



## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

### Location Recommendation

#### for HUC-JIR's Restructured and Reimagined Rabbinical School

By Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D., HUC-JIR Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Provost

February 1, 2022 — 1 Adar I 5782 (Updated February 15, 2022)

*The following recommendation reflects the collaborative work and collective input of the President, President's Cabinet, Provost's Office, and Rabbinical School leadership.<sup>1</sup> The recommendation has been informed by over 350 stakeholder interviews (including alumni, board members, supporters, staff, faculty, and students) and other data gained through the strategic planning process begun in February of 2020. Our views were shaped by discussions among the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, Internal Working Group, Faculty Consultation Group, and the 2021 [Strategic Planning Task Forces](#). Individuals in these groups do not necessarily support this recommendation, and some are opposed to it. The groups are listed here to acknowledge our appreciation for the varied voices that have informed our thinking.*

For nearly 150 years, since 1875, the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati has been educating Reform rabbis who—in the words of founder Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise—are bringing “light, truth, love, and righteousness” to the world.<sup>2</sup> For 100 years, since 1922, the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York has been training rabbis who—in the words of the founder Rabbi Stephen S. Wise—embrace the “different constructions of Judaism and of Jewish life” with an open, liberal spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Following the merger of HUC and JIR in 1950, a West Coast location opened in Los Angeles in 1954,<sup>4</sup> and then in 1963 the foundation was laid for what is now a thriving Taube Family Campus in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> From these four campuses, HUC-JIR has been raising up generations of Jewish leaders—rabbis, cantors, educators, Jewish nonprofit leaders, and scholars—to preserve and pass on our priceless Jewish heritage while building vibrant Jewish communities of meaning and purpose in North America, Israel, and around the globe.<sup>6</sup>

Each of our campus cities has its advantages and disadvantages, both as places to live and as places to deliver on the mission of the College-Institute. On every campus, we have field-leading faculty and top-notch staff who work hard to provide our students with a first-rate

education. Outstanding graduates from all our campuses go forth far and wide to serve the Jewish people with dedication and distinction.

### **Continual Questions about the Best Site for Our Seminary**

Since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where we should be doing this vital work has been a matter of contention. According to Dr. Michael Meyer, shortly after Isaac M. Wise died, questions arose as to whether a school training North American liberal rabbis should continue to be situated in Cincinnati: “In 1900 there was by no means general agreement that the Queen City was still the best site for a rabbinical seminary.”<sup>7</sup> In 1921, Louis Grossmann, former principal of the Cincinnati Institute, presented HUC’s Board of Governors with a proposal to open up branches for training teachers and attracting future rabbis outside of Cincinnati. He argued: “An academic institution must be near the life of the people and a Jewish school must be in constant and intimate touch with it.”<sup>8</sup>

Over a hundred years later, this debate continues. In a September 2020 strategic planning memo, Dr. Gary Zola notes that for the past forty years, “the idea of consolidating HUC on one or two campuses has been discussed seriously and repeatedly.” He chronicles how zealous advocates for each stateside campus successfully resisted any proposed changes to the structure of HUC-JIR’s three campus Rabbinical School in the 1980s, the early 1990s, and again after the economic collapse in 2008-2009.<sup>9</sup>

Given this history, why would the current HUC-JIR administration again raise the seemingly intractable issue of the configuration and location of the Rabbinical School? Simply put, it would be irresponsible for us not to do so.

### **Why Call the Question Now?**

With dwindling RMAC dues and persistent deficits,<sup>10</sup> plus downward enrollment trends<sup>11</sup> and predictions about the future of American Judaism and higher education,<sup>12</sup> we are compelled to confront the question—challenging as it may be—of whether or not the status quo of our three full residential rabbinical programs is sustainable.

If we continue spreading our limited, precious resources—students, faculty, and funding—so thinly across our campuses, before long we will risk being able to deliver on our mission, much less achieve our strategic goals for our Rabbinical School, and hence for the entire institution:

- (1) **Educational excellence**, which means fostering a robust academic life for our faculty and students in vibrant communities of learning; *and*
- (2) **Student support**, which requires having sufficient resources to provide our students with all they need to grow and thrive; *and*

(3) **Expanding our impact**, which includes maintaining outstanding programs that will continue to attract high quality students in sufficient numbers to meet the diversifying leadership needs of the Reform movement and the Jewish people; *and*

(4) **Fiscal sustainability**, which depends on inspiring philanthropy and managing our resources with fiscal prudence to sustain the institution.

Viewed from a different vantage point, the multiple forces compelling us to make change also **open up opportunities to reimagine what we do and to dream of how we might achieve our loftiest aspirations**. The administration is approaching the challenges at hand with reverence for our past, judicious concern for the present, and optimism about our future.

### **The Recommendation**

**We recommend restructuring HUC-JIR’s residential rabbinical program in Los Angeles and New York and reimagining rabbinical education on our historic Cincinnati campus.**

The “Recommendation for Restructuring HUC-JIR’s Rabbinical School” memo outlines the key factors that influenced our proposal to field two residential rabbinical programs instead of three. After concluding that consolidation is the key first step needed to enable us to begin addressing our financial shortfall while also strengthening our Rabbinical School, we asked: which locations are best for rabbinical formation? The present “Location Recommendation” explains the variables we evaluated before recommending the restructuring of HUC-JIR’s rabbinical school in New York and Los Angeles. This document also sketches out our initial plans for the design and development of a low-residency clergy program and other offerings that will allow us not only to maintain, but to expand rabbinical school education in Cincinnati.

### **Overview**

- I. **Key Variables for Assessing the Implications of Change to the Rabbinical School:**
  - a. Impact of Proposed Changes on HUC-JIR’s Other Schools
  - b. Breadth and Depth of the Surrounding Jewish Community
  - c. Benefits of Nearby Jewish Seminary and Academic Connections
  - d. Cost of Living and Other Factors that Influence Campus Preference
  - e. Implications of Rabbinical Job Placement Patterns
  
- II. **A Vision for Reimagined Rabbinical Education in Cincinnati**
  
- III. **Appendix:**
  - a. Five Scenarios
  - b. Location Questionnaire: Linking Location and Strategic Goals

### **Acknowledging Alternate Perspectives**

It is important to acknowledge that some people who share a deep commitment to the College-Institute will disagree with our recommendation. Different people will arrive at different conclusions about what is best for training rabbis and where the best place is to do that work.

It is important to emphasize that we can continue to provide high quality rabbinical education on any of our campuses—Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New York—or other places in the United States.

It is important to recognize from the outset Cincinnati offers many positive features that distinguish it from the other campuses. These include but are not limited to the following:

- In-person, on-demand access to the incomparable treasures of the Klau Library and the American Jewish Archives
- Experience of studying on a historic, multi-building campus
- Ability to take classes with students in the Pines School of Graduate Studies
- Opportunity to live in a Midwestern city with a low cost of living as well as a rich history and cultural life
- Sense of belonging to an engaged, close-knit Jewish community
- Exposure to a range of communal organizations through the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Service Learning Fellowship Program

What drives this recommendation is not a critique of any campus, but an evaluation of which two locations are best for rabbinical formation. Having concluded that our current three-campus structure is unsustainable and necessitates change, the question becomes: where should we situate residential rabbinical training? This recommendation is based on data collected over the past two years with hundreds of stakeholders and represents the collective educational and administrative expertise of the President's Cabinet, members of the Provost's Office, and Rabbinical School leadership.

We are making this hard call now, rather than waiting until we are forced to make emergency decisions. This will allow us to implement our decisions over a multi-year time frame in a deliberate, sensitive manner that is consistent with our Jewish values.

### **Key Variables for Assessing the Implications of Change to the Rabbinical School**

The administration's recommendation developed through an extensive assessment process that started with the consideration of a range of options for how and where we might operate the Rabbinical School, including:

- Maintain our current structure with a residential rabbinical program on all three campuses: Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and New York
- Consolidate the three residential rabbinical programs in one location: Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago
- Consolidate the Rabbinical School to two sites: Cincinnati and Los Angeles; Cincinnati and New York; New York and Los Angeles

- Following the Year-In-Israel, offer both a four-year program on one campus and the option to spend years 2-3 on the main campus and years 4-5 on a satellite campus

After narrowing these options to five scenarios (Appendix A), a process of data collection and financial analysis then ensued in order to estimate the economic impact of various changes that the College-Institute might make to achieve our goals and arrive at a balanced budget by fiscal year 2026. As part of this process, we produced a Location Questionnaire that links multiple components of vibrant learning communities to our four strategic goals (Appendix B) as a way to generate metrics to evaluate and compare the campus cities according to the criteria deemed most important for rabbinical education and the larger mission of HUC-JIR. The discussion below summarizes some of the most relevant information gleaned from this process.

<b>Impact of Proposed Changes on HUC-JIR’s Other Schools</b>
--

One key consideration in making our recommendation was the potential impact that changes to the Rabbinical School might have on our other schools. How might altering the Rabbinical School affect the other academic programs that are core to the College-Institute? How might any changes to the co-located programs alter rabbinical education and the student experience at HUC-JIR?

Impact on Other Schools	
Changes in...	Would affect these schools
Cincinnati	Pines School of Graduate Studies
Los Angeles	Loucheim School of Judaic Studies Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management School of Education
New York	Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music

1. New York: According to our assessment, removing the Rabbinical School from New York would have the most detrimental impact on the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, which relies on the large number of cantors and Reform synagogues in the greater New York area for faculty and fieldwork placements. We contend that severing the synergies between the rabbinical and cantorial programs would be detrimental to

them both, and the opposite of what we aim to accomplish by conceiving of the two schools as the heart of the “Seminary of Progressive and Reform Judaism.”

2. Los Angeles: Removing the Rabbinical School faculty from the Skirball campus in Los Angeles would seriously jeopardize the longstanding and fruitful partnership between HUC-JIR and USC. The Jerome H. Louchheim School of Judaic Studies yields about \$1.5 million in annual net revenue after all direct expenses are covered, and it adds a valued component to the HUC-JIR/LA faculty experience (see below).

Since the option of obtaining a dual degree with USC attracts students to the Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management, this feature of the program would be difficult to replicate were the Zelikow School to be moved out of Los Angeles.

Moving the School of Education out of Los Angeles likely would involve the loss of the DeLeT program for California day school teachers. The residential MEdL (Masters of Educational Leadership), with some programmatic adjustments, could move to New York. The EMA, our on-line Executive MA in Educational Leadership, would largely be unaffected.

3. Cincinnati: No longer having residential rabbinical students in Cincinnati would have a detrimental impact on the Pines School of Graduate Studies as it currently exists. While we contend that we can offer graduate programs wherever we have faculty, we recognize that having regular in-person access to the Klau and AJA is a defining feature of the current Pines School. We intend to explore future possibilities for the Pine School. There would be limited if any impact on our joint Ph.D. program with the University of Cincinnati in Modern Jewish History and Culture.

This discussion raises a corollary consideration of how the co-located academic programs on a given campus impact the rabbinical students who study and socialize with their non-rabbinical classmates. In Cincinnati, rabbinical students take many of their classes with Pines graduate students who bring a singularly academic focus; and they benefit from relationships formed with the non-Jewish students who make up the majority of the Pines School student body.

In New York and Los Angeles, rabbinical students study with classmates who will become colleagues serving the Jewish community as cantors, educators, and organizational leaders. At a recent meeting of the President’s Rabbinic Council, Rabbinical School alumni attested to the value of the intellectual “cross-pollination” and the personal and professional bonds formed with others aspiring to become Jewish professionals.

### **Importance of the Surrounding Jewish Community**

In evaluating the campus cities, another central question we considered was: In what ways does the size and character of the surrounding Jewish community matter for rabbinical

formation? The chart below provides demographic data about the size of the Jewish population in the three campus cities, along with the number of Reform synagogues, rabbis, and cantors.<sup>13</sup>

Breadth & Depth of Jewish Community					
Campus City	Jewish Population and rank 1950	Jewish Population and rank 2019	URJ Congregations within 50 Miles	CCAR Rabbis	ACC Cantors
Cincinnati	22,000 18 <sup>th</sup> largest	27,000 41 <sup>st</sup> largest	6	54	2
Los Angeles	225,000 4 <sup>th</sup> largest	519,200 2 <sup>nd</sup> largest	37	190	21
New York City	2 million Largest	1.58 million Largest	105	258	80

What difference do these statistics make for rabbinical students?

1. Fieldwork Opportunities: A core component of rabbinical training at HUC-JIR, and a feature that distinguishes us from other seminaries, is our supervised fieldwork program, which involves both student pulpits and internships.

- a. Student Pulpits

When students receive a pulpit placement, they travel to Jewish communities across the country to serve as the sole clergy presence, usually on a bi-weekly or monthly basis. Pulpits provide a valuable learning experience for our students and represent a significant way that, since its founding, HUC has helped sustain Jewish life across the country. Our student pulpits span from Juneau, Alaska to Windsor, Ontario; Parkersburg, West Virginia; Cutchogue, New York; and many small towns in between.

Without a residential rabbinical program in Cincinnati, students in New York and Los Angeles could continue to serve some of the current Cincinnati pulpits; and future low-residency students could do the same. The nearly 60% decline in the size of the rabbinical student body in Cincinnati over the past 15 years (from 66 students in 2006 to 27 this year) has meant that some of the pulpits that HUC-JIR served in the past no longer have student rabbis. New York students currently serve at least two

pulpits formerly held by Cincinnati students. We will be identifying ways to support small communities in the central region and across the county.

b. Internships

Another invaluable component of an HUC-JIR Rabbinical School education is the learning and growth that take place through supervised internships. In congregational internships, students join a larger clergy team on a weekly basis and have the chance to experience the array of services, programs, and activities that take place in metropolitan and suburban congregations in or near our campus cities. Non-congregational internships offer exposure to an array of different types of Jewish organizations—like Hillel or JDC—and professional mentorship from the organizations’ leaders.

The presence of a larger number of Reform synagogues and other Jewish organizations in the general vicinity of the Los Angeles and New York campuses means that there are more supervised internships available in those cities compared to Cincinnati.

c. Differences between the Campuses

Fieldwork requirements and opportunities differ on the three campuses, an example of the curricular disparities that mark our current multi-campus system. In Cincinnati, generous funding from the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati created the Service Learning Program,<sup>14</sup> which places students in different fellowships throughout the city. Students are required to serve in a fellowship placement during the school year and summer throughout their four years, in addition to serving in student pulpits. In Los Angeles, students tend to serve a pulpit for a year or two and then move on to an internship. In New York, fewer students serve in pulpits, more serve in internships, and many take on additional jobs to earn extra income.

d. Plans for a Streamlined Fieldwork Program

With a consolidated Rabbinical School, we would standardize requirements and appoint one national Fieldwork Coordinator to work with local coordinators to ensure a consistently high level of oversight and training for students and their supervisors. With adequate financial aid, we would seek to limit employment to supervised fieldwork only, which would allow students to benefit from the learning that takes place outside the classroom, while still having ample time for their studies.

2. Mentors: The size of the Jewish community also matters for the availability of local mentors.

Formal and informal mentors in the field play an important role in rabbinical formation, providing support and guidance while students are in school and then throughout their careers. Students in all our campus cities develop meaningful relationships with the rabbis and other Jewish professionals in each area who are committed to HUC-JIR and who give of themselves generously to our students as adjunct faculty, clinical fieldwork

supervisors, and mentors. A bigger Jewish community simply offers a larger and more diverse pool of local mentors.

3. Lived Jewish Experiences: During their time in rabbinical school, students develop themselves Jewishly and as Jewish leaders through their lived religious experiences and their participation in the surrounding Jewish community. This facet of the campus cities is important to faculty and staff as well.

Living in Cincinnati enables students to be part of a tight knit, engaged Jewish community where sizable numbers of people show up for cultural and religious events throughout the city. Students have the opportunity to get to know the many dedicated families who are stalwarts of the committed Cincinnati Jewish community as they experience the rewards of Jewish life in a smaller city.

The Jewish communities in New York and Los Angeles are larger and more diverse, which offers more exposure to a fuller expression of Jewish peoplehood and a richer array of Jewish expression for the students who take advantage of these assets.

**Benefits of Nearby Jewish Seminaries and Academic Connections**

Nearby Jewish Seminaries and Academic Connections		
Campus City	Jewish Seminaries	Academic Partnerships
Cincinnati	None	University of Cincinnati Xavier University
Los Angeles	American Jewish University Academy for Jewish Religion, CA	University of Southern California American Jewish University
New York	Jewish Theological Seminary Academy for Jewish Religion, NY Chovevei Torah, Maharat, Hadar + Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (Philly)	New York University Jewish Theological Seminary NY Theological Consortium (inc. Union Theological Seminary)

Each campus city contains various types of institutions of higher learning that enrich the HUC-JIR experience for students, faculty, and the institution as a whole in different ways.

1. Jewish Seminaries: The presence of other Jewish seminaries in New York and Los Angeles differentiates these two cities from Cincinnati, which lacks a nearby Jewish seminary.

- a. Significance for Students

In New York, some students take courses at The Jewish Theological Seminary; in Los Angeles, Ziegler rabbinical students from AJU regularly take courses on the Skirball campus, especially during the summer Beit Midrash. Our students study and form friendships and future professional contacts with other Jewish seminary students in formal and informal settings: in classes and in worship services, in social gatherings and community events. These experiences help prepare them for serving in diverse, pluralist Jewish communities.

Since there are no Jewish seminaries in or near Cincinnati, Cincinnati students engage with other Jewish seminary students mainly through optional extra-curricular experiences like fellowships with the iCenter, AIPAC, and Clal.

- b. Institutional Advantages

During Covid, following an initial conference sponsored by the Jim Joseph Foundation at the Hartman Institute in New York, HUC-JIR has convened a new roundtable of the five legacy institutions (AJU, Hebrew College, JTS, and RRC) to build collaborative relationships.

These relationships are particularly salient to our work in New York and Los Angeles, where physical proximity to JTS and AJU puts HUC-JIR in a better position to develop expanded institutional partnerships. Many in the wider Jewish world are waiting for us to do more in this regard. This is particularly important as we anticipate a future in which denominational attachment is weakens further and the institutions that have formed stronger collaborative partnerships will be more likely to survive and thrive.

- c. Advantages for Recruitment

The location of other liberal rabbinical schools also makes a difference for recruitment. Because there are multiple other non-Orthodox rabbinical school options on the West Coast and East Coast (not only in New York, but in Philadelphia and Boston), rabbinical students who want to live in those geographic areas and may not feel as committed to a particular movement,<sup>15</sup> might opt to attend another seminary were HUC-JIR not located in either region.<sup>16</sup> Some see being in the Midwest as an advantage, since there is not a competing rabbinical school in the region. From our perspective, the higher recruitment risk involved in the loss of students to other cities outweighs the benefits. We will continue to actively recruit students from the Midwest.

2. Non-Jewish Seminaries: Another difference between the campus cities is the greater number of non-Jewish seminaries in Los Angeles and New York compared to Cincinnati.
  - a. In New York, some students take advantage of taking classes through the New York Theological Consortium, especially at Union Theological Seminary.
  - b. In Los Angeles, students gain knowledge about other faiths through their required August intensives on Christianity and Islam; and they form interfaith friendships through activities like the annual InterSem retreat that brings together Los Angeles area seminary students from St John's Seminary, Fuller Seminary, Claremont School of Theology, and Muslim students studying at Bayan.
  - c. While Cincinnati does not offer a comparable number of non-Jewish seminaries, as noted above, rabbinical students in Cincinnati benefit from relationships developed with their non-Jewish Pines classmates.
  - d. Most HUC-JIR rabbinical students on all campuses also gain interfaith experiences through their Clinical Pastoral Education training.
  
3. Academic Partnerships: The presence of other nearby academic institutions also differentiates the campus cities and the experiences of students and faculty.
  - a. Degree Opportunities for Students  
 Rabbinical students in Los Angeles frequently take advantage of the dual degree or certificate opportunities at the Zelikow School of Nonprofit Management and/or joint MEdL degree in the School of Education. Some students in Cincinnati take advantage of the opportunity to earn a Masters in Educational Administration with a Specialization in Jewish Education through a joint program between HUC-JIR and Xavier University. Occasionally, students in New York have earned concurrent degrees or certificates at nearby educational institutions, such as an Advanced Professional Certificate in Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations and Social Work degree at NYU; some have started doctoral programs at Columbia University while completing their rabbinical studies.
  
  - b. Advantages for Faculty  
 Faculty on all campuses maintain collegial connections with neighboring academic peers and use their academic resources. Many of the HUC-JIR/LA faculty enjoy the mix of teaching aspiring Jewish professionals at HUC-JIR as well as undergraduates at USC through the Louchheim School. They develop relationships with their USC colleagues through participating in the larger, more vibrant intellectual community available across the street.

Likewise, physical proximity facilitates interactions with University of Cincinnati colleagues. Plus, HUC-JIR has two joint faculty positions with Xavier University: a Xavier professor teaches 2 classes each year at HUC-JIR (in addition to 3 at Xavier), and an HUC-JIR professor teaches 2 classes at Xavier and 3 at HUC-JIR.

Professors on the other campuses occasionally teach in a more limited capacity at nearby institutions as well.

c. Current and Future Institutional Relationships

As described above, the College-Institute has formal relationships of varying degrees with other academic institutions in each campus city.

In Los Angeles, HUC-JIR and USC have enjoyed a close, mutually beneficial relationship for over 50 years, thanks to the Louchheim School and Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management (formerly School of Jewish Communal Service). With the strengthening of ties over the last 18 months, we see the potential to grow our impact through new ventures with USC. Because USC is an internationally recognized, top-tier institution of higher education whose academic credits are more easily transferred to other institutions, we are eager to explore new academic program opportunities that might include an undergraduate study abroad program, summer classes, and new graduate school partnerships.

In New York, we are actively engaged in collaborative discussions with JTS and Union Theological Seminary, both located in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Manhattan. The administration is eager to explore and expand possible joint ventures with these venerable institutions and has been looking into possibly relocating to a smaller footprint near these academic partners.

Even without a full time, residential rabbinical program in Cincinnati, the potential exists for growing our partnership with the University of Cincinnati in exciting ways that would significantly expand the impact of our academic collections (Klau, AJA, and our Skirball Museum), make the most of our real estate assets, deploy those current tenured faculty who choose to remain in Cincinnati, and build on the overall combined strengths of the two institutions.

<b>Cost of Living and Other Factors that Influence Campus Preference</b>
--

Prior to 2020, when students enrolled in the Rabbinical School, they filled out a campus preference form in which they listed their first and second choice campuses and provided reasons for their preferences. Until then, the administration assigned students in a way that sought to maintain a fairly even distribution over the three campuses, even if that meant giving some students their second choice. Campus preference forms give us information about which campuses students prefer most often and why.

After a faculty task force chaired by Rabbinical School Director Dvora Weisberg issued a recommendation in Fall 2020,<sup>17</sup> the administration has followed a campus preference system that now allows students to attend the residential rabbinical program of their choice.

1. Patterns in the Campus Preference Data

A review of Rabbinical School campus preference data from 2008 to 2021 (see Appendix C) shows that New York was the first-choice campus most often (7 times, plus once tied with LA), followed by Los Angeles (3 times, plus once tied with NY), and Cincinnati (3 times).

The three years when more students requested the Cincinnati campus correspond to the five-year period (FY 2013-17) when a generous grant from the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati provided financial incentives not offered to students on other campuses: \$12,000 in tuition support, plus \$4,000 for fellowships. Note that even with the concentrated attention of a Cincinnati-based National Office of Recruitment and Admissions staff, significant supplemental funding, and a lower cost of living, Cincinnati only attracted the most students for three years (and during these three years, more students combined chose the other campuses).

2. Reported Reasons for Campus Preferences

The “Campus Placement for the Rabbinical School” task force report explains some of the factors that tend to influence campus preference: “The considerations most often cited are familiarity and family considerations. Students often mention their desire to be close to parents, siblings, and grandparents. Students with partners are concerned about the educational or employment needs of their partner. Some cite prior exposure to a particular campus, or friends and mentors who are students or alumni of that campus. Another factor may be other programs based on a particular campus.”

In an increasingly polarized political climate where state legislatures are exerting greater influence over what rights its citizens can expect and what type of culture prevails, some HUC-JIR students, especially LGBTQ+ students, report that they prefer the coastal campuses because they perceive California and New York to be more welcoming and inclusive compared to Ohio. This suggests that our efforts to attract a diverse student body might be more difficult in Cincinnati than in Los Angeles or New York.

3. Cost of Living and Quality of Life

One of the oft-cited benefits of Cincinnati is its quality of life and lower cost of living. According to the government mandated Cost of Attendance calculations posted on the HUC-JIR website based on student reported data, the annual cost of attendance is about \$52,500 in Cincinnati compared to about \$59,000 in Los Angeles and New York, a difference of approximately \$6,500 per year.<sup>18</sup> We recognize that the relatively small gap in cost of attendance does not account for a likely larger difference in quality of life. This is particularly important for students who have families.

Given all the factors that go into cost of living, Cincinnati clearly is more affordable and more desirable by this measure. This makes a big difference for students who enter HUC-JIR burdened with significant student debt and for students who face financial challenges for other reasons.

Of all the factors that distinguish the campus cities, cost of living is one of the few differentiators that the College-Institute could offset through increased scholarships and stipends, something we believe philanthropists would be more eager to support if we made structural changes to improve our mission-impact.

**Implications of Rabbinical Job Placement Patterns**

When contemplating a restructuring of the Rabbinical School, one of the concerns often raised is that without a residential rabbinical program in Cincinnati, we will not have rabbis interested in serving in the Midwest. The chart below demonstrates that students on the coasts take their first jobs in the Central region roughly as frequently as they stay in their campus region.<sup>19</sup>

First Rabbinical Placement by Region				
Campus City	Percentage ordained on a specific campus serving in a particular region in their first placement (2012 – 2021)			
	Central	Eastern	Western	National or International
<b>Cincinnati</b>	58%	29%	8%	5%
<b>Los Angeles</b>	35%	20%	41%	4%
<b>New York</b>	43%	42%	12%	2%

This chart reinforces anecdotal evidence that indicates that where a student goes to school does not necessarily inform where they serve as a rabbi in their first job after ordination. Rabbinical students come to HUC-JIR from across the country and bring with them experiences of Jewish communities, large and small, urban and suburban, denominational and non-denominational.

The ordination class of 2021 proves that one need not attend rabbinical school in a certain region in order to be willing and able to serve in that region:

- One Cincinnati 2021 graduate is serving a congregation in West Hollywood, and another in Manhattan.
- A New York graduate is working at a Hillel in British Columbia.
- A Los Angeles graduate is the solo rabbi of a congregation in Topeka, Kansas.

A few snapshots of the Los Angeles ordination class of 2022 further confirm that campus attendance does not necessarily determine where students take their first jobs:

- One student who grew up in California, went to college in Washington, DC, and attended the Los Angeles campus, recently accepted a position in Manhattan.
- Another student who grew up in California, went to college in Wisconsin, and attended the Los Angeles campus, will be heading to a congregation in Florida.
- One person who grew up in Cincinnati, went to college in Ohio, and came to Los Angeles for rabbinical school, will return to the Midwest to serve a synagogue in Kansas City.
- Another who grew up in Omaha, went to college in Vermont, and moved to Los Angeles for rabbinical school, will remain in Los Angeles after ordination for a first job.

Rabbinical school placement data thus lessens the importance that some place on regionalism as a key reason to retain a three-campus residential Rabbinical School. Students will go where good jobs are available, regardless of which campus they attended.

### **A Vision of Reimagined Rabbinical Education in Cincinnati**

The College-Institute remains committed to serving all of North America Jewish life, not just the three regions in which our campuses currently are situated. We are eager to develop ways to train our clergy students for service across the country, recognizing that there are multiple distinctive cultural regions across North America: not just the Northeast, West Coast, Midwest, but also Southern Florida, the Deep South, Pacific Northwest, Toronto/Canada, the Southwest, the mid-Atlantic, and more.<sup>20</sup>

One way to achieve the goal of serving North American Judaism without an expanded physical footprint is through the design and development of an innovative, high quality, low-residency clergy program based in Cincinnati that could connect students to URJ congregations across the country and other Jewish institutions in the communities in which students reside. A low-residency program for rabbinical and cantorial formation would increase HUC-JIR's capacity to educate clergy who are prepared to build and sustain thriving progressive Jewish life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Using a combination of online classes and in-person intensives in Cincinnati taught by faculty who remain in Cincinnati and faculty from other campuses, this program would share the same goals of academic excellence, professional and spiritual formation, leadership development, and personal integrity as our full-time residential program. The program design would build on our success with more than ten years of running a low-residency Executive MA program in Jewish education (EMA), our extensive experience running residential rabbinical and cantorial programs, and recent learnings about online education as a result of the pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

This plan for low-residency education centered in Cincinnati is part of a larger vision of a reimagined Cincinnati campus with intellectually and culturally vibrant rabbinical education and other opportunities for learning and study throughout the year to serve HUC-JIR, the Reform movement, and the wider scholarly and Jewish worlds. This proposal aims to significantly expand the number of people who visit the Cincinnati campus and experience all it has to offer.

We are eager to build out and secure funding for an array of exciting educational experiences on the historical Cincinnati campus:

- ***Location for In-Person Intensives for our Low-Residency Clergy Program:*** The centerpiece of a newly designed low-residency clergy program will be the in-person learning in Cincinnati for multi-week intensives several times a year.
- ***HUC-JIR First-Year Orientation Program:*** All first-year rabbinical, cantorial and education students will start their HUC-JIR journeys on the Cincinnati campus, learning about Reform Judaism, being exposed to our academic treasures, and getting to know one another before departing for the Year-In-Israel.
- ***Cincinnati Summer Session:*** Creative and dynamic summer intensives for HUC-JIR students and other seminary students that are intentionally designed to make the most of the history, academic resources, and cultural richness of the Cincinnati campus.<sup>22</sup>
- ***Student Research Fellowships:*** Fellowship funding to allow HUC-JIR students to spend an extended period of time doing thesis research at the Klau and AJA.
- ***HUC-JIR Faculty Gatherings:*** Periodic faculty gatherings in Cincinnati will provide opportunities for study and sharing, strengthening academic and collegial connections, and advancing institutional projects and priorities.
- ***Alumni Homecoming:*** Created in conjunction with our Reform movement professional association partners—CCAR, ACC, AJRE and NATA—homecoming events will help us build community and provide on-going professional enrichment for our alumni.

Through these programs, we seek to make Cincinnati a hub for vibrant learning and community building year round. We picture people from across the country poring over documents in the AJA reading room and perusing the stacks in the Klau Library. We hear cantorial students leading worship in the Scheuer Chapel, and hallways humming with conversations as rabbinical students explore new ideas and grapple with age-old controversies. We envision EMA students seated at picnic tables, mining ancient texts for contemporary meaning. We imagine faculty seated in the Adirondack chairs on the front lawn sharing syllabi. We see religious school children on a scavenger hunt in the Skirball Museum. We picture alumni gathering under the shade of the trees that welcome visitors to the Cincinnati campus.

For the HUC-JIR administration, this is what a reimagined HUC-JIR Cincinnati campus looks like. This is why we are recommending consolidating the residential rabbinical program to create two larger, more dynamic communities of learning in New York and Los Angeles and maintaining rabbinical education in Cincinnati through the development of a low-residency clergy program and other innovative educational opportunities. Our proposal aims to make the most of our priceless resources and our celebrated past as we move toward an inspiring and sustainable future.

## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A: Five Rabbinical School Scenarios

*These are the five scenarios that the Cabinet modeled in order to assess the financial implications of various proposed changes.*

<b>Scenario 1</b>	<b>3 Residential Rabbinical Programs</b> Maintain residential rabbinical programs in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and New York and situate a future low-residency rabbinical program in Cincinnati. No programmatic or structural changes to the other co-located programs are in this scenario.
<b>Scenario 2</b>	<b>3 Flex Residential Rabbinical Programs</b> Maintain residential rabbinical programs in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and New York and situate a future low-residency rabbinical program in Cincinnati. Based on recent campus preference patterns, this scenario assumes a smaller student body in Cincinnati, and hence a smaller faculty and administrative staff.
<b>Scenario 3</b>	<b>2 Residential Rabbinical Programs</b> Transition to two residential rabbinical programs, located in New York and Los Angeles, and situate a future low-residency rabbinical program in Cincinnati.
<b>Scenario 4</b>	<b>1 ½ Residential Rabbinical Programs</b> Transition to a single 4-year residential rabbinical school in New York, where all rabbinical students would study in years 2-3. Students would have the option of spending years 4 and 5 in Los Angeles, where they could earn a MEdL (Master's in Educational Leadership) in the School of Education and/or certificate or Master's in Jewish Nonprofit Management in the Zelikow School. Situate a low-residency rabbinical program in Cincinnati.
<b>Scenario 5</b>	<b>1 Residential Rabbinical Program</b> Transition to a single residential rabbinical school in New York and situate a low-residency rabbinical program in Cincinnati.

### APPENDIX B: Location Questionnaire

*Alongside work on the financial model, we sought concrete ways to measure various features of the campus cities that have an impact on rabbinical education. The Location Questionnaire links multiple components of vibrant learning communities to our four strategic goals. This chart presents a summary of the topics addressed, which in the document are accompanied by a series of questions for investigation and analysis.*

<b>Goal 1: Educational Excellence</b>	<b>Goal 2: Student Experience</b>	<b>Goal 3: Expanding our Impact</b>	<b>Goal 4: Financial Sustainability</b>
Fostering robust academic culture	Local Jewish community: vibrancy and cohesion	Recruitment impact	Access to donors
Access to scholarly resources	Cost of living	Access to Jewish institutions	Loss of existing donors
Ease of access to other kinds of communities	Distractions	Training for all of Jewish North America	Philanthropic return on investment
Academic and Jewish institutional partnerships	Access to mentors and fostering professional relationships	Educational impact	Cost of operations
Flow of academic talent	Fostering diversity		Talent availability and cost
Ability to attract and retain great Jewish faculty	Access to support services		

**APPENDIX C: Campus Preference Data (for Year 2 stateside campus)**

*Data compiled from campus preference forms by Rabbi Dvora Weisberg.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cincinnati</b> First choice 21%	<b>Los Angeles</b> First Choice 29%	<b>New York</b> First choice 57%
2008	6	6	19
2009	8	13	10
2010	9	13	18
2011	7	9	9
2012	9	4	15
2013	7	8	15
2014	12	7	10
2015	10	6	7
2016	15	11	10
2017	10	12	11
2018	8	11	12
2019	2	8	11
2020	4	6	12
2021	7	12	7

---

<sup>1</sup> The following individuals are in support of this recommendation: President Andrew Rehfeld, Ph.D.; members of the President Cabinet: Rabbi Andrea Weiss, Ph.D. (Provost); Amy Goldberg (Chief Financial Officer); Melissa Greenberg (Vice President of Institutional Development and Chief Philanthropy Officer); Josh Holo, Ph.D. (Dean, Los Angeles Campus); Rabbi David Adelson (Dean, New York Campus); Rabbi Naamah Kelman (Dean, Jerusalem Campus); Rabbi Adam Allenberg (Senior Director Office of Recruitment and Admissions); Rabbi Andrew Goodman (Director of Student Support); Nicole Jones (Global Director of Human Resources); Michelle Slocum (Assistant Vice President of Finance and Controller); Serena Young (Assistant Vice President of Institutional Advancement); along with the following members of the Rabbinical School leadership and Provost's Office: Rabbi Dvora Weisberg, Ph.D. (Director of the Rabbinical School and Los Angeles Program Director); Rabbi Lisa Grant, Ph.D. (New York Rabbinical Program); Miriam Heller Stern, Ph.D. (Vice Provost for Educational Strategy); Sarah Benor, Ph.D. (Vice Provost).

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise at the second HUC ordination in 1884, from *The American Israelite* (July 4, 1884), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, from JIR's 1925 prospectus (quotation courtesy of Rabbi Shirley Idelson).

<sup>4</sup> The HUC-JIR Los Angeles campus expanded from a 2-year (years 2-3) to a 4-year rabbinical program (years 2-5) in 2000 and ordained its first class of rabbis in 2002.

<sup>5</sup> The Jerusalem campus started as a post-doctoral school of archaeological and biblical studies. It later became the home of the Year-In-Israel program for North American students (starting in 1970), the Israel Rabbinical Program (with the first ordination in 1980), and now several other educational programs.

<sup>6</sup> See the HUC-JIR [Mission Statement](#).

<sup>7</sup> Michael A. Meyer, "A Centennial History," in *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: At One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> September 8, 2020 memo from Rabbi Gary Zola to President Andrew Rehfeld. All memos from Dr. Zola and others were shared with Wellspring Consulting through the strategic planning data gathering process from June 2020 to February 2021.

<sup>10</sup> After average annual structural deficits of about \$1.5 million per year in FY 2010-20 and an operating deficit of nearly \$4 million in FY 2021, HUC-JIR faced a projected \$8.8 million dollar deficit in FY 2022. In 2006, support from URJ congregations through Reform Movement Affiliation Commitment dollars (RMAC formerly MUM) was over \$14 million per year, reflecting 35% of the HUC-JIR budget (\$19 million today adjusted for inflation). RMAC is projected at \$5.4 million for FY 2022 (12% of the budget) and is not expected to return to pre-COVID levels.

<sup>11</sup> See the "Recommendation for Restructuring" memo for more information about enrollment trends.

<sup>12</sup> For more on these broader trends, see Andrea Weiss, "What Calls the Question" Strategic Planning Memo (October 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Data come from Berman Jewish DataBank, US Jewish Population, 2019, and [American Jewish Yearbook](#), 1950, pp. 71-72. These sources, recommended by Dr. Bruce Phillips, reflect city population, not metro area population. The Cincinnati Community Study estimated the Jewish population of the metro area to be roughly 33,000.

<sup>14</sup> The remaining funds from the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati grant will be used to extend the fellowship program through the 2023-24 academic year. We anticipate that once the fellowship program concludes completely, most of the organizations will not initiate paid internships, but some of the Reform synagogues in Cincinnati might create or resume hiring rabbinical student interns.

<sup>15</sup> See the recent *Tablet Magazine* article, "[Beyond Conservative and Reform: the Rise of the Unaffiliated Synagogue](#)," which discusses how students today are attracted to institutions based less on ideology and more on their sense of community and spiritual vibrancy.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, we know of cantorial students who chose to go to the Academy for Jewish Religion in Los Angeles instead of moving to New York to attend the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, even when some recognize that the DFSSM is superior to AJR's cantorial program.

<sup>17</sup> The Rabbinical School Campus Placement Working Group included Rabbi Lisa Grant, Ph.D. (NY), Rabbi Jonathan Hecht, Ph.D. (CN), Dr. Sharon Koren (NY), Rabbi Mark Washofsky, Ph.D. (CN), Rabbi Dvora Weisberg, Ph.D. (Chair), Dr. Michael Zeldin (LA).

---

<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting while students in New York face the highest cost of living, they also receive higher salaries for their supervised fieldwork positions compared to their other classmates.

<sup>19</sup> Data compiled by Rabbinical School Director Dvora Weisberg and organized geographically by Sutanu Majdumdar, Manager of Institutional Research and Assessment.

<sup>20</sup> The insight about the distinctive cultural regions in the United States comes from Dr. Bruce Philips, HUC-JIR Professor of Sociology and Jewish Communal Service.

<sup>21</sup> We convened a team that has been working since the fall of 2021 to develop an initial vision for a low-residency clergy program. Members of that planning committee include Rabbi Adam Allenberg, Cantor Richard Cohn, Rabbi Lisa Grant, Ph.D., Dr. Lesley Litman, Dr. Miriam Heller Stern, and Rabbi Dvora Weisberg, Ph.D.

<sup>22</sup> While our students may live in three different regions of the U.S., our curriculum currently does not focus on teaching students to serve in particular parts of the country. The Cincinnati Summer Session could help train our students to work in an array of different Jewish communities by offering newly designed courses on relevant topics, like the sociology of the contemporary Jewish community and today's American religious landscape, the history of American Judaism, and a class on the texts and teachings of other faith traditions. Such courses could be supplemented with supervised summer internships in different parts of the country aimed to provide students with experience and motivation to want to serve as clergy in diverse types of communities across the country.