

THE MANDEL FELLOWS PROGRAM MANDATE

Rosenbaum, Director of the Jewish Museum in New York. They learned about the Riverway Project that has pioneered engagement of Jews in their 20s and 30s with the founder of that program, Rabbi Jeremy Morrison at Temple Israel in Boston.

From exploring the importance of mission and vision to examining the management issues of budgeting, fundraising, and administering a staff, the Tisch Fellows enhance their leadership capacity. Students also spend several hours each month working with a coach to aid their personal introspection and professional growth, and are asked to reflect on their development as leaders. They receive tuition for three years and an annual living stipend, which allows them more time to delve into their academics.

The diversity of the 13 Tisch Fellows to date reflects the broad reach that they will have as rabbinical leaders. Some are invested in a concern for the environment, as reflected in a senior sermon where **Joseph Skloot**, N'10, (see page 42) noted, "Our current ecological, social, and physiological situation demands action to redress the imbalance of ordinary and extraordinary in our lives." Others, like **Matthew Soffer**, N'10, are motivated by a strong commitment to social justice as seen in his interviews with great Jewish leaders of the 20th century (see page 19). **Nicole Roberts**, C'12, entered HUC-JIR with a track record of attracting Jews in their 20s and 30s to congregational life (see page 46), while **Yaron Kapitulnik**, N'10, (see page 35) is pioneering ways in which to affiliate the hundreds of thousands of Israelis living in the U.S., a project that he successfully coordinated at the 92nd Street Y in New York last year. "Being a Tisch Fellow," says **Rachel Joseph**, L'12 (see page 42), "means that I will have the opportunity to be an agent for change in other people's lives and lead them towards a vision of living a rich and full Jewish life."

This August, the Tisch Fellows spent three days concentrated on their personal theology at the first ever Tisch Shabbaton. Through study with Dr. Steven Cohen, Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, and Rabbi Debra Hachen, prayer services planned and facilitated by the students, and numerous opportunities for focus on personal spirituality, the Fellows returned to the new academic year with renewed excitement and commitment to becoming visionary rabbis and leaders. ■

SCHOOL OF SACRED MUSIC LEADERSHIP FELLOWS PROGRAM

Beginning in the Fall of 2009, cantorial students will be eligible for the School of Sacred Music Fellows Program. This new Program, made possible through a generous endowment of \$1.5 million by an anonymous donor, will provide full tuition and a living stipend for up to three students' third and fourth years of study. The SSM Leadership Fellows will integrate into the programming of the Tisch Leadership Fellowship Program, including seminars on congregational leadership, advanced text study, mentorship, visits to innovative venues of Jewish life, and presentations by leading scholars and practitioners.

“Everything I have learned as a Mandel Fellow over the past two years is going to make me a better rabbi,” says **Rena Polonsky**, N'10. “As an educator and a rabbi, I can educate, effect change, and help others transform and realize their own visions for Jewish life.” Polonsky is one of HUC-JIR's 23 Mandel Fellows to date – 15 based in Los Angeles and 8 in New York.

Now inaugurating its third cohort, the HUC-JIR Mandel Fellows program is enhancing the educational leadership capacity of selected rabbinical students who seek degrees in Jewish Education in a one-year intensive program in addition to their five-year rabbinical program. This initiative, created and sustained by Morton Mandel and the Mandel Foundation, is grounded in the assumption that vibrant synagogue communities are vital to Jewish life and that they require inspiring rabbinical leadership anchored in a vision for Jewish learning.

Professor Sara S. Lee serves as leader for this program, which includes three intensive seminars in California, Boston, and Israel that offer learning with faculty, presentations by guest scholars and practitioners, site visits to vision-guided institutions and encounters with innovative rabbis, and guided reflection on these experiences. She points to the outcomes of the Mandel Fellows Program, beginning with “the systematic, thoughtful inquiry into what Jewish life at its best might look like, and the encounter with visionary people and compelling institutions that offer proof to counter assumptions and arguments that suggest that the task is too complex and idealistic.” Lee explains that Mandel Fellows benefit from “the mentored development of personal stances about Judaism and Jewish life that are grounded in Jewish ideas and beliefs, and come to view all aspects of congregational growth as sites of substantive individual and communal Jewish growth.”

Melissa Zalkin Stollman, N'10, extols the program, saying, “We challenge one another to be more thoughtful, creative, and passionate about what we care about.” She brings the Mandel Fellows' perspectives back to her rabbinical classes, as well, explaining, “I find that I now pose the bigger, underlying questions rather than jumping immediately to find an answer.” Furthermore, educational theory strengthens her work with multiple generations in her student internships.

Polonsky values the guidance by mentors who are “committed to my development as a Jew, a leader, and as a change agent.” She recalls the unexpected insights gained by a visit to the mega church Grace Chapel, which “pushed me outside my comfort zone and presented a model that forced me to completely rethink the congregational model.”

The Mandel Fellows focus on four key areas in their seminars:

- Shaping a vision that guides a Jewish community's decisions, policies and programs;
- Discerning educational experiences that contribute to individual and

collective growth in a community as well as those that are miseducative;

- Nurturing community by sustaining values, engagement, and empowerment of members, participation, diversity, and a pervasive sense of purpose and responsibility for the community's welfare;
- Probing the purposes, practices, ideas, and values of Jewish peoplehood over time and its challenges for contemporary Jews.

Melissa Simon, N '10, credits the Mandel Fellows Program for transforming her vision, saying "I seek to serve a pulpit where there is an opportunity to be a part of a change process through dialogue, open communication, understanding of our collective history, and community-building educational initiatives." She has already begun to work on re-imagining congregational education as part of her internships at Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York City over the past two years.

Stollman concludes, "As I struggle with the essential question of the value of a Reform Jewish education and how to articulate a compelling answer that truly speaks to families, my perspective has evolved. Hearing from educators and rabbis who work in a multitude of settings has expanded my thinking, helping me realize that building community means bringing people into Judaism, not only into a synagogue." ■



The Mandel Fellows meet with leaders of Kibbutz Ketura during the Mandel Leadership Institute in Israel, June 2009.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: "WHAT'S NOT OK IS NOT CARING"

Jean Bloch Rosensaft

“Our students must emerge from their years at HUC-JIR with finely honed, successful strategies for social change and a vision for the core values of *tikkun olam*” says Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson, National Coordinator of Leadership Initiatives. “As they prepare to serve as leaders of communities, our students need to be aware of the ‘Obama shift’ and have a solid understanding of the new administration’s stances in foreign policy, Israel and the Middle East, church-state boundaries, racism, the environment, immigration, and inter-religious cooperation. They must learn how to apply Jewish ethical values to the key social issues of the day and, without being partisan, exert a call to action within their communities.”

To accomplish these goals, the Jerome K. Davidson Chair in Social Responsibility infuses the five-year rabbinical program throughout HUC-JIR’s four campuses in a myriad of ways. Faculty teaching Bible and Rabbinics include texts that speak to these issues. Students are required to take specialized courses in professional development, social action and economic justice, community organizing, leadership and organizational dynamics, and training in public policy advocacy. Prominent guest lecturers focus on social issues. Infield experience is gained through supervised internships and learning opportunities with the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) (see pages 25 and 41), Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) and Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, Rabbis for Human Rights, the Jewish Funds for Justice, PANIM, Hazon, the Coalition on the Environments and Jewish Life, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, One-LA/IAF (see page 39), Progressive Jewish Alliance, MAZON, Bet Tzedek, and programs for the homeless in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and the Soup Kitchen on the New York campus. Ongoing mentorship and self-reflective writing assignments are integrated with the requirement to implement an institutional change project to gain hands-on experience in leading social change in their congregational internship settings.

As part of their social responsibility requirement, rabbinical students **Ariana Silverman**, N '10, Tisch Fellow **Matthew Soffer**, N '10, and Schusterman Fellow **David Segal**, N '10, participated in a seminar during which they interviewed 20th-century Jewish leaders who have had a significant impact on society, including Rabbi David Saperstein (RAC), Ruth Messinger (AJWS and Darfur), Leonard Fein (hunger and Mazon), and Elie Wiesel (Soviet Jewry and genocide). Here is an excerpt from their interview with the renowned social activist Rabbi Arnold Wolf, C '41, z”l: