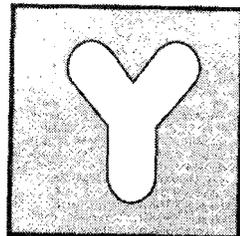


What's New At The Seminaries?

New programs from YU, JTS and HUC.

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Yeshiva University this year launched a new program, the Institute for University-School Partnership at YU's Azrieli Graduate School

of Jewish Education and Administration.

The program, in the planning stages since July 2007, examines how to create better quality teachers and to improve Jewish education, both in the realm of day schools and yeshivas, as well as at the graduate level. It's a partnership between the schools and the university, sending researchers and graduate students to schools, where they conduct research and help implement programs. One such project, BRAVE, looks at bully prevention; the researchers study how this plays out in schools, then offer training to those schools to try and curb the problem.

"We take grad students ... and bring them to schools as seeds of change, but also bring back to the ivory tower of the university what we're learning by being in the schools on a regular basis," said the program's director, Scott Goldberg. "It's a marriage of the ivory tower with practical institutions."

The partnership is modeled after similar programs in the secular, general education world; Teachers College in Manhattan has such a relationship with a number of local public schools, as do other graduate schools of education.

More than 200 schools throughout the country are involved, a number Goldberg said

he anticipates growing as the program grows.

"School change is going to be an ongoing task because schools represent the world outside and since the world is constantly and consistently changing, schools must, too," said Goldberg. "The university's role is to stay ahead of the curve and learn historically what's been going on in terms of trends, and figure out what's on the horizon, what's next. There's always going to be a next, as long as Jewish education is around."

In other news of seminaries mirroring the secular education world...

The Jewish Theological Seminary is starting a new JTS Executive Doctoral Program in fall semester. The program will appeal to Jewish education professionals seeking to earn a PhD but who are already engrossed in demanding jobs or live far from New York and cannot take advantage of JTS' existing doctorate program.

The program mirrors the kind of executive doctoral or MBA programs cropping up at business, nursing and education schools, for students already enmeshed in careers but who want to take their learning further.

The impetus for starting the JTS program, which will have a small first cohort of four to seven students who meet every six weeks for two intensive days of classes on Sunday and Monday and otherwise do coursework online, was due in part to an increasing pressure in the field of Jewish education for researchers, heads of school and other administrators to hold a doctorate, said Barry Holtz, dean of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at JTS. Not only that, but it's become a trend for day schools to hire rabbis to serve as rabbinic heads of school

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while non-Jewish Ph.D.'s sometimes take over the secular principal role.

"There are examples of schools that have non-Jews with good educational backgrounds [as leaders], it shows we have a shortage of people with the kind of training that prepares them to run an institution and have Jewish knowledge," said Holtz. But this is problematic, he said, because the head of school is also supposed to be the figurehead and role model for the school as a whole. "You need a level of commitment and learning to be the person who's the embodiment of the values of the school and who can, with authority and wisdom, get up and say, 'this is a Jewish institution and this is what we stand for.'"

And at the Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion...

Students on the schools' campuses on opposite coasts are now learning together in "E-classrooms," after an inaugural class in Bible this fall. The class was team-taught by Andrea Weiss in New York and Tamara Eskenazi in Los Angeles, co-editors of "The Torah: A Women's Commentary," and comprised of fourth and fifth-year rabbinical students.

The class met once a week, with both teachers present and communicating through a high-definition video conferencing system; using Smartboards, or electronic blackboards,

the teachers could see and write information that everyone could then see and discuss together. In between weekly classes, students held "cyber-sichot" (discussions) on the themes and issues they were exposed to in class, mirroring the kind of meet-in-the-hallway-or-on-the-street banter that might take place outside a typical course.

"In any classroom, it's the dialogue that takes place outside the classroom that we want to capture and connect to," said Gregg Alpert, national director of E-learning at HUC.

E-learning has applications beyond the joint classroom as well. Teachers with a certain expertise who are located on one campus are able to teach students at HUC's campuses in New York, Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Jerusalem through video conferencing, and HUC already holds extensive online seminars, or "webinars," for alumni, as well as maintaining resources online.

And Alpert believes that the options for E-learning, in the seminary and beyond, are endless.

"While certain classes might take better advantage of this kind of technology and environment, I don't believe there's a class that can't use this effectively," he said. "I honestly don't believe there's a limitation... once teachers try to take their material and look at how it can be enhanced by the use of E-learning, then it opens new doors." ■