What’s New At The Seminaries?
New programs from YU, JTS and HUC.

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Staff Writer

The impetus for starting the ITS program, which will have a small first cohort of four to seven students who meet every six weeks for two intensive days of classes on Sunday and Monday and otherwise do coursework online, was due in part to an increasing pressure on students to try and curb the problem.

“We take grad students ... and bring them to schools as seeds of change, but also bring back to the ivory tower of the university to schools as seeds of change, but also bring back to the ivory tower of the university,” said the program’s director, Scott Goldberg. “It’s a marriage of back to the ivory tower of the university to the secular, general education world; the ivory tower with practical institutions.”

Some such project, BRAVE, looks at bully prevention; the researchers study how this plays out in schools, then offer training to teachers present and communicating through high-definition video conferencing system; using Smartboards, or electronic blackboards, the teachers could see and write information that everyone could then see and discuss together. In between weekly classes, students hold “cyber-sichot” (discussions) on the themes and issues they were exposed to in class, mirroring the kind of meet-in-the-hallway-or-on-the-street banter that might take place outside a typical course.

“In any classroom, it’s the dialogue that takes place outside the classroom that we want to capture and connect to,” said Gregg Alpert, national director of E-learning at HUC.

E-learning has applications beyond the joint classroom as well. Teachers with a certain expertise who are located on one campus are able to teach students at HUC’s campuses in New York, Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Jerusalem through video conferencing, and HUC already holds extensive online seminars, or “webinars,” for students, as well as maintaining resources online.

And Alpert believes that the options for E-learning, in the seminary and beyond, are endless.

“While certain classes might take better advantage of this kind of technology and environment, I don’t believe there’s a class that can’t use this effectively,” he said. “I honestly don’t believe there’s a limitation... once teachers try to take their material and look at how it can be enhanced by the use of E-learning, then it opens new doors.”

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While non-Jewish Ph.D’s sometimes take over the secular principal role.

“There are examples of schools that have non-Jews with good educational backgrounds [as leaders], it shows we have a shortage of people with the kind of training that prepares them to run an institution and have Jewish knowledge,” said Holtz. But this is problematic, he said, because the head of school is also supposed to be the figurehead and role model for the school as a whole. “You need a level of commitment and learning to be the person who’s the embodiment of the values of the school and who can, with authority and wisdom, get up and say, ‘this is a Jewish institution and this is what we stand for.’”

And at the Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion...

Students on the schools’ campuses on opposite coasts are now learning together in “E-classrooms,” after an inaugural class in Bible this fall. The class was team-taught by Andrea Weiss in New York and Tamara Eskenazi in Los Angeles, co-editors of “The Torah: A Women’s Commentary,” and comprised of fourth and fifth-year rabbinical students.

The class met once a week, with both teachers present and communicating through a high-definition video conferencing system; using Smartboards, or electronic blackboards, the teachers could see and write information that everyone could then see and discuss together. In between weekly classes, students held “cyber-sichot” (discussions) on the themes and issues they were exposed to in class, mirroring the kind of meet-in-the-hallway-or-on-the-street banter that might take place outside a typical course.

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