

Inspired by the Jewish values of *ahavat ger* (loving the stranger) and *keruv* (drawing near all who are far), HUC-JIR's rabbinical students are tackling the challenges of unaffiliation and intermarried families head-on. The core curriculum through the **Schusterman Outreach Weekend Institutes** puts them at the center of real life issues that they will confront as future congregational leaders: preparation for a wedding, studying for a conversion, meeting with interfaith couples about their struggles/paths, planning for a child's *bar/bat mitzvah*, dealing with holiday dilemmas, and more. They explore these issues through their core text courses, mentored infield experiences, and meetings with leading experts and rabbis who are applying a welcoming grass-roots effort.

At the Schusterman Institutes, students are required to delve into the most innovative outreach strategies designed to serve men and women, interfaith and interracial couples, converts, those in the process of conversion and religious seekers, Jews of color, and single adults and blended families, and assist them in making meaningful Jewish choices in the context of membership in a Reform congregation. At the same time, students learn how Reform congregations can

been enriched and already begun to figure out how to amend my approach to engagement work in my fieldwork position. Our congregants are looking for something and want to be involved in our community and we need to find a way to help them." **Olga Bluman**, L '09, affirmed the "importance of providing many entry points into the congregation," and pointed to the need to "hear more about what happens to the members once they are engaged and how they keep being engaged once they are part of the 'mainstream.'"

This year all 4th-year students will find more answers to their questions at the Schusterman Outreach Weekend Institutes at Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, TX, Larchmont Temple in Larchmont, NY or Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos, CA. The goals are for the students to articulate their personal views as future rabbis about outreach in general and the inclusion of intermarried families specifically. Furthermore, they will become conversant with the challenges and opportunities facing the synagogue and the Jewish community because of changing demographics and the increasing number of unaffiliated. They will enhance their ability to lead institutional change as they gain a better sense of who they are as leaders.

## OUTREACH: BUILDING WELCOMING,



## SACRED COMMUNITIES

Jean Bloch Rosensaft

become more welcoming through effective recruitment, engagement, and lifelong retention of members. Other outreach learning opportunities take place with the Jewish Outreach Institute, Introduction to Judaism courses, and InterfaithFamily.com.

Students spend time with rabbis and congregations that have created exceptional outreach programs, including Rabbi Billy Dreskin and Woodlands Community Temple in Greenburgh, NY; Rabbi Peter Rubinstein and Central Synagogue in New York City; Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass and Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati; Rabbi Jeremy Morrison and the Riverway Project in Boston, and Rabbi Jeffrey Sirkman and Larchmont Temple in Larchmont, NY, among others.

Last year, students participated in the inaugural Schusterman Outreach Weekend Institute at Temple Israel in Boston. Their responses reflect the benefit of such intensive learning experiences, "I came away inspired and with a renewed sense of dedication to the importance of creating a welcoming community within synagogue life, said **Sandi Intraub**, NY '10." **Neil Hirsch**, NY '10, added "I have

The Schusterman Outreach Weekend Institutes will focus on:

- The role of the non-Jew in the synagogue
- The approaches of other Movements and institutions
- The congregation's work with interfaith couples before/after marriage, before/after having children, and facing life cycle events
- Interfaith families bringing up Jewish children
- Boundaries and open doors in the areas of liturgy and ritual, membership, and governance
- Diverse viewpoints on intermarriage officiation
- Professional/lay partnerships in effecting change within the congregation

Upon their return, students will be required to process their learning and express their personal points of view through a meaningful writing or action project. Most importantly, upon Ordination, they will emerge from HUC-JIR with greater knowledge and a stronger understanding as they set out to build welcoming, sacred communities. ■