

# Executive Summary

## Institutional Overview

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), the oldest institution of Jewish higher learning in the western hemisphere, was formed in 1950 through the merger of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College (founded in 1875) and New York's Jewish Institute of Religion (founded in 1922). Both schools trained liberal rabbis for the American Jewish community. A site in Los Angeles was opened in 1954 to serve the needs of the growing Jewish population on the west coast; an additional site in Jerusalem was opened in 1963 to serve as a research and operations center for American and European archaeologists excavating in the State of Israel, a base for HUC-JIR students studying there, and a resource for liberal Judaism in the Jewish State. In 1970, the College-Institute initiated a Year-in-Israel Program required of all first-year rabbinical students (subsequently extended as well to all first-year students in the Cantorial and Education Programs).

The institution is governed by a Board of Governors and administered on a federal model: a national administration and four local administrations. Each site historically has exercised considerable autonomy in running its programs: in addition to the Rabbinical School, which is situated on all three stateside campuses (years 2-5) and in Jerusalem (year 1), the School of Graduate Studies is based in Cincinnati; the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, New York School of Education, and the Doctor of Ministry Program are located in New York; the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, Loucheim School of Judaic Studies, and Magnin School of Graduate Studies are located in Los Angeles; and the Israel Rabbinical Program (for Israeli students) is located in Jerusalem.

The College-Institute has world-class academic resources, including an internationally respected faculty, the Klau Library system housing the largest collection of Hebraica and Judaica outside the state of Israel, and the American Jewish Archives, one of the world's largest archives of Jewish Americana.

The three domestic campuses of HUC-JIR have been accredited since 1960, each by its respective regional accreditation agency (Cincinnati by the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission, New York by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and Los Angeles by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges; Jerusalem's Year-in-Israel Program was accredited through the Cincinnati campus).

Since the last decennial re-accreditation evaluations in 2002, the College-Institute has been encouraged by its accrediting agencies to seek a single accreditation for the entire institution. This recommendation was also developed internally as part of an institution-wide strategic planning process that began in 2004. After extensive research using multiple data-gathering methods and broad institutional consultation, HUC-JIR decided to apply to MSCHE for single accreditation and was accepted in 2011.

A major theme of the past ten years institutionally has been regularization of policies and procedures across the institution and integration of programs across sites, while still respecting local cultures. This integration has been spurred not only as an organizational best practice but also by the recent financial challenges. As the intended outcomes below indicate, integration has been the central focus of this self-study. It has significantly contributed to the major progress the College-Institute has made in meeting its financial challenges. Perhaps of greater import, the complete report will demonstrate dramatic progress toward integration of learning, administrative, and strategic functions—a tribute both to the commitment of those involved in

the study and also to the clarity and streamlined nature of the MSCHE materials and process. There is currently a search to replace our president, who assumed office in 2001 and is retiring in 2014. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to preside over a substantially more integrated institution with more evidence-based decision-making processes.

## HUC-JIR Intended Outcomes of the Self-Study

HUC-JIR's Self-Study Steering Committee articulated six intended formative outcomes of the study beyond the overall summative outcomes required for MSCHE affiliation, "to demonstrate that the institution possesses the characteristics of excellence described in the Commission's 13 Standards that are relevant to HUC-JIR." Both sets of outcomes are reminders to participants that the purposes of self-assessment and peer review include deepening institutional self-understanding and advancing its self-improvement.

- **Vision:** To create a common vision of the institution's future direction.
- **Integration:** To better integrate the programs, resources (human and material), and opportunities of the four campuses while preserving their fundamental cultural differences.
- **Planning:** To involve faculty, administration, and governors in two critical planning tasks:
  - Creating mission-driven, evidence-based strategic plans for each program, administrative office, and campus.
  - Assessing the extent to which financial, planning, and administrative decisions are driven by the College-Institute's mission.
- **Assessment:** To involve faculty, administration, and governors in three critical assessment tasks:
  - **Academic:** To fully implement and utilize manageable program assessment for evaluating and improving student learning results, and revealing the enduring commitments as well as habits of mind that students have built at the College-Institute.
  - **Administrative:** To help all sectors of the College-Institute community better understand the challenges and accomplishments of administrative sectors and provide their own perspectives on those challenges and accomplishments.
  - **eLearning:** To use manageable program assessment to assess the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning for College-Institute students.
- **Discovery:** To involve faculty, administration, and governors in discovering new ways:
  1. To promote academic excellence and high-quality mentoring of College-Institute students without diminishing standards and quality of delivery considering HUC-JIR's complex organization, small size, scholarly commitment, and identity as a religious community.
  2. To address financial realities and exigencies while promoting the College-Institute's role as the intellectual center of Reform Judaism and advancing the academic support for learning of various aspects of HUC-JIR programs, both curricular and co-curricular.
- **System Development:** To compose a concise and constructive document that not only meets the needs of MSCHE but also serves as a valuable tool for institutional planning, assessment, change, and growth.

## Summary of Suggestions for Improvement

The self-study's findings and suggestions for improvement are summarized in Chapter 9. What follows are highlights of those suggestions<sup>1</sup>:

1. While respecting individual campus cultures, the *Suggestion on All-Campuses Integration* calls for further integration across the four locations of basic policies and procedures through wide community involvement, and for their subsequent prominent publication.
2. The *Suggestion on Program Assessment* further promotes the culture of program assessment across the College-Institute through ensuring that there continues to be: (a) updating by faculty of the definitions of their programs' missions and learning outcomes and communication of the value of both to their students and to other HUC-JIR stakeholders; (b) term-by-term assessment data collection in a timely, conscientious, and consistent manner; (c) analysis of assessment data provided to all programs on an annual basis; and (d) annual documentation of how the results have been used to create educational innovations.
3. The *Suggestion on System Development and Planning* calls for assurance that the self-study findings be integrated into the current strategic planning process and that the Governance Committee clarifies roles of committees of the Board as they pertain to setting institutional priorities and resource allocation. Several Self-Study Working Groups independently called for increased collaboration of financial and academic planning processes and results.

## Comprehensive Recommendations

A synthetic review of all the suggestions for improvement listed in Chapter 9 resulted in five comprehensive recommendations. It is these recommendations that College-Institute commits to implement and report on in its 2018 Periodic Review Report.

1. Show evidence that each program has updated its program learning outcomes and continues to implement a system of assessment based on them.
2. Each administrative unit and educational program will create brief annual reports that articulate goals, include innovations introduced in the prior year, assessment of recent performance, and propose innovations related to assessment results.
3. Show evidence of regularizing the periodic review, updating, and reporting to the President's Cabinet concerning the College-Institute handbooks including those for the Board of Governors, Boards of Overseers, Faculty (including policies and procedures for promotion and tenure), Personnel, and Students.
4. Develop and implement tools to assess the efficacy of our financial aid policies.
5. Make policies and protocols more easily accessible on line.

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted additionally that an Academic Vision Statement has been written and should be updated through wide participation when the new president decides.