

Chapter 5. Student Admissions, Retention, and Support Services (Standards 8 and 9)

Overview of Charge

The working group's examination of the evidence for compliance with Standards 8 and 9 occurred within a context of previous and (as was discovered) repeated discussions among faculty and students on all three American campuses: topics of concern that must be addressed in order to improve the College-Institute's recruitment and admissions programs, and the services offered to its students. The evidence has several sources. It is located in the campus student handbooks and the new integrated NSAH. These describe the academic requirements and procedures of the College-Institute's several academic programs. It is also found on websites issued and overseen by the national administrative offices, such as the Offices of the Registrar, Admissions and Recruitment, and Financial Aid. The third source is the reports of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, many of which are available on <http://wiki.huc.edu>.

The group revisited the charge to focus the research questions more specifically on current issues of student recruitment, retention, and support facing the College-Institute. The four new questions are stated at the beginning of their respective sections. The contrast with, and rationale for, changes from the design document research questions are available in Working Group D Research Question Changes.

Standard 8. Admissions and Retention

Discussion of Research Questions and Compliance

Research Question 8.1

Would a merit-based financial aid policy increase the quality and number of students admitted to HUC-JIR's professional programs?

The College-Institute follows a needs-based financial aid policy in the Rabbinical School, the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music (DFSSM), and the School of Jewish Nonprofit Management (SJNM): a student who demonstrates financial need may be awarded annual scholarships not exceeding \$12,000. The scholarship is applied immediately towards payment of the student's tuition, which currently is \$21,000 per year. No "merit" scholarships or stipends are available across all campuses to students in the Rabbinical School,¹⁰ the DFSSM, or the SJNM. The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) awards both scholarships and fellowship stipends. Graduate student scholarships and fellowships are drawn completely from restricted funds. Similarly, because of a recent grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation, students in the Schools of Education are awarded scholarships that cover full tuition and, in some programs, also additional stipends for living costs.

Some of the College-Institute's faculty and administration insist that a more generous financial aid policy, especially one that recognizes and awards "merit," would attract more and perhaps

¹⁰In New York, the Bonnie and Daniel Tisch Rabbinical Fellowship is awarded annually to a selected group of five students. It begins in the third year of the Rabbinical School program, continues for two more years and provides both a full-tuition scholarship and a living stipend, which reduces the fellow's need to take on outside work. A similar fellowship is awarded annually to one cantorial student (Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music Leadership Fellows Program).

more highly qualified students to the DFSSM, the SJNM, and especially the Rabbinical School. Those who favor such a policy change point out that enrollment has increased in the Schools of Education since the awarding of full-tuition scholarships began. In addition, a more generous financial aid policy will minimize a student's indebtedness, which is an increasingly important issue to many students and might be the deciding factor in many students' choice of profession. A further consideration is that today the applicants to the Rabbinical School are more likely than in the past to apply as well to other rabbinical programs. This implies that the College-Institute needs to compare costs of attendance and availability of student support awards with those of other rabbinical programs, which was recently accomplished (see Financial Aid Presentation to the Board of Governors, 10/2012).

Others disagree. In their view, a more generous financial aid policy would have little or no effect on recruitment and admission to the SJNM, the DFSSM, or the Rabbinical School, given what they consider to be both relatively low tuition rates and indebtedness (as opposed to students who pursue training in schools of law, medicine, or business). Many who hold this point of view also contend that students who apply to the DFSSM, the SJNM, and the Rabbinical School choose a life of service to the Jewish people for other than financial reasons. So increased financial aid, while certainly helping students in the College-Institute's professional programs to reduce future indebtedness, would not be a motivating factor in their choice of profession.

The members of the working group did not have an answer to the merit scholarship question. But they did agree that the College-Institute must pursue the question, and that any answer (or answers) that emerge from that pursuit must be based not solely on opinions (as strongly held as those opinions might be) but on evidence. Accordingly, they added two logically prior questions to Research Question 8.1, which itself has been slightly rephrased:

1. What changes in financial aid policy have been implemented over the past five years?
2. What evidence demonstrates that such changes were based on appropriate assessment results?
3. To what extent would a merit-based financial policy demonstrate an institutional commitment to student success and the achievement of student learning outcomes?

Evidence to investigate these questions comes from internal HUC-JIR documentation, published empirical studies on financial aid systems, and published analyses of current best practices and trends in how financial aid is administered.

Changes in financial aid policy implemented over the past five years

Through email correspondence with the College-Institute's Director of Financial Aid, summarized in the Table of Recent Financial Aid Policies, and on the College-Institute website at www.huc.edu/financialaid, the working group was able to construct a picture of an ongoing, two-fold concerted effort:

1. To ensure that the College-Institute's policies are always in compliance with the United States Department of Education's Title IV requirements.
2. To ensure that the College-Institute's financial aid policies are always synchronized with the ever-changing needs of the institution and its students.

Evidence that changes were based on appropriate assessment results

Beginning in 2010, the Financial Aid Office has administered surveys every other year to collect cost-of-attendance information for each of the various programs offered on the four campuses of the College-Institute. Based on the numbers that students provide, and through consultation

with program directors on each campus, the average cost of attendance for each respective program is calculated. These averages determine the maximum amount of loans that a student may borrow. The Table of Average Costs of Attendance highlights the cost-of-attendance data for the Rabbinical School for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years.

Currently, the cost-of-attendance survey is the only method by which the College-Institute actively assesses and adjusts to the financial needs of its students. Additionally, as part of the self-study process, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment created an Administrative Survey which was sent to the entire College-Institute community (students, faculty, and staff on every campus). The goal of the survey was to examine responsiveness, reliability, and respect within the various administrative functions in the College-Institute. One of the functions that respondents had a chance to rate was the Financial Aid Office, which was found to be quite responsive to student needs (see below at discussion of S9_09).

Subsequently, the results of the survey were discussed with the heads of each function, and their conclusions can be found in Chapters 4 and 8. The plan and suggestion in Chapter 8 is to continue this on an annual basis. Some of the findings were also included in the director's Financial Aid Presentation to the Board of Governors at their October, 2012 meeting.

To what extent would a merit-based financial policy demonstrate an institutional commitment to student success and the achievement of student learning outcomes?

This was a challenging research question to deal with. None of the institutions to which the working group reached out (local seminaries, other national Jewish seminaries, the University of Cincinnati's College of Law) was able to provide data sets that illustrate a linkage among merit-based financial aid, the achievement of student learning outcomes, and/or an impact on recruitment. Furthermore, assessment of student learning outcomes needs to be combined with admissions data to fully resolve this question. It should be noted, however, that, as institutional and academic assessment models become more entrenched over time through use, these types of data sets should become more readily available. Nevertheless, the working group was able to gather enough internal data and glean information from recent studies and articles that suggest that an extensive merit-based financial aid system would not necessarily improve 1) achievement of student learning outcomes, and 2) recruitment.

During the planning for their grants to the Schools of Education, the Jim Joseph Foundation in the Fall of 2011 commissioned an initial price analysis (tuition) conducted by the American Institutes for Research. One of the outcomes of the survey, whose respondents included current students and recent alumni, that was most relevant to this research question was that a blanket policy of a full-tuition waiver to all students is an inefficient strategy given that at least half of the students surveyed would be willing and able to pay at least half of the current tuition. This finding indicates an optimal price point of \$11,000. It should be noted that the original Jim Joseph funding resulted in a marked increase in enrollment in the education programs.

Merit-based financial aid is made available in the DFSSM through the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music Leadership Fellows Program. The program is "dedicated to transforming synagogue life for the next generation through intensive and specialized training designed to create synagogue professionals who will become spiritual and moral leaders." Through a rigorous application process that includes essays, an interview, and three references, one student is chosen per year for the fellowship program. Some of the "specialized training" includes working with a rabbinical cohort for 2½ years, monthly study sessions supplemented by a substantial book list, a yearly weekend retreat, and a week at a congregation involved in ground-breaking leadership models. In addition to a seven-week paid internship at a cutting-

edge congregation, the student also receives full tuition (\$21,000) plus a \$10,000 stipend for years three and four. In year five, that amount is \$12,000 in tuition and a \$5,000 stipend.

In wanting to learn more about the impact that this fellowship program has had on the achievement of student learning outcomes and recruitment, the working group posed four questions to the director of the DFSSM:

1. What are the specifics of the DFSSM's scholarship program (requirements, guidelines, etc.)?
2. How effective a recruiting tool is the scholarship? Do you have numbers and data to illustrate effectiveness?
3. What is the caliber of student that the DFSSM tries to attract with its scholarship?
4. How do these students perform in the program compared to students who do not receive the scholarship?

His responses reveal a fellowship program the academic success of which is hard to quantify, and that has not necessarily had a huge impact on recruitment for the DFSSM. As the scholarship can only be offered to one student per class, it would be unfair to raise the expectations for each student in a class. Hence, measurement of student learning outcomes is not feasible. The director even stated that, due to the academic caliber of the students chosen for the fellowship program, they would have been standouts with or without it. As it relates to recruitment, the students chosen for the fellowship program are all top-notch in their class in the areas of leadership and academics. Yet, the fellowship program is not available to students until their third year, meaning that it more than likely has no bearing on a prospective student's decision to attend the DFSSM.

For an overarching view of merit-based financial aid, the working group turned to several publications on the subject summarized in Literature on Trends in Higher Education Merit Aid. This review concluded that merit-based aid may not always be a particularly effective recruiting tool because it can potentially divert funds from students who have a viable financial need.

By its nature, the College-Institute attracts highly qualified and engaged students and leaders who do not require a lot of motivation to learn and to develop as rabbis, cantors, educators, etc. The College-Institute's assessment system has been significantly advanced by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment through the use of a manageable program assessment. As it relates to this issue, the achievement of student learning outcomes isn't the problem; the problem is whether any sort of merit-based aid system would price some students out of the College-Institute. Due to the demanding nature of the College-Institute's programs and the various commitments incumbent upon students, generating any sort of income outside of the College-Institute is incredibly hard, if not impossible in some cases. Students depend on their need-based aid to live on a semester-to-semester basis. To alter that system, especially since there is no documentation suggesting that the College-Institute's current financial aid structure is broken, would be unwise. The working group recommends that expansion of scholarship support should be directed toward educational innovation that will benefit all students in their respective programs or toward student financial need rather than any selectively applied criteria relating to student merit.

Research Question 8.2

What are the criteria for assessing whether or not HUC-JIR's two-year Hebrew requirement for admissions has had an effect on recruitment and admissions? Are the criteria adequate? If not, what criteria should be in place?

This research question grew out of the working group's concern about declining enrollment in the Rabbinical School. There has been a declining trend in first-year enrollment in the Rabbinical School since a one-year spike in 2003. This has often been anecdotally interpreted in diverse ways that are not consistent with the long-term trends, which showed a modest increase due to increasing numbers of female applicants offset by a small but significant decline in males. HUC-JIR has taken a number of steps in an effort to increase student enrollment in the Rabbinical School, most notably, investing in expansion of the Admissions Offices nationally and on all campuses, and establishing regular communication through weekly meetings and information updates. In addition, the school has engaged the services of a consulting firm to help the administration and admissions personnel develop new materials, policies, and procedures for applying to all HUC-JIR programs (see their report and supplementary materials at Admissions Consulting Overview and Admissions Consulting Outreach Plans).

Prior to 1995, HUC-JIR urged applicants to the Rabbinical School to study as much Hebrew as possible during their undergraduate years, but there was no formal admissions requirement to do so. Beginning in 1995, applicants were required to complete a year of college-level Hebrew or its equivalent. From 2002, the admissions requirement was raised to at least two years of college-level Hebrew or its equivalent.

During the course of the working group's deliberations, some of the members (and many members of the faculty) noted that applications to the Rabbinical School began to decline shortly after the two-year Hebrew requirement was put into effect. Some working group members and members of the faculty posited that the more expansive Hebrew language requirement contributed to, or in fact might be the principal cause of, the drop in enrollment. Concomitantly, they reasoned that easing the requirement to one year of college-level Hebrew (again) or dropping the Hebrew language requirement altogether would therefore result in an increased number of applications to the Rabbinical School.

It is clear that extensive study is needed in order to determine if a Hebrew language requirement affects a student's decision to apply to HUC-JIR's Rabbinical School, and whether or not this requirement makes its programs less competitive with other liberal rabbinical school programs that might be viewed by applicants as alternatives. It is also clear that a study of this nature goes beyond the scope of a small working group. The working group, therefore, has asked the National Admissions Director to urge the consulting group to incorporate such a study into their assessment of the College-Institute's admissions and recruitment program. The working group also compiled some data that might help the process and give it direction.

First, in 2011-12 the working group compiled a list of HUC-JIR's then-matriculating rabbinical students' majors as undergraduates. This revealed that 61% of rabbinical students majored in some area of liberal arts; 8% held majors in science or business; 31% majored in some area of religious or Judaic studies. This study also revealed that there were eight universities from which four or more of the College-Institute's rabbinical students had graduated: Brandeis University, George Washington University, Indiana University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Stanford University, the American Jewish University, and the University of Wisconsin.

These figures do not in themselves suggest conclusions. But they do raise questions that the working group believes should be answered by more extensive studies. For example:

1. Some colleges and universities offer strong and extensive Hebrew language courses, but *most* colleges and universities do not. Is not HUC-JIR excluding bright, talented, and dedicated students from rabbinical school simply because they do not attend an "elite" college or university that offers college-level Hebrew courses?

2. Should not the College-Institute have in place (in Jerusalem, or at one or more stateside campuses) Hebrew language programs of instruction for students who major in fields other than religion and Judaic Studies or who decide to apply to rabbinical school too late in their college years to take the required Hebrew instruction even if it were offered at their universities (or perhaps after graduating from college)?
3. Does a two-year Hebrew requirement for admission to the Rabbinical School – or, for that matter *any* Hebrew language requirement – result in more qualified rabbinical students?

Our second study addressed that last question. The study took the form of a survey sent to all faculty on the three stateside campuses. The survey posed three questions:

1. Has the two-year Hebrew requirement improved the academic quality of admitted students?
2. Has the two-year Hebrew requirement resulted in an improvement in rabbinical students' Hebrew proficiency?
3. Were you teaching at the College prior to the implementation of the two-year Hebrew requirement?

Responses were received from nearly all full-time faculty members, indicating the salience of the issue. The tallies were as follows:

1. Faculty who were not at the College-Institute before the two-year requirement was initiated unanimously checked that they did not know whether it improved the quality of the admitted students or even their Hebrew proficiency.
2. The remaining faculty divided their answers by campus for both questions with significantly fewer Cincinnati faculty indicating improvement than New York, while Los Angeles faculty responses were in between.

Complicating the interpretation of this variation among campuses is a variable that has not been corrected for: whether or not variation in the level of Hebrew performance was evenly distributed among the three student populations and whether or not it remained evenly distributed among those populations before and after the introduction of the two-year Hebrew language requirement.

The survey study also did not consider the relevance of multilingual students for whom no prior language was Hebrew. There is much evidence that each new language becomes easier to learn. Thus, multilingual students who do not know Hebrew may ultimately be at least as effective Hebrew learners or even more so than those who fulfill their second language requirement with Hebrew. To the extent that such people are excluded from the program on the basis of no prior Hebrew, the College-Institute is undermining its own recruitment priorities. In addition, the curriculum in the Year-in-Israel Program changed in concordance with the two-year Hebrew admission requirement. Thus, the answers to the survey are confounded by two possible causes for changes in Hebrew performance.

The question of the impact of the two-year Hebrew language admissions requirement was discussed at length by an all-campus faculty consultation on Hebrew instruction which met in Jerusalem in June of 2012. This group considered all aspects of Hebrew language instruction at the College-Institute, and generated a position paper, which will be discussed by each local faculty (see *Curricular Improvement* in Chapter 3).

In summary, the College-Institute still must have more, and more extensive, studies to determine what role, if any, a two-year Hebrew requirement or a multilingual background plays in a student's decision to apply to HUC-JIR's Rabbinical School. Moreover, any decision HUC-JIR might make regarding a language requirement, Hebrew or otherwise, for admission to the Rabbinical School must be tested over time, combining the manageable program assessment

data and processes described in Chapter 8 with admissions data on language background to see if the decision does, in fact, lead to desired outcomes. Assessment will also help determine if the decision results in unintended consequences.

Additional Findings Related to Compliance with Standard 8

HUC-JIR's A Guidebook for HUC-JIR Admissions and Interview Processing clearly shows carefully crafted policies that are thoroughly in line with the mission of the College-Institute, thus fulfilling S8_01. The Guidebook makes specific mention of every program and, like the mission and purpose statements, emphasizes Jewish commitment, academic scholarship, leadership, service, and community. The Israel experience provided by the College-Institute is mentioned several times, but, like the Cincinnati course descriptions in the 2009 study for NCAHLC, nothing was mentioned relating to the candidate's potential for contributing to "the growth of the Reform Jewish community worldwide."

As the admissions guidebook details, HUC-JIR undertakes an extraordinarily thorough examination of students before admitting them, including evaluation of academic and personal data as well as a psychological examination. In particular, the admissions committee is charged that "a candidate receiving 'Not at this Time'¹¹ must be given a small list of clearly defined actions to undertake." Once admitted, if it is found that a student needs special help in Hebrew, special Ulpan classes are provided before the Year-in-Israel Program (YII) and special tutoring is made available even after the YII on each stateside campus. Given the small student body of the College-Institute and the careful admissions process, accommodations for handicapped or learning-disabled students are made on a case-by-case basis by program directors, who develop individualized plans based on diagnoses and guidance from medical or psychological professionals as well as faculty members. All of the items noted in this paragraph fulfill S8_03.

Admissions criteria and information about how to apply to particular programs are easily accessible from a prominently-displayed admissions link on the home page of the HUC-JIR website, and detailed in sections on frequently asked questions and financial aid, fulfilling S8_02 and S8_06. A new brochure, *Your Extraordinary Life*, was made available in the summer of 2012. Basic information about academic requirements, such as the Hebrew placement exams, GRE's, TOEFL, recommendations, and so forth are on the admissions pages of the HUC-JIR website with supplemental details on the pages for each program. Thus, there is additional information for rabbinical admissions, cantorial admissions, and admission to the School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, the Graduate School, and the Executive MA in Jewish Education.

The admissions office is in transition. A search for a new National Director of Recruitment and Admissions located in Cincinnati is currently underway with the hope of having the position filled early in 2013. This will inevitably result in changes in procedures with a primary goal of enhancing recruitment, a process already begun by the current director (see the September-December 2012 Admissions Updates). The current procedure requires a preliminary interview with admissions staff or program directors, to ascertain whether the candidate is appropriate and ready to apply, before formal application materials may be accessed electronically and submitted. Together, these procedures fulfill S8_04.

¹¹Defined in the Admissions Committee Candidate Rating Scale (the second Appendix of the Guidebook) as "This candidate falls short of being admissible now but holds promise. I would like to see the candidate again in two or more years. He or she should be provided the following specific recommendations for activities to undertake before reapplying [*List specific activities*]."

The College-Institute has done extensive work on student learning outcomes over the last half decade. This has led to clearer online program descriptions (see for example, Rabbinical Curriculum, Academic Information Leading to Investiture, Academic Information for the CN Graduate School), also fulfilling S8_04. In addition, a major project to carefully define the expected development of rabbinical students led to the 45-dimension Rabbinical Matrix completed in 2008 that is described in Chapter 8 on assessment. From 2009-11 a further project was undertaken to create a vehicle for manageable program assessment. That project involved interviewing every full-time faculty member in every program to create Learning Outcomes Networks for each program (also described in Chapter 8). These form the basis of the learning outcomes rating forms being used by every program. A detailed study of alumni and student placement was conducted to guide admissions, faculty, and financial projections, and a summary of the results have been placed on the website¹² in compliance with S8_05.

The College-Institute provides extensive and generous financial aid that is detailed on the website both in the admissions and financial aid sections, fulfilling S8_06. Compliance with this element is further supported by the establishment in spring 2012 of a Scholarship Committee comprised of the Director Financial Aid, the VPAA, the VPFA, the program directors of the Rabbinical and Sacred Music Schools, and the chair of the CN faculty.

Transfer credit policies have recently been consolidated across campuses through the work on the National Student Academic Handbook, fulfilling S8_07.

The Rabbinical School used the new all-campus learning outcomes to craft a new HUC-JIR Rabbinical Mission Statement for the program. The first draft of the program mission was approved by the National Assessment Committee and then edited by the rabbinical faculties of each campus. Since the 2009 CN Focused Visit Report had already documented the relations of the College-Institute's mission to learning outcomes, this completed the mission-integrating process for the original and largest program of the College-Institute. Special assessment work has been conducted for the YII program and was also reviewed recently in the 2009 CN Focused Visit Report. Because the other programs are campus-specific, they continue with their campus-specific mission statements. Because the number of non-retained students per year in all levels of each of HUC-JIR's programs is quite small (see Retention and Completion Rates), aggregated connections to retention are not especially informative. On the other hand, the manageable program assessment tools provide a detailed picture of student success that is shared with each student's advisor, and the aggregated results for all students are shared with the entire faculty of each program, fulfilling S8_08.

Fulfillment of S8_08 is further supported by experience with individual cases gained by program directors, who according to policies described in the National Student Academic Handbook meet with each student seeking a leave of absence or withdrawal from the program. In order to address performance closer to the admissions point, the OIRA began this year to add ratings from the YII to the Learning Outcomes Network (see Chapter 8 for details of this assessment along 9-12 dimensions for every student in every course). Thus, the manageable program assessments provide evidence of compliance with the "ongoing assessment of student success" aspect of S8_08. The anecdotal experience of program directors is used during their input on admissions policies (the minutes of the Academic Advisory Council show that all program directors and deans have met and provided input to the National Student Academic Handbook). Thus, the College-Institute evaluates through case discussions "the match between the attributes of admitted students and the institution's mission and programs, and reflects its findings in its admissions, remediation, and other related policies." The manageable program

¹²<http://huc.edu/admissions/frequently-asked-questions/> under "Will I get a job when I graduate?"

assessment tool will need to be in use for enough years to aggregate the data on retention and use them for mutual validation.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. Direct the expansion of scholarship support toward educational innovation that will benefit all students in their respective programs or toward student financial need rather than any selectively applied criteria relating to student merit.
2. Match the manageable program assessment data with retention figures after data have been collected from several classes on all campuses.
3. Have the Admissions Committees arrive at predictions after interviews concerning whether or not they believe the candidate will achieve the *Practical* or better level of each area of the program's mission or rubrics dimension by the end of the program.

Standard 9. Student Support Services

Discussion of Research Questions and Compliance

Research Question 9.1

Do psychiatric and evaluations administered by HUC-JIR during the admissions process further HUC's efforts to foster professional and personal development? How might the evaluations and the process be changed to help HUC-JIR foster its students' professional and personal development?

The goals and procedures of the psychological evaluations are clearly defined and shared appropriately with the evaluators. Some members of the working group wondered if the psychological tests might be helpful beyond the admissions process. That is, might the tests reveal information that would help the College-Institute's faculty address each student's unique learning style? Could test results help faculty become better advisors and mentors for their students? Indeed, these questions have been asked before. But they have not been addressed in a manner that provides measurable data that is appropriate for effective assessment.

Areas of Success

Ultimately the psychological examinations are fulfilling several important roles. Based on the interviews that were conducted, it is generally thought that the psychological examinations are in place to ensure, as best the institution can, that the students who are admitted to HUC-JIR are able to meet the challenges of the school's program and the profession. The psychological examinations help determine if a candidate is mature, capable of taking on the demanding course of study, capable of balancing academics and work in the community, and capable of navigating life as a pastoral counselor. Moreover, the psychological examination helps to ensure that the students who set off on this path are in a healthy place as they start out.

The psychological examinations can also accomplish several tasks that benefit the admissions process. First, some individuals self-select not to apply to HUC-JIR after learning about the psychological examination. The psychological examinations serve as a deterrent to individuals who already are aware of psychological reasons why they are not suited for the rabbinate. Second, the psychological examinations have been able to identify substance abuses that were not identified by the applicant. Third, an applicant's learning disabilities have surfaced during the process of the psychological examination. Fourth, the information gleaned by the psychologists

aids admissions committees as they make decisions about applicants. The examinations have provided vital information to admissions committees about an applicant's maturity, ability to handle stress, mental health, problematic tendencies, or inhibiting emotional traumas.

Areas for Improvement

While there are many reasons to retain the psychological examination as part of the admissions process of HUC-JIR, there are ways to improve the process. The first way in which the process could be improved is to set up regular opportunities for the psychologists employed by HUC-JIR to come together to discuss how they make their recommendations. This has only happened on one previous occasion. Much of the psychologist's report currently depends on the subjectivity of the individual psychologist. While this may always be true to some degree, having regular meetings among all the psychologists will help ensure that there is a level of uniformity among the decisions being made on all four campuses. A second way in which the process could be improved is to standardize the form utilized by the psychologists. Despite attempts by the College-Institute to create a uniform report, the psychologists provide their respective reports in their own manners. Standardizing the reports will further ensure that there is a level of uniformity among the decisions made on all four campuses.

Research Question 9.2

What changes in the role of the registrar and the structure of the Registrar's Office have been implemented over the past five years? What evidence demonstrates that such changes were based on appropriate assessment results? What type of assessment system should be developed for the Registrar's Office to demonstrate HUC's commitment to student success and the achievement of student learning outcomes?

Prior to 2008, each campus had a separate Registrar's Office. The campus registrars maintained the academic records of the academic programs housed on their respective campuses, and helped the campus deans administer the academic policies and procedures of the campus academic programs. In addition, the campus registrars often served in an advisory capacity to faculty, students, and the campus deans and program directors.

In 2008, the College-Institute appointed one national registrar, based on the New York campus. The intent was to utilize technology (in the form of a newly-installed Student Information System, SIS) in order to eliminate the redundancies (and the administrative expense) of separate campus registrars (see also *Improvement of Administrative Systems and Practices* in Chapter 3).

The system worked in some respects, but the College-Institute quickly learned that the new SIS system could not accommodate the differing academic policies and procedures of the several campuses. For example:

1. Each campus and academic program defined "incomplete" differently and, compared to other campuses, had different requirements and procedures to guide students from "incompletes" to final grades.
2. Each campus had its own class schedule and academic calendar.
3. The Los Angeles and Cincinnati campuses had joint academic programs with the University of Southern California and the University of Cincinnati, respectively. USC and UC students received "transfer credits" for courses they took at HUC-JIR, and HUC-JIR students received "transfer credits" for courses they took at USC and UC. As a result, the SIS system needed to accommodate not only HUC-JIR's academic schedule and requirements, but those of the sister institutions.

4. Problems with the SIS system created bottlenecks in the Registrar's Office. Faculty grades were sometimes recorded late, or recorded improperly. Some students received their grades long after the conclusion of the academic semester, which led some students to miss deadlines for loan applications.

The implementation of the system simply did not accomplish the task assigned to it. Nor were the registrar and the assistant able to solve the problems or answer the ever-increasing complaints from faculty and students from all three stateside campuses.

Clearly, major and immediate changes were needed. In summer 2011, the College-Institute appointed a new registrar, and moved the Registrar's Office from New York to Cincinnati, where it is in proximity to the College-Institute's Department of Information Technology. Upgrades to the SIS system were implemented, and additional personnel in the Registrar's Office were hired. The registrar, together with the VPAA and a faculty advisory committee, initiated measures to standardize academic policies, procedures, and class schedules among the American campuses and among the academic programs housed on each campus, resulting in the creation of the NSAH.

Further upgrades are needed to improve the College-Institute's academic technology. But the College-Institute's faculty and students seem to have benefited from the steps taken. Most importantly, the Registrar's Office is now seen as an important component of the academic life of the College-Institute, one that furthers learning and teaching in significant ways. The Administrative Survey Results showed that the Registrar's Office was functioning at a *Practical* level only a half year after the new registrar was hired. That the Office was not yet considered to be functioning at the *Inspiring* level is not surprising, given that there were many problems previously. It is important that this assessment be repeated annually so that its evidence can be used to ensure continued progress.

In summary, the working group's investigations revealed that the College-Institute has in place the student services that are required of accredited institutions of higher learning, but prior to the major revision in policies incorporated in the new NSAH, those services were not always clearly described in all College-Institute academic handbooks nor uniformly applied on all of its campuses

Additional Findings Related to Compliance with Standard 9

A program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs is available to all students in all programs. Many of these services are documented in the National Student Academic Handbook and in the Year-in-Israel Academic Handbook. The special needs of students embarking on a new program in a new culture are extensively addressed through an extensive website for the YII program and Year-in-Israel Student Services Portal Documentation, both deeply supported by Jerusalem personnel. A special issue for the College-Institute is the acquisition of skills in ancient and modern Hebrew. Extensive programs during the first year in Israel contribute to this, and tutors are hired on each campus to provide support to students needing it. These and other student support issues are documented in the Joint Commission on Rabbinic Mentoring, Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music Advisors Policy, CN Rabbinical School Advisors Policy, and the Graduate School Orientation and Guidance Procedures, thus fulfilling S9_01. In fulfillment of S9_02, support services are provided and organized by qualified professionals on each campus (see Student Support Services Professional Credentials).

The NSAH allows students considerable but appropriate flexibility involving add/drop, leaves of absence, withdrawing, changing or adding a program, incompletes, repeats, reduced load,

independent study, appeal of an adverse academic standing decision, financial assistance, FERPA protection, and probation. The NSAH also provides extensive and careful attention to academic grievance procedures, learning disabilities identification and accommodation (including support for self-advocacy, faculty training, and diverse forms of assistance), and sexual harassment. In each case, the document describes diverse needs and indicates to whom to go for help and what kind of help to expect. Thus, the NSAH documents that the College-Institute has procedures to address the varied spectrum of student academic and other needs, in a manner that is equitable, supportive, and sensitive, through direct service or referral, fulfilling S9_03 and S9_04. It also documents reasonable procedures for equitably addressing student complaints or grievances, fulfilling S9_05. The NSAH is easily accessible on both the registrar's page and the "Policies" page of the College-Institute's website. This prominent location satisfies the requirement for "widely disseminated" student policies and procedures, including those for grievances and complaints (S9_05). The NSAH identifies that program directors must be consulted before registering for more than 18 credits or taking an independent study course. It also indicates that they may be consulted regarding academic grievances and learning disabilities. The Office of the National Registrar maintains files on student complaints and grievances relating to FERPA policy. Campus deans and program directors have files concerning student complaints and grievances relating to academic matters.

The NSAH has a carefully crafted FERPA statement that describes who has the right to inspect and review student educational records, and how to address records that the student feels are inaccurate or misleading, provide release consent, make appeals concerning records, or file complaints with the US Department of Education. Additionally, it describes precisely the types of "directory information" that the College-Institute makes available to those with "legitimate interests." It also documents the maintenance of student records in the Student Information System and the student's file with its application materials, transcripts, and correspondence concerning the student, while providing program directors access to all but the confidential letters of reference in support of the student's application. Thus the NSAH documents "published and implemented policies for the release of student information" as well as "policies and procedures, developed and implemented, for safe and secure maintenance of student records," fulfilling S9_06, S9_07, and S9_08. The registrar, Director of Financial Aid, Director of Human Resources, and staff from the Office of Institutional Research meet periodically to review compliance deadlines and pending federal and state policies that may impact the College-Institute. Additionally, the registrar, through the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO) monitors legislation that may impact the institution.

Evidence regarding S9_09 can be found in the administrative survey, details about which are provided in Chapter 8 on Assessment. Respondents were asked to judge the service they experienced from each major administrative function of the College-Institute. All students from all campuses were invited to participate and about 10% of the entire student body chose to do so (this compares with about 90% of faculty and 30% of staff).

Regarding the administrative function of accounting, the students gave low ratings of accuracy, responsiveness, and understanding of their needs, but provided no comments concerning details. The accounting group has made significant changes in their policies and procedures that are referred to in Chapter 8 on Assessment and described in improvement suggestions.

For eLearning, students expressed some concern with the accuracy of the help. The facilities staff received fewer *Inspiring* ratings than other functions, but were otherwise non-exceptional (this does not seem to be an actionable finding).

The Financial Aid Office received fewer low ratings for accuracy from students than the average administrative function and average ratings elsewhere. This office has made basic repairs of the links on their website, created a screen-shots guide for helping students accept, decline, or change their loan amounts online, and for dealing with missing documents. They are also creating an informative presentation for graduating students on how to handle their loans. Additionally, they have changed their approach to student questions concerning items on the website by not only telling them how to find the information on the website but also giving them the information they asked for at the same time.

The accuracy of Information Systems was rated better than expected by students, but the responsiveness was rated significantly worse. Information Systems also undertook a Tech Survey. A significant frustration mentioned in the Administrative Survey was problems with Outlook, which were primarily frustrations with the small storage allotted to email. This and numerous anecdotal complaints justified the purchase of a new server that resulted in considerably more email space for each user. Grateful remarks from users have been abundant. Other initiatives resulting from the surveys include putting a link on the huc.edu home page to the IS page, listing training opportunities on that link, and exploring new ways to improve support without adding burdensome costs. For all other functions (see Administrative Survey Analysis for the list), student ratings were not exceptional.

Thus, there has been ongoing assessment of student support services and the offices with significant findings have used the results for improvement, fulfilling S9_09. The response of the Financial Aid Office suggests a way that all offices of the College-Institute could improve their performance regarding this element. Even though their ratings suggested no problematic area, the Office responded with a series of improvements that should lead to even better ratings the next year. The working group recommends that this approach be encouraged for all offices.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. The working group recommends that the registrar continue to audit campus policies and procedures to ensure that the institution complies with changes in federal, state, and Middle States regulations, standards, and requirements. The results of this audit should be reflected in annual updates of the NSAH that are available in electronic format with links to institutional policies and procedures that govern all academic programs.
2. The College-Institute also applies assessment tools and procedures to other areas of the College-Institute, including the recruitment and admissions programs, the Office of Financial Aid, and the Office of the Registrar. These offices report directly to the V PAA. The VPAA, in turn, discusses policies and procedures that govern these offices with the President's Cabinet. Such a structure provides capable administrative oversight; but it does not necessarily ensure effective ongoing assessment of these programs as prescribed by the Standards of Excellence. The Administrative Survey has provided useful evidence regarding the overall quality of these functions. However, future data could be more targeted to the evaluation of *policies and procedures*, with evaluations based on evidence that indicates whether the policies and procedures in question further (or fail to further) student learning and achievement. The working group urges that student perspectives be included by the National Assessment Committee that receives and analyzes the data and evidence and recommends steps for improvement.