

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

היברו יוניון קולג – מכון למדעי היהדות

2014-15 Rabbinical School Academic Assessment Report

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Background & Methodology

This report highlights the student learning program assessment efforts of HUC-JIR's Rabbinical School faculty over the course of the 2014-15 academic year. Student learning program assessment is mandated by HUC-JIR's accreditors, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Program assessment is a systematic, continuous process that uses the results from measured outcomes to improve programs. This form of assessment allows faculty to assess the developmental growth of students across a variety of skills, and the ensuing data can then be aggregated to identify trends in student learning. This is not meant to replace course assessment (i.e. grading), but complement it.

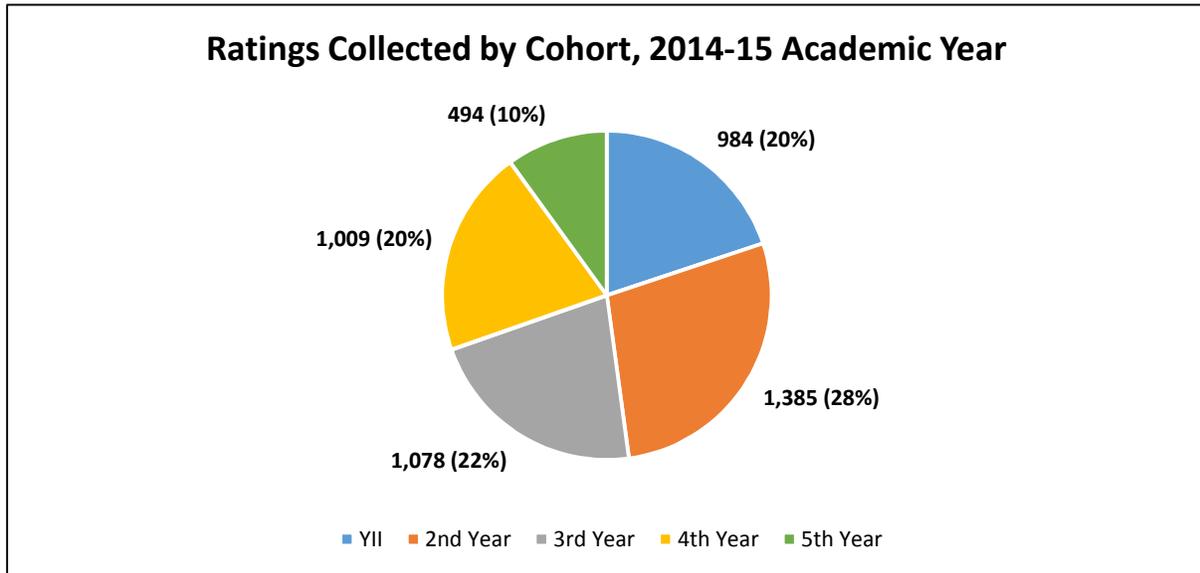
The Rabbinical School program learning outcomes were developed in the spring of 2014 by the National Assessment Committee in collaboration with the faculty. The resulting rubric rolled out in the fall of 2014, the full outcomes language of which can be viewed at the end of the report. The twelve skills of the rubric are as follows:

- Written Communication
- Performative Skills: English
- Performative Skills: Hebrew
- Critical Thinking
- Hebrew
- Textual Interpretation
- Teaching
- Pastoral Counseling
- Leadership
- Personal/Religious Growth & Development
- Skills & Habits for Independent Study
- Jewish Knowledge & Integration of Knowledge

These skills are assessed across four developmental levels of growth: *Beginning* (the point at which students enter the program), *Developing*, *Intermediate*, *Achieved/Ordination* (the baseline level of knowledge expected of students upon ordination), and *Aspirational* (the ideal level of knowledge that we expect and hope all students will achieve). Program-level rubrics are deployed by assessing the same assignment across all students. The goal is to create an “apples-to-apples” comparison in which the entire cohort is being assessed at the same point, thereby reflecting that all students have been exposed to the skills and concepts that are being taught within a course. Data is then aggregated to identify strengths and weaknesses in learning, which can be used to inform curricular improvement.

Data Statistics

A total of 4,950 ratings were collected over the course of the academic year, with the distribution by cohort as follows:



Cohort	Fall Ratings	Spring Ratings	% Increase
YII	476	508	7%
2 nd Year	613	772	26%
3 rd Year	443	635	43%
4 th Year	419	590	41%
5 th Year	171	323	89%
Total	2,122	2,828	33%

Most Assessed Skills	
Skill	% of Overall Ratings Collected
Written Communication	15%
Critical Thinking	14%
Textual Interpretation	13%
Jewish Knowledge & Integration of Knowledge	12%
Skills & Habits for Independent Study	10%
Hebrew	9%
Personal/Religious Growth & Development	8%
Performative Skills: Hebrew	5%
Performative Skills: English	4%
Leadership	4%
Teaching	3%
Pastoral Counseling	3%

Cohort Analysis

In the spring of 2012, David Dirlam, the former Director of Institutional Research & Assessment, prepared a report analyzing the findings of ratings collected that spring using the prior iteration of the Rabbinical School rubric. Skills across cohorts were analyzed by calculating the combined percentage of *Practical* and *Inspiring (Achieved/Ordination and Aspirational* in the current rubric) ratings as part of the whole for each skill. Using these percentages, growth for each skill was determined by calculating the percentage difference between the Year-in-Israel and 5th year cohorts.

The ratings collected over the course of the 2014-15 academic year will be analyzed in the same manner, and compared to the spring 2012 findings (save for any skills in the prior rubric that do not appear in the current version). Ratings were generated by faculty assessment of artifacts that were representative of the skills taught in their courses. These artifacts are typically cumulative assignments such as final exams, papers, or projects, although midterm assignments were also assessed in some cases.

Combined % of <i>Achieved/Ordination</i> and <i>Aspirational</i> Ratings by Skill and Rabbinical School Year								
Skill	YII	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	% Increase*	2014-15 Growth Rank	2012 Growth Rank
Written Communication	9%	22%	38%	57%	62%	53%	6a	9
Performative Skills: English	29%	33%	52%	85%	81%	53%	6b	NA
Performative Skills: Hebrew	25%	13%	18%	55%	83%	58%	4a	NA
Critical Thinking	16%	24%	47%	58%	60%	44%	9	10
Hebrew	17%	28%	37%	44%	66%	49%	7	12
Textual Interpretation	7%	16%	29%	51%	47%	40%	10	3
Teaching	0%	25%	59%	85%	92%	92%	1	8
Pastoral Counseling	NA	5%	34%	88%	65%	60%**	2	NA
Leadership	NA	18%	42%	88%	77%	59%**	3	NA
Personal/Religious Growth & Development	16%	19%	42%	79%	71%	55%	5	7
Skills & Habits for Independent Study	22%	33%	51%	68%	70%	48%	8	2
Jewish Knowledge & Integration of Knowledge	10%	20%	38%	58%	68%	58%	4b	NA

*Calculated by subtracting the difference between the 5th year percentage and the YII percentage

**Growth for *Pastoral Counseling* and *Leadership* was calculated from the 2nd year, the first year in which students were assessed

Skills in Order of Growth Rank	
Skill	2014-15 Growth Rank
Teaching*	1
Pastoral Counseling*	2
Leadership*	3
Performative Skills: Hebrew	4a
Jewish Knowledge & Integration of Knowledge	4b
Personal/Religious Growth & Development	5
Written Communication	6a
Performative Skills: English	6b
Hebrew	7

Skills & Habits for Independent Study	8
Critical Thinking	9
Textual Interpretation	10

*The rankings for *Teaching*, *Pastoral Counseling*, and *Leadership* should not be considered significant due to the dearth of ratings for each skill

Discussion of Findings

The skills that will be discussed in this section are ones that appear in the lower half of the growth rankings, and are of particular at this point in time to the College-Institute’s faculty and administrators: *Written Communication*, *Hebrew*, *Skills & Habits for Independent Study*, *Critical Thinking*, and *Textual Interpretation*.

It is important to note two things:

1. This discussion will consist of a comparison of data collected over two different time frames (one semester vs. a whole academic year). As HUC-JIR gathers more academic assessment data, more robust analyses will be possible.
2. The spring 2012 Rabbinical School rubric had four levels of learning, whereas the 2014-15 rubric had five. The primary difference is the addition of an extra middle developmental level. This is significant from a consistency standpoint; in the past, if a faculty member felt as if a student did not fall within the lone middle development level, he/she might have rated the student at the *Practical* level.

▪ *Written Communication*

- **2012 Narrative:** “Despite being the single most applicable dimension, *Write* showed only modest growth mainly due to a spurt in the second year where it was found to apply to 97% of the courses. These findings support the proposal on some campuses to initiate a writing center.”
- **2014-15 Findings:** As the most assessed skill, much can be gleaned from *Written Communication*. While the leap in proficiency from the YII to the 2nd year is significant like in 2012, larger levels of growth occurred in each subsequent year leading up to the 5th year. This could be due to students taking advantage of the aforementioned writing centers, but since use of those resources is not voluntarily, it is hard to say. The level of growth from the 4th year to the 5th year tapers off, with only 62% (a 5% increase from the 4th year) of artifacts being rated at the *Achieved/Ordination* level or above in *Written Communication*.

▪ *Hebrew*

- **2012 Narrative:** “The ratings of *Use Hebrew Language* are especially interesting considering that a major study of the role of Hebrew Language instruction in the rabbinical curriculum is currently underway. This dimension was rated as showing the lowest overall amount of growth of all twelve dimensions. This growth was statistically significant only because it had a larger number of ratings than the two dimensions (mentioned below) that did not show significant growth. The increase in *NA* ratings in years 2 and 3 reflects the increase in non-Hebrew courses such as Professional Development, History and Philosophy, where reading is done in English.”
- **2014-15 Findings:** While not the slowest growing skill a la 2012, there is enough worrisome evidence to suggest that the ongoing curricular discussions on *Hebrew* were just as warranted in 2012 as they are now. Most notable is what the percentage increase (49%) from the YII to the 5th year indicates: over the

course of their Rabbinical School careers, less than one out of two artifacts were rated at the *Achieved/Ordination* level or above in *Hebrew*.

▪ ***Skills & Habits for Independent Study***

- **2012 Narrative:** “*Use Sources* refers to the academic program outcome of using “multiple interdisciplinary sources found independently.” This dimension showed the second fastest growth of all dimensions with especially rapid growth in the second year and statistical significance of overall growth at an extremely high level. The second year gains, however, were almost reversed during the next year, perhaps due a combination of being introduced to new corpora of source materials while taking an increased number of professional development courses. This suggests that it would be useful to find some way to encourage richer selection and use of sources in the third year.”
- **2014-15 Findings:** The 2014-15 data looks much different than the 2012 data. The YII cohort was rated at a fairly high level, and continues to show positive growth through the 4th year. However, the growth from the 4th year to the 5th year was tied for the lowest of any skill, possibly owing to a decreased course load. Essentially, students are entering their 5th year at the proficiency level with which they are going to leave the College-Institute.

▪ ***Critical Thinking***

- **2012 Narrative:** “*Critique* (meaning at the *Practical* level to “apply and describe the history of methodologies for comparing passages and resolving contradictions”) showed relatively slow growth, perhaps due to a growing emphasis on professional practice up to the third year. A resumption of emphasis during the last two years may not have been enough to establish the outcome at the level expected by the faculty.”
- **2014-15 Findings:** Out of all of the skills, the 2014-15 *Critical Thinking* data came the closest to matching the growth (albeit slow growth) of the 2012 data. Along with *Skills & Habits for Independent Study*, *Critical Thinking* exhibited the least growth from the 4th year to the 5th year, which equates to a 2% increase in growth from 58% to 60% of artifacts being rated at the *Achieved/Ordination* level or learning or above.

▪ ***Textual Interpretation***

- **2012 Narrative:** “*Interpret Texts* showed the 3rd fastest growth. Apparently students came into the program with relatively little development in this area and showed a surge in development in their second year. The lack of improvement in the third year may be due to the introduction of new types of text in that year. As indicated by the red % NA line, after the fourth year, students take more courses that do not emphasize this skill.”
- **2014-15 Findings:** *Textual Interpretation* was the weakest skill out of all of the assessed 2014-15 skills. Diverging from the 2012 findings, the largest surge in growth occurred from the 3rd year to the 4th year. Additionally, *Textual Interpretation* was also one of a handful of skills that actually regressed from the 4th year to the 5th year. Echoing the 2012 findings, this could be due to students taking less courses that emphasize the skill.