pernicious enemy the Jewish people have ever faced. Precisely at a time of rapid assimilation and intermarriage, I feel I have an obligation to impart to others the guiding principles of our religion."

--Male Semifinalist, Orthodox Rabbinate

"The future of our people is in grave danger. . .I feel a responsibility and obligation, as well as an emotional and spiritual commitment, to combat assimilation while inspiring Jewish identification."

--Male Finalist, Reform Rabbinate

In response, some proponents of Jewish revitalization call for innovations (a Judaism that is "theologically sophisticated, ethically empowering and experientially grounded.") Others promote "outreach" to Jews or a concerted struggle "with the forces of modern society." Still others urge strengthening Jewish education and a return to "sechel" [common sense] in

Jewish communal life. Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical candidates seem more alarmed by this "crisis" than their Reform and Reconstructionist counterparts, perhaps because of their movements' greater fidelity to Jewish tradition. Similarly, men express more concern in this area than women.

Fewer than ten percent of candidates for the rabbinate stressed as one of their goals promoting intra-Jewish harmony, a surprise considering the importance of this goal to the Wexner Foundation. About the same number defined their goals in terms of outreach to the unaffiliated and excluded. Other goals that few candidates listed include fighting antisemitism, promoting interfaith relations, maintaining the wall of separation between church and state, helping oppressed Jews around the world, encouraging Holocaust awareness, and strengthening ties between American Jews and Israel. Important as all of these goals have been to American Jews both historically and in the present, applicants now seem to find them uninspiring and less than vital. The great issues that do rouse them, as we noted, have much more to do with personal fulfillment, social justice, and Jewish continuity.

Jewish Education

In setting forth their future goals, most Jewish education applicants, unlike prospective rabbis, viewed their own field as an end in itself, not as a means of effecting change. Those seeking to move from experience to vocation, from being 'good' avocational teachers to becoming 'excellent' teaching professionals, described their goals in terms of self-improvement, self-fulfillment, and an altruistic desire to serve the Jewish community better. Those whose essays portrayed an American Jewish community in crisis believed much more singlemindedly than candidates for the rabbinate did that the solution to the community's predicament lay in enhanced Jewish education.

> *"[I]t is my goal, with G-d's help, to pursue graduate Judaica education so that I may contribute to expand my horizons by furthering my own Jewish education and Jewish personality, hoping to infuse this greater knowledge of Judaism and self into others."*
>
> --Female Finalist, Jewish Education

> *"I hope to contribute a great deal to the future of the Jewish people, through creating educational environments where young Jews will learn a love for Israel, Judaism, and our rich heritage."*
>
> --Female Applicant, Jewish Education

A smaller number of applicants, among them many finalists and fellows, express a more ambitious goal. They seek to transform Jewish education by making it, among other things, (a) more

accessible to women, (b) more available to those with special needs, (c) more focused on the family, (d) more sensitive to culture -- art, dance etc., and (e) more open to new technologies. These are generally candidates with experience in education who now seek to acquire additional professional training not only to improve themselves but also to improve the field as a whole.

> *"There is much that has to be done in order to improve the calibre of the education of Jewish women of all ages, and this improvement is necessary for the health and strength of the Jewish community at large. I believe that many attitudinal changes can be effected by the existence of the proper role models for our young women, and it clear that institutional changes can only be accomplished by individuals with the authority to do so."*
>
> --Female Finalist, Jewish Education

> *"I can see myself consulting with an institution dedicated to the design of Jewish educational resources. I have visions of participating in a Jewish media worship not unlike the Children's Television Workshop, in which educators, educational researchers, producers, end-users and others would create quality Jewish material."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Education

> *"I would like to teach the learning disabled of our Jewish Day Schools."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Education

An even smaller number consciously view education as an instrument of change: a vehicle for promoting such goals as social action, Jewish unity, and Jewish renewal. These are educators with considerable communal experience, who seek, through the medium of education, to transform Jewish life.

> *"I want to develop a retreat center for Jewish families in a beautiful setting where families can experience the richness of Shabbat, learn how to observe the Jewish holidays, develop a competence in kashrut, and explore their Jewish identity and spirituality."*
>
> --Female Fellow, Jewish Education

> *"Ten years from now I hope to be a contributing member of a growing national Jewish movement implementing sophisticated programs for social change on local, national and global levels."*
>
> --Male Finalist, Jewish Education

From a historical point of view, it is again significant that challenges that once ranked high on the agenda of Jewish educators, such as how to teach Hebrew, how to promote love of Zion, how to sensitize students to the implications of the Holo-

caust, how to confront antisemitism, and how to innoculate students against Christian conversionists, do not seem important to our applicants. They are much more interested in promoting Jewish identity and identification, and teaching students to appreciate the richness of their Jewish heritage.

3. Jewish Communal Service.

Jewish Communal Service applicants are divided in their goals. A majority, about 70%, set forth personal and vocational objectives: to hone their skills, find personal fulfillment, aid their fellow Jews, better the lot of the underprivileged, and grow professionally.

> *"My personal Jewish leadership goals revolve around being an excellent social worker."*
>
> --Female Applicant, JCS

> *"My goals. . . are to learn the case work skills and techniques to enable me to serve the more difficult families in our emigre caseload with a higher level of professional service and expertise."*
>
> --Female Fellow, JCS

> *"I know that I want to make a difference, to make Judaism a bit stronger and people's lives more meaningful through my efforts."*
>
> --Female Finalist, JCS

The remaining 30% of candidates, including many fellows and finalists, go beyond these goals to address the two central problems that animate rabbinic candidates as well: tikkun olam and Jewish continuity in America. As Jewish professionals, these candidates look forward to playing a significant role in confronting these problems and promoting social and political change.

> *"I see myself as a highly visible leader within the Jewish and general communities, advocating for human rights, civil liberties and social welfare. . . Whatever the specifics of my career may be, I know that I will be devoted to promoting a better world within a framework of Jewish values and traditions."*
>
> --Female Fellow, JCS

> *"The North American Jewish community of 1990 is now facing some of the most threatening situations, most notably, that of the assimilation of its young people. It is imperative for one like me, a young person with a strong Jewish background and love for the Jewish people, to be professionally committed to its future."*
>
> --Female Applicant, JCS

Religion plays a comparatively minor role in the essays of Jewish Community Service applicants (with the exception of Orthodox applicants). Only 4% even mention a desire to further religious harmony within the Jewish community -- this, despite the Wexner Foundation's well-known devotion to this goal. In another trend that mirrors what we have seen among rabbinic applicants, traditional community priorities -- like combatting antisemitism, promoting interfaith cooperation, furthering Holocaust awareness, and winning support for Israel -- are also not stressed in the majority of essays. The dominant goal, stated, perhaps self-evident and yet rarely elaborated upon by applicants, is to serve the American Jewish community and to strengthen it.

Conclusion

Applicants for Wexner Graduate Fellowships represent an elite group within the American Jewish community. They reflect neither the community at large nor a cross-section of its future leaders. They are, instead, the cream of the crop: the most accomplished candidates for professional Jewish leadership training in North America.

Broadly applicable generalizations can nevertheless be drawn from this sample. The ten conclusions that follow summarize the central points of this study with emphasis on those that carry the most portentous implications for Jewish communal leaders and the North American Jewish community as a whole. Note that many of these conclusions speak of candidates without differentiating women from men and with no mention of "denominational" distinctions. This is deliberate: except where noted these differences did not prove significant.

1. Candidates for American Jewish leadership span a spectrum that stretches from "groomed," those raised with the expectation that they may become Jewish leaders, to "bloomed," those previously unconnected with Judaism who find their way to active Jewish life relatively late. Both the sources of American Jewish leadership and the paths that candidates traverse are a good deal more twisted and complex than generally imagined.

2. Those "groomed" for Jewish leadership form part of a sizable multi-generational leadership pool within the American Jewish community. More needs to be learned about this leadership pool, including how it can best be nurtured and what the career trajectory and choices of members of this group can teach us about job satisfaction within the Jewish communal field.

3. Looking back, candidates for professional Jewish leadership point to a combination of factors that motivated them; no single factor alone is sufficient. The six most significant influences are: family members, role models and mentors, the college envi-

ronment, alternative environments (Israel, summer camps and youth groups), professional experience, and well-placed suggestions from respected individuals.

4. College campuses play a vitally important role in shaping and transforming the lives of future candidates for Jewish leadership. Far from being the "disaster area" for Jews and Judaism that so many still assume campuses to be, some of today's colleges and universities actually provide young Jews with the opportunity to study and personally explore Judaism and to gain valuable communal leadership skills.

5. Israel, and to a lesser extent Jewish summer camps and Jewish youth groups, offer young Jews the chance to experience alternative environments, ones conducive to religious awakening and change, where they have the opportunity to try out life run according to Jewish rhythms . All three "alternative environments" function in parallel ways that in effect critique contemporary culture and hold up a vision of how life might be lived differently under Jewish auspices.

6. Positive professional experiences rank above every other factor mentioned by candidates in discussing how they came to choose their careers in the Jewish community. In this respect, candidates for the rabbinate are disadvantaged, since they have fewer opportunities to gain experience prior to entering rabbinical school. A comprehensive program of college internships at synagogues and Jewish communal agencies might thus prove valuable both for the experience they provide and as a potent recruitment device.

7. The factors that attract young people to Jewish professional life are not the same as those that make a career in Jewish professional life successful. Most candidates thus point to individuals, life experiences, and the challenges of living in new or alternative environments as the decisive influences upon them, and pay little regard to those institutions (synagogues, federations, religious schools etc.) that might have been expected to have influenced them and are most likely, in due course, to employ them.

8. Candidates for the rabbinate often portray their lives leading up to rabbinical school as a spiritual journey, a "sacred pilgrimage" through the wilderness of young adulthood. They characterize their decision to dedicate life to the Jewish people in redemptive terms; having come through this wilderness successfully they now seek to redeem their fellow Jews as well. By contrast, aspiring Jewish educators and communal service professionals recount more prosaic personal narratives having to do with their journey from secular careers to parallel Jewish careers, or from pre-professional career experience to the quest for professional credentials and vocational competence. The sublimely

religious character of rabbinic narratives in comparison to the others reflects much more than just a difference in narrative style. It helps to account for a range of perceived differences between rabbis and other Jewish professionals and for the unique aura in which the rabbinate as a profession is held.

9. The central career goals articulated by candidates in all areas, and especially the rabbinate, focus on three principal areas: personal fulfillment, social justice ("*tikkun olam*") and Jewish continuity. Reform and Reconstructionist candidates and especially women emphasize the first two; Conservative and Orthodox candidates and especially men emphasize the third. Prospective rabbis tend to view themselves as instruments of change; they thus describe the rabbinate largely as a means to an end. Jewish educators, by contrast, overwhelmingly see themselves as teachers; Jewish education, to them, represents an end in itself. No clear pattern emerges with respect to Jewish Communal Service applicants. Some define their goals in career terms and seek to be excellent at what they do; others view communal service as a means of addressing the great issues of Jewish life.

10. The generation of Jewish leaders now in training considers internal domestic issues -- the needs of North American Jewry -- highest on its list of communal priorities. It sees far less need to devote attention to such once-cherished goals as fighting antisemitism, promoting interfaith relations, ending racism, maintaining a high wall of separation between church and state, helping oppressed Jews around the world, encouraging Holocaust awareness, and strengthening ties between American Jews and Israel. In place of the great causes that animated North American Jews of yesteryear, applicants now offer a new agenda -- one aimed at helping American Jews to achieve spiritual satisfaction, social justice, and communal renewal.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that all of these conclusions are based on applications submitted by candidates poised at the very beginning of their professional careers, before they have come under the influence of professional schools and first employers. How subsequent experiences impact upon these candidates -- nurturing or dampening their enthusiasm, transforming their goals, and perhaps accentuating their differences -- cannot be determined by the data at hand. Follow up studies designed to track these candidates and analyze their motivations and goals at later junctures on their "road to Jewish leadership" would be of enormous value -- for theirs, as we know, is a long and often bumpy road, winding through many peaks and valleys, and sometimes zigzagging off in new directions that no one at the starting point might have predicted.