

## THE TASK OF THE TISCH RABBINICAL FELLOWS

informal exchanges, they examine management methods, define personal visions for their rabbinate, and cultivate strategies for drawing Jews who often feel marginal – including those in interfaith relationships and those not affiliated with any Jewish congregation – closer to the heart of the Jewish community.

“At our first retreat we reviewed the National Jewish Population Surveys and their data on intermarriage, affiliation, and participation in Jewish education and ritual observance,” recalls Newman. “This has given us a strong basis, transcending intuition or anecdotal knowledge, for a better understanding of demographic trends in the changing Jewish community.”

The program, which is taught by HUC-JIR and JTS faculty and outside experts, is shaped by STAR and the Center for Leadership Initiatives, Inc. (CLI), who lend expertise in innovation, interfaith outreach, strategic planning, non-profit management, leadership development, and skills training and collaborative networking frameworks, respectively. Students receive tuition and a living stipend during the third and fourth years of rabbinical studies, in order to have more opportunity to focus on becoming rabbinical leaders of contemporary American Jewry.

“I am a committed Reform Jew, and would like more unaffiliated Jews to learn about Reform Judaism, take part in our programming, and join our synagogues,” states Newman. “At the same time, I believe that liberal Jews have more in common than our denominational affiliations let on. I want to work together to figure out how to strengthen the American Jewish community.” **Aaron Miller**, C ’11, (see page 42) agrees, saying “We can learn and benefit from each other as our Movements continue to evolve in their unique ways. The Schusterman Fellowship has been one of the most defining and enlightening experiences I have had as a rabbinical student.” ■

*Rabbi Darcie Crystal and Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, Co-Coordinators of the Tisch Rabbinical Fellows Program (rear, second and third from left) with the 13 Tisch Rabbinical Fellows.*



In a rabbinical class on the Prophets last spring, Tisch Fellow **Jonathan Prosnit**, N ’11, began to think about these biblical figures through the contemporary lens of community organizers and public advocates, “speaking their mind and trying to mobilize around issues. These are Jewish themes – being part of a community and reaching out are intrinsic to the leadership development and social justice courses I’m taking at HUC-JIR.” Prosnit has just completed his Tisch summer residency at Temple Micah in Washington, D.C., where he had the opportunity to reflect on public policy and Jewish policy, from Israel to social justice, within the context of the Reform congregational setting.

The Tisch Rabbinical Fellows Program, established through the vision and generosity of Bonnie and Dan Tisch, is an opportunity for rabbinical students to specialize in congregational leadership through three years of enriched study and learning experiences. From in-depth seminars and reflective exercises to mentored summer residencies with exceptional rabbinical role models in URJ congregations, the Tisch Fellows engage in both formal and informal learning that emphasizes critical thinking in four areas:

- Advanced text study
- Congregational studies as it applies to synagogue leadership
- Sociology of religion in America, generally, and in the Jewish community, particularly
- Personal theology through ongoing dialogue and mentorship

Rabbi Darcie Crystal, Coordinator of Leadership Initiatives at HUC-JIR/New York, lauds the sense of community that has grown among the first two cohorts of the Program. “In providing support to every member of the group,” she says, “Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, who coordinates the Program with me, and I hope to model a sacred community, the kind that they will one day create in their own congregations.” Furthermore, she highlights the students’ access to an extraordinary array of distinguished leaders and rabbis with whom

they “study, dialogue, question, and challenge.” Over the past two years, they have met with Rabbi Rachel Cowan (see page 54), Rabbi Art Green, Rabbi Irwin Kula, Rabbi Shira Milgrom, and Barry Shrage, among many others, and have engaged in intensive study with members of the HUC-JIR faculty and administration.

Tisch Fellows leave the classroom for the real world to examine successful and innovative enterprises in Jewish communal life. At Larchmont Temple they met with Rabbi Jeffrey Sirkman and his congregants to experience first-hand the covenantal community that he has built there. They spent time learning about managing a Board from Joan

## 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