

You are encouraged to share this article with colleagues. We ask only that you let people know that this article originally appeared in NewCAJE's online journal, *The Jewish Educator*. Other articles on this topic may be found on the NewCAJE website, [www.newcaje.org](http://www.newcaje.org).

## **A NEW MODEL FOR JEWISH TEACHER TRAINING: BRIDGING THE WORLDS OF JEWISH AND PUBLIC EDUCATION**

**by Rebecca Shargel and Hana Bor**

Baltimore Hebrew University (BHU), a renowned teachers college and school of Judaic studies celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009. The same year marked a dramatic transition, a merger with Towson University, the second largest university in the state of Maryland. On our new campus we continue our mission to prepare students for Masters degrees in Jewish studies, Jewish Communal Service, and Jewish Education.

As professors of Jewish education, we knew that we had an enormous opportunity at Towson, the largest teachers college in Maryland, which has a faculty of over 100 professors. Not only would we enjoy the multiple resources of a large state university while preparing students for careers in the Jewish world, we knew that we could also find ways to create bridges between our students and those students preparing to work in public schools. These bridges would broaden the context of our students' learning and give them an appreciation of how Jewish and general education could mutually benefit each other.

In our new home, we knew that some of our courses would remain relevant only to Masters of Jewish Education students, such as those relating to the pedagogy of teaching Bible or Jewish holidays. Yet we also seized a golden opportunity. We could reinvigorate our existing model by broadening the scope of some classes to appeal to both Jewish educators and public educators. We asked ourselves this question: *Which courses would appeal to both Masters of Jewish education students and public education students? Which content areas could produce the most fruitful dialogue between the two populations?*

We realized that there were at least three areas of mutual interest: ethics, the Holocaust, and Israel. Given these common interests, we could introduce a new model of Jewish education courses that included the nexus of Jewish and secular educational approaches. While other universities could provide occasional intercultural dialogue by hosting occasional programs to bridge two different schools, at Towson we could facilitate these dialogues consistently within the walls of our College of Education.

With this in mind, Hana developed a course on the pedagogy of the Holocaust, which includes tools for teachers from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds and equally meets the needs of both Jewish and public school educators. This course emphasizes the importance and personal relevance of the Holocaust in terms of culture, civic organization, and personal behavior. It calls upon the students to explore resources available to teachers and

You are encouraged to share this article with colleagues. We ask only that you let people know that this article originally appeared in NewCAJE's online journal, *The Jewish Educator*. Other articles on this topic may be found on the NewCAJE website, [www.newcaje.org](http://www.newcaje.org).

administrators to develop curricula and lesson plans, while addressing the challenges in both studying and teaching the Holocaust. The course engages both public school and Jewish teachers with hands-on experiences, such as meeting survivors; guest speakers; a trip to the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC; and online dialogues. It also enables teachers to customize their teaching methods to translate statistics into personal stories, analyze history through a cross-curricular approach, and explore concepts of Holocaust studies, including anti-Semitism, racism, and discrimination that confront multiple populations.

In addition, Rebecca developed a course on ethics in education, *Moral Questions in the Classroom* (named after Katherine Simon's book).<sup>1</sup> This course appealed to both students of Jewish and general education, who understood how competing approaches, inculcating children with traditional values or fostering moral decision-making, could work within either setting. Moreover, students enjoyed debating the veracity of competing theories of moral development, i.e., Kohlberg vs. Gilligan and considering how gender plays a factor in children's interactions. To apply theories to practice, students presented mini-lessons to each other to receive critical feedback. Last semester bore a particularly fruitful dialogue as students taught each other stories, some of which represented their respective faith traditions. A Reform student engaged her classmates in a debate over how the laws of property damages in the Bible relate to today's situations; an Orthodox student told a Hasidic story; and a Lutheran student story shared a story of the Good Samaritan from the New Testament. Students enjoyed hearing the richness of each other's traditions and comparing the didactic values of each story. They appreciated the wide range of beliefs undergirding these stories and understood where their ideologies converged and diverged.

Another opportunity, in the realm of Israel studies, is a new study abroad program that will combine students in both the Jewish and general education programs in an Israel program, with seminars following the trip. While that group of students is abroad, we continue to facilitate our multiple communities to "study at home" in developing their joint knowledge and skills in working in a diverse community with a variety of cultural, geographical, and educational backgrounds. This merger is certainly a brand new development in Jewish higher education. We look forward to future courses, initiatives, and opportunities to bridge the worlds of general and Jewish education--- all on one campus.

As a result of designing new courses and study abroad that appeal to both populations, we realize that our students reap great benefits. Not only do they gain from intensive core courses in Judaic studies and special courses in Jewish education, but their horizons also are expanded. Our students merge worlds of Jewish studies and education within the broader context of public education.

Beyond our courses, students have the opportunity to take courses in other areas, including special education, early childhood, elementary or secondary education, leadership, educational

You are encouraged to share this article with colleagues. We ask only that you let people know that this article originally appeared in NewCAJE's online journal, *The Jewish Educator*. Other articles on this topic may be found on the NewCAJE website, [www.newcaje.org](http://www.newcaje.org).

technology, and literacy. Our programs take their place in both the College of Education and -- as part of the Instructional Leadership and Professional Development Department -- in the College of Liberal Arts. By spanning multiple departments, our students develop a matrix of relationships. They benefit from the strong ties between the Jewish community and the university, with programming and financial assistance through the Baltimore Hebrew Institute as well as internships in the Baltimore/Washington areas.

**Endnotes:**

Simon, Katherine. *Moral questions in the classroom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Rebecca Shargel and Hana Bor are professors of general and Jewish education at Towson University and affiliates of the Baltimore Hebrew Institute. For further information about the program, please contact Dr. Bor, program director of the Masters in Jewish Education and the Masters of Jewish Communal Service programs, at [hbor@towson.edu](mailto:hbor@towson.edu) or go to [www.towson.edu/bhi](http://www.towson.edu/bhi).  
[RShargel@towson.edu](mailto:RShargel@towson.edu)  
[HBor@towson.edu](mailto:HBor@towson.edu)