

## **The Coming Generation of Jewish Communal Professionals**

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## **The Wexner Fellows Program**

Inaugurated in 1988, the Wexner Fellows Program supports the graduate education of future Jewish communal professionals. Initially, the program was limited to future rabbis, Jewish educators and Jewish communal service professionals. It was later broadened to include future professors of Jewish studies and, most recently, cantorial students. During their professional training, Wexner Fellows receive full scholarships as well as stipends for living expenses of \$12,500-\$17,500 annually for a period of up to four years. They also participate in a variety of leadership training institutes organized by the Wexner Foundation.

Since the program's inception, over 200 candidates have applied for Fellowships annually. They must complete application forms which provide detailed information on their Jewish and academic backgrounds. By exploring the information contained in these applications, this report seeks to outline some of the processes that have produced the coming generation of Jewish communal professionals.

In particular, the report examines the Jewish educational backgrounds of those who are now becoming rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, Jewish communal service professionals, and Jewish studies professors. To what extent do we find attributes that set apart this unusual group of young adults from American Jews generally? What sorts of experiences are associated with specific career tracks, and, in the case of rabbinic school applicants, with specific denominations? The answers to these questions can help to inform organized Jewry in its efforts to identify, recruit, develop, and train highly qualified Jewish communal professionals.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond specific consideration of Jewish communal professionals. Let us assume that Jewish communal professionals embody what may be called "Jewish success stories." After all, these are individuals who are so involved with Jewish life that they are headed for careers either within the organized Jewish community or in academic Jewish Studies. But it is important to consider the extent to which the experiences and factors that helped to produce these professionals are those that produce Jewish involvement more generally. In other words, the working assumption here is that the experiences of tomorrow's communal professionals can provide some helpful guidelines for developing tomorrow's committed Jewish lay people.

## **Data and Profile of the Applicants**

The data for this study derive from the short-answer portions of the 738 application forms completed by every Wexner applicant from 1988 to 1992. The form asked questions about demographic background, Jewish educational experiences, academic record, extra-curricular and professional activities, as well as a variety of other items. Wexner Foundation staff (under the direction of Deborah Rozansky) developed a coding scheme, coded the forms, entered the data, and transmitted a machine-readable data diskette.

As Table 1 shows, the number of applicants took a significant leap upwards in 1991. This change no doubt reflects a natural growth process resulting from the increased awareness of the new program within the professional community, as well as the increasingly extensive and intensive recruitment efforts of Foundation staff.

About half (49%) of the applicants were headed for the rabbinate; 22% were planning on careers in Jewish communal service (generally by entering social work or graduate-level Jewish communal service programs); 16% were planning careers in Jewish education; just under 11% would be studying for academic careers in Jewish studies; and about 2% were entering cantorial schools. Since the latter two careers became eligible for Wexner Fellowships only in the last two years of the study period, their share of recent applicants is somewhat greater than their representation among all applicants over the first five years of the program. Owing to the small number of cantorial students (N=15), tables below reporting findings by career choice exclude this group.

**Table 1**  
**Wexner Foundation Applicants'**  
**Year of Application, Career Field, and Rabbinical School**  
**Distributions**

Year	Number	Percent
1988	107	14.5
1989	107	14.5
1990	112	15.2
1991	200	27.1
1992	212	28.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Career	Number	Percent
Rabbi	361	48.9
Communal Service	162	22.0
Jewish Educator	121	16.4
Judaic Studies Professor	79	10.7
Cantor	15	2.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<b>Rabbinical School</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yeshiva University	36	9.9
Jewish Theological Seminary or University of Judaism	125	34.4
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion	162	44.6
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College	76	11.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The rabbinical students-to-be were divided among four schools. The greatest number (45%) were entering the Reform rabbinical school, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, New York, or Los Angeles; and just over a third (34%) would be entering either the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York or its sister school, the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. By contrast, only 11% would be enrolling in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and even fewer (10%) would be studying at the Orthodox Yeshiva University's rabbinical program (RIETS).

The age distribution of the candidates is presented in Table 2. The median is 24 years, and almost three quarters were 27 years or younger at the time of the application. Of the quarter over 27, almost all were under 50. The very oldest applicants, however, were in their early 70's, with more older applicants planning careers as rabbis, and fewer planning to study for careers as Jewish communal workers. Among future rabbinical students, few older applicants plan to attend Yeshiva University; these candidates were more than twice as likely as those under 28 to plan on entering the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

**Table 2**  
**Age Distribution**  
**Relationship to Career & Rabbinical School**

<b>Age at Time of Application</b>	<b>Percent</b>
23 or younger	47
24-25	16
26-27	10
28 or older	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Career by Age</b>	<b>19-23</b>	<b>24-27</b>	<b>28+</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rabbi	48.4	45.3	57.4	49.9
Communal Service	25.4	27.4	12.1	22.4
Jewish Education	17.5	10.5	21.6	16.7
Judaic Studies	8.7	16.8	8.9	10.9
<b>N=</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>723</b>

<b>Rabbinical School by Age</b>	<b>19-23</b>	<b>24-27</b>	<b>28+</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Yeshiva University	14.4	11.9	1.8	9.9
Jewish Theological Seminary or University of Judaism	33.5	40.5	31.3	34.4
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion	49.1	32.1	47.3	44.6
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College	2.0	15.5	19.6	11.0
<b>N=</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>363</b>

Among all applicants, there is a preponderance of women over men (57% versus 43%). However, as might be expected, the sex distribution varies markedly by career field; among rabbinical students, it varies dramatically by institution (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Sex by Career & Rabbinical School**

<b>Sex by Career (percentaged across the rows)</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Rabbi	42.4	57.6	49.9
Communal Service	75.3	24.7	22.4
Jewish Education	74.4	25.6	16.7
Judaic Studies	53.2	46.8	10.9

<b>Sex by Rabbinical School (percentaged across the rows)</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Yeshiva University	0	100.0	9.9
Jewish Theological Seminary or University of Judaism	41.6	58.4	34.4
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion	51.2	48.8	44.6
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College	65.0	35.0	11.0

Women significantly outnumber men (by about 3 to 1) in the fields of Jewish education and Jewish communal service, and they slightly outnumber men among those preparing for Jewish academia (53% to 47%). Overall, slightly more men than women are studying for the rabbinate (58% to 42%). However, these figures obscure significant variations among the four major rabbinical schools. We find no women at the Orthodox Yeshiva University; at JTS, men somewhat outnumber women (58% are men); HUC-JIR students are about evenly divided by sex, with a very slight edge going to the women (51%); and at the RRC, women significantly outnumber men by a margin of 65% to 35%.

## **High Levels of Jewish Educational Experiences**

Completed Wexner Fellowship application forms provide detailed information about a variety of Jewish educational experiences in applicants' childhood and adolescence. These include formal education (type of Jewish schooling), as well as such informal educational experiences as enrollment in or work at Jewish summer camps, participation in Jewish youth groups, and travel or study in Israel.

We certainly would expect to find evidence of extensive participation in these experiences which, undoubtedly, foster involvement in Jewish life and lead significant numbers of their alumni to select careers within the Jewish community.

These data do not establish the extent to which Jewish education actually produced involvement on the part of these extraordinary young Jews. Other factors, such as Jewishly committed homes and community environments help to propel youngsters toward intensive Jewish educational experiences and toward Jewish communal careers. So, from a theoretical, logical, statistical and methodological point of view, attributing these applicants' professional goals to one or another background factor is impossible. But the data at hand do substantiate relatively high levels of intensive Jewish educational experiences without establishing an absolute causal connection between Jewish education and Jewish professional career choice.

Evidence of high levels of Jewish education occurs in several instances (Table 4). Fully a third of the candidates (34%) had attended an elementary Jewish day school and half of these (19%) had gone on to attend a Jewish secondary day school. Over a quarter (27%) attended both a supplementary Hebrew high school, and a Hebrew school in their younger years, and another quarter (28%) attended only a Hebrew school. Only 11% reported no prior formal Jewish education and this figure may even be inflated by the inclusion in this category of "No Answer" responses.

These patterns may be contrasted with those applicable to younger Jewish adults (under age 35) established in the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations in 1990. In this authoritative sample of American Jews, just 13% of the younger adults report any day school attendance. That is, two to three times as many prospective Jewish professionals attended day school as compared with their contemporaries at large. At the other extreme, 29% of the NJPS respondents reported no formal Jewish schooling, a proportion almost three times the size of that found among the Wexner applicants. Clearly, emerging Jewish communal professionals have experienced far more intensive Jewish schooling than has the wider Jewish population.

We find similar patterns with the other forms of Jewish education. As many as 61% of the Wexner applicants had been to Israel for an educational program; 22% had taken part in at least two programs. (The most frequently occurring educational experiences were as follows: 23% studied at The Hebrew University usually for their junior years or in the summer program; 8%



studied Hebrew in Israel; over 5% studied at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem, either in its summer or year-long program.)

**Table 4**  
**Jewish Educational Experiences**

<b>Extent of Jewish Schooling</b>	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>	<b>American Jews</b>
None	10.6%	29% <sup>1</sup>
Hebrew or Sunday School	28.2	58
Hebrew High School	27.4	0
Elementary Day School	15.0	13
Secondary School	18.8	0
Total	100	100
<b>Number of Involvements in an Organized Israel Experience Program</b>		
None	39.0	82 <sup>2</sup>
Once	39.0	12
Twice or more	22.0	6
Total	100	100
<b>Most Frequently Mentioned Israel Experience Programs</b>		
Hebrew University	22.9	
Hebrew Ulpan	8.3	
Pardes Institute	5.3	

<sup>1</sup>Estimated from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey; unweighted Jewish adults, under 35 years old.

<sup>2</sup>Estimated from the 1990 NJPS and the 1991 New York Jewish Population Survey.

<b>Participated in Overnight Summer Camp with Jewish Educational Program</b>	62.5	45 <sup>3</sup>
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<b>Most Frequently Mentioned Camps</b>	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>
Ramah	14.4
Zionist Camp	4.2
Union of American Hebrew Congregations Camp	14.1
JCC Camp	13.4
Orthodox Camp	8.1
<b>Participated in a Jewish Youth Group Most Frequently Mentioned Groups</b>	
United Synagogue Youth	20.9
National Federation of Temple Youth	15.3
B'nai B'rith Youth Organization	13.7
National Council of Synagogue Youth	13.7

Although the available data for the larger Jewish population are not quite comparable to those used in the study, they indicate the extraordinary levels of participation in Israeli programs by Wexner applicants. In the NJPS, just 28% of the younger adults have been to Israel (whether in an organized program or not), and only 14% have been there twice or more. Of those who have been to Israel, not all participated in an educational program. The 1991 New York Jewish population study reports that 40% of those who have visited Israel participated in an educational program there. By extrapolation, about 12% (= 40% of 28%) of younger American Jewish adults have participated in an Israel educational program, and only about 6% participated in two programs. Future Jewish professionals are about four to five times as likely to participate in educational programs in Israel as are their counterparts in the wider Jewish population.

As many as 63% of the Wexner applicants reported having attended a Jewish summer camp. This figure compares with 45% of New York area Jews under the age of 35 who attended or

<sup>3</sup>1991 New York Jewish Population Survey.

worked in such a camp. These categories are not quite equivalent and probably understate the gap between the pre-professionals and the larger Jewish population. In addition, the responses in the New York study may refer to a wide variety of "Jewish camps," since the term can imply a camp with many Jewish campers but minimal Jewish educational programming. However, the majority of the Wexner applicants who are included under this rubric attended camps regarded by the profession as providing a fairly intensive Jewish educational experience. Of all applicants, over 14% went to Camp Ramah (of the Conservative movement), 14% attended a UAHC (Reform) Camp, 14% also went to camps sponsored by Zionist youth movements, 13% attended JCC camps, and 8% went to an Orthodox Camp.

About two-thirds (67%) of the pre-professionals were involved at some point in Jewish youth groups. The most frequently mentioned group was the Conservative movement's USY (21%), followed in turn by the Reform North American Federation of Temple Youth (15%), B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (14%), and the Orthodox National Conference of Synagogue Youth (7%).

In comparison with younger American Jews in the general population, emerging Jewish communal professionals report far more frequent Jewish educational experiences in every context we examined. Very large gaps occur with respect to day school attendance and study in Israel. The rates of participation in Jewish camps and groups are associated with smaller but still substantial differences between future professionals and the wider Jewish population.

Similar patterns characterize these pre-professionals in their college years (Table 5). As many as 89% report having taken a course in Jewish Studies as undergraduates. In the New York Jewish Population Study, in contrast, only 31% of young adults reported having either taken such a course at the university or studied in some other Jewish adult education context. Owing to the broader definition of the New York question, it is reasonable to assume that the number who attended university courses alone is lower than 31%. In addition, New York area Jews are more Jewishly involved than Jews nationally. These considerations strongly indicate that Jewish communal professionals are at least three times as likely as the general American Jewish population to have enrolled in at least one Jewish Studies course during their undergraduate years.

**Table 5**  
**Jewish Educational Experiences as an Undergraduate**

	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>	<b>American Jews</b>
Enrolled in at least one course in Jewish Studies	89.4%	31% <sup>4</sup>
Enrolled in courses in at least three different areas of Jewish Studies	70.5	
Majored in Jewish Studies	43.2	

<b>Self-Evaluation of Hebrew-Speaking Ability</b>	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>	<b>American Jews</b>
Excellent	28.3	4 <sup>5</sup>
Good	31.3	6
Fair	26.6	11
Poor	13.8	9
	100.0	100

<b>Level of Participation in Hillel Activities</b>	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>
None	60.0%
Some	20.9
Active	19.1
	100.0

<sup>4</sup> Estimate from the 1991 New York Jewish Population Survey; includes participation in adult Jewish education.

<sup>5</sup> Source: 1986 National Survey of American Jews; comparability is inexact.

<b>Level of Participation in Hillel or Other Jewish Student Activities</b>	<b>Wexner Applicants</b>	<b>American Jews</b>
None	33.1%	70% <sup>6</sup>
Some	26.7	30
Active	40.2	--
	100.0	100

Further evidence indicates very significant involvement by Wexner applicants in Jewish Studies. We have no direct information on the number of courses, but we do know the number of Jewish Studies disciplines or substantive areas the applicants studied. That is, we know if they took courses in Hebrew, religious studies, history, the Bible, or other subject matter. Over two-thirds (71%) enrolled in courses in at least three subject areas. In addition, fully 43% reported that they majored in Jewish Studies (or a sub-field), most often in conjunction with another discipline such as psychology, English, history, political science, and religion.

Another indicator of the strength of the Wexner applicants' Judaica backgrounds is their Hebrew language skills. Over a quarter (28%) rate themselves "excellent" Hebrew speakers, and another 31% relate their skills as "good." In contrast, in a recent survey of American Jewish adults, just 4% said that they could understand most conversations in Hebrew with relative ease and another 6% claimed the ability to understand simple conversations, though with some difficulty. Although we are comparing responses to differently worded questions, there seems no doubt that the Wexner applicants are significantly more competent in Hebrew than are American Jews generally.

Not only have they studied Judaica more intensively and extensively than most Jews during their college years, they have also been more active in Hillel and other Jewish campus activities. Fully two thirds (67%) participated in such activities, and, according to the criteria utilized by the Wexner Foundation coders, as many as 40% were highly active in such programs. In contrast, in the New York survey, just 30% reported any participation in Jewish college activities, such as Hillel. (These observations apply only to on-campus activities and not to off-campus activities such as study in Israel or work in Jewish education.)

The last piece of evidence of their high levels of Jewish involvement comes in the form of the applicants' work experiences. As we have seen, most of these pre-professionals apply to the Foundation almost directly out of college. Thus, at this point, most of their work experiences consist of summer-time and part-time jobs. Significantly, most have used their limited

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<sup>6</sup>Source: 1991 New York Jewish Population Survey; comparability is inexact.

opportunities for gainful employment to work for and within the organized Jewish community (Table 6). Fully 87% have worked in some way for organized Jewry. As many as 67% have worked in the field of Jewish education, 47% have worked in Jewish youth work, and 37% have worked for a Jewish social service agency.

**Table 6**  
**Work Experiences in the Organized Jewish Community**

Jewish Education	66.7%
Jewish Youth Organizations or Camping	46.9
Jewish Social Service Agency	36.6
Any of the Above	86.8

In short, we find clear and convincing evidence of high rates of participation by Wexner applicants in Jewish educational activities, both formal and informal. Some implications of this finding are, as noted above, not fully clear, because we cannot be sure of the effects of parents and community.

At the very least, these instruments of Jewish education and socialization are the sort that are chosen and seen as useful by committed Jewish parents; and, again at the very least, they are the instruments through which such parents transmit Jewish commitment to their children. But educational activities during the college years and the work experiences during or after college are more remote from the direct influence of parents and home community. While parents may promote their children's attendance at day school or their participation in Jewish teen activities, undergraduates exercise more independence in deciding whether to participate in Jewish Studies courses, Hillel-type activities, and work in Jewish schools, camps, youth groups and social service agencies. At the very least, the campus-based activities and the opportunity to engage in part-time work for the Jewish community represent critical vehicles through which emerging Jewish professionals sustain and, presumably, enrich their commitment to Jewish involvement.

The findings noted above certainly point to high levels of participation in various frameworks of Jewish education during childhood, adolescence, and the undergraduate years. Previous research has documented the close connection between different sorts of experiences. Those who participate in one educational context are more likely to be active in a second or third sphere of activity. For example, day school alumni are far more likely to participate in organized trips of high school youth to Israel than non-day school alumni. Anecdotal reports by professors of Jewish Studies suggest that both characteristics, in turn, are associated with pursuit of Jewish studies in college.

Given this pattern (known informally among researchers as "the more the more"), it is not surprising to learn that most Wexner applicants report not a few, but a significant number of Jewish educational experiences. The analysis made use of an Index of Jewish Education in which, consistent with standard procedures of index construction, the respondent received points for each of the following 15 experiences:

- attendance part-time at a Jewish school – primary school years
- attendance part-time at a Jewish school – high school years
- attendance full-time at a Jewish primary school (worth 2 points)
- attendance full-time at a Jewish secondary school (2 points)
- participation in a Jewish youth group
- attendance at a Jewish overnight camp
- participation in an organized tour of Israel for teen-agers
- enrollment in at least one course in Jewish studies
- enrollment in courses in four different areas of Jewish studies
- participation in Hillel (or similar) campus activities
- work in a Jewish school
- work with Jewish youth
- study in Israel (not at a university)
- study at the Hebrew University
- participation in Israel-based programming after high school

Because day school attendance generally entails a greater commitment of time and money than do the other experiences, it seemed reasonable to award two points for attending an elementary day school and two points for attending a secondary Jewish day school. Some of the activities listed are mutually exclusive--no one attended a part-time Jewish high school and a full-time Jewish high school. The actual observed maximum is 13, and the lowest score is 0 (Table 7).

**Table 7**  
**Index of Jewish Education**

Score	Percent
0-1	3.4
2-3	7.9
4	7.2
5	10.2
6	10.7
7	15.3
8	18.7
9	11.9
10-11	11.6
12-13	3.2
TOTAL	100.0

The extent to which the Wexner applicants generally report multiple activities is demonstrated by the many high scores on the index. The median (or middle) value is 7 and the modal (or most frequent) value is 8. Taking scores of 7 and 8 as representing the "typical" Jewish communal professional, we can offer a composite portrait of this person's Jewish educational background. He or she attended a Jewish day school, went to a Jewish camp, joined a Jewish youth group, spent some time in Israel, took courses in several areas of Jewish Studies, participated in the campus Hillel, and worked in a Jewish youth or educational context. To be sure, this portrait represents the *typical* Jewish pre-professional; some have somewhat less background, others have more. But even the near-minimal levels of Jewish education are quite impressive. Since 89% score four or more on the index, we can infer that almost nine out of ten Wexner applicants at least engaged in four or more Jewish educational programs. Typically, these would include some sort of Jewish school, a Jewish youth group, Jewish summer camp, and at least one course in Jewish Studies (These four are among the most widely reported Jewish educational activities). If so, then even Jewish pre-professionals with the least history of Jewish involvement are considerably better educated in Jewish matters than are the vast majority of American Jews.

These high levels of Jewish involvement are certainly consistent with the findings reported by Jonathan Sarna in his parallel, qualitative analysis of the applications' essays. He reports that a significant number of would-be Jewish communal professionals are themselves the children of



Jewish communal professionals. As such, they have been groomed since birth to assume careers in the Jewish community. To these professionals must be added a good number who are also the products of intensive Jewish socialization, even if their parents were not themselves working for organized Jewry.

At the other extreme of the Jewish socialization spectrum are those who have chosen to enter Jewish communal professions even without a strong Jewish educational background in their younger years. Those whose Jewish commitment bloomed late in their lives were shaped by forces beyond the purview of these data.

The data do allow us to estimate the time in their lives during which the Wexner candidates were clearly on the track to becoming Jewish professionals. In this population of future rabbis, educators, communal servants, academicians, and cantors, we can identify four possible periods in which the Jewish involvement die first was cast.

The earliest form of involvement in Jewish communal life is, of course, primary school (Table 8). Over a third (34%) of these emerging professionals attended a Jewish day school in their youth; all of these day school alumni went on to participate in several other Jewish educational activities.

**Table 8**  
**When Applicants First Showed Signs of Significant Involvement in Jewish Education**

After college	7.3
College	19.1
Teen years	39.7
Childhood (day school)	33.9
TOTAL	100.0

Of the remainder--those who never attended Jewish day school--quite a large number (40%) seemed firmly on the road to Jewish professional studies by the time they were adolescents. This group is operationally defined as those who lacked a day school education, but who participated in at least two of the following contexts: a supplementary Jewish high school, Jewish summer camping, Jewish youth group activities, or an organized trip to Israel. Another 19% apparently developed a serious interest in Jewish life only in college. These are defined as those who never went to day school and who, as teenagers, were relatively inactive in Jewish life. However, during their college years they became involved in two of the following ways: by taking at least one course in Judaica, by taking many such courses (and earning additional points on the index), by participating in Hillel activities, or by studying in Israel. This reckoning leaves just 7% who developed their deep commitment to Jewish life at some point after college. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of such late bloomers were age 28 or over at the time of their application to

the Foundation. In short, roughly three-quarters (at least) of the Wexner applicants appeared well on their way to active involvement in Jewish life even before beginning their undergraduate studies. Only a quarter developed a deep interest in Jewish affairs thereafter, and most of those did so while attending college. Very few did so afterwards.

(Because the applications do not contain short-answer questions concerning all forms of Jewish involvement, we probably underestimate the extent to which these emerging professionals were Jewishly involved early in their lives. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that with more comprehensive data we would be able to determine that far more Wexner applicants were heavily involved in Jewish life in childhood in ways other than attendance in day schools, our only available childhood measure. In other words, for many applicants, more complete information would probably push the estimate of the period of first significant involvement to an even earlier point in their lives.)

### **Undergraduate Institutions: A Small Number of "Hothouses"**

Just a handful of undergraduate institutions generate a significant proportion of future Jewish communal professionals. As many as 40% of the applicants attended just ten institutions of higher learning. They were (in descending order): Yeshiva University, Brandeis University, Columbia and Barnard Colleges, University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, University of California at Berkeley, UCLA, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and Brown University (Table 9).

These schools share certain characteristics. Leaving aside Yeshiva University, which is of course *sui generis*, they all have moderate to large Jewish student populations (in absolute and relative terms); all but one are located in or near metropolitan areas with large Jewish populations; all are predominantly residential (rather than commuter) campuses; all are academically highly selective; most sponsor strong Jewish Studies programs; and all enjoy a reputation for good to excellent Hillel or their equivalent programs.

**Table 9**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently Attended**  
**(i.e. attended by five or more Wexner Applicants, 1988-1992)**

<b>Top 10</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Yeshiva University	49	6.6	6.6
Brandeis	48	6.5	13.2
Columbia-Barnard	44	6.0	19.1
Penn	33	4.5	23.6
Harvard	24	3.3	26.9
UC-Berkeley	22	3.0	29.9
UCLA	22	3.0	32.8
Michigan	21	2.8	35.7
Wisconsin	20	2.7	38.4
Brown	15	2.0	40.4
Maryland	14	1.9	42.3
Washington U., St. Louis	12	1.6	44.0
Rutgers	11	1.5	45.5
Illinois	11	1.5	46.9
Indiana	11	1.5	48.4
Princeton	9	1.2	49.7
U. of Massachusetts	9	1.2	50.9
SUNY Binghamton	9	1.2	52.1
Ohio State	9	1.2	53.3
Emory	9	1.2	54.5
Yale	8	1.1	55.6
Boston U.	8	1.1	56.7
SUNY Other	8	1.1	57.8
Cornell	7	0.9	58.8
NYU	7	0.9	59.7
Wesleyan	6	0.8	60.5
Tufts	6	0.8	61.3
Jewish Theological Seminary	6	0.8	62.1
Hebrew U.	6	0.8	63.0
U. of Pittsburgh	5	0.7	63.6
SUNY Albany	5	0.7	64.3
Northwestern	5	0.7	65.0
Johns Hopkins	5	0.7	65.7
Texas	5	0.7	66.4
UC Santa Barbara	5	0.7	67.0
University of Judaism	5	0.7	67.7

One possible explanation for the frequency of Wexner candidate attendance at certain schools is that these schools tend to appeal to and recruit students already heavily involved in Jewish life. To test this assumption, we focus only on Wexner applicants with relatively weaker Jewish educational backgrounds. We operationally define this group as those with two characteristics: they never went to day school, and they engaged in no more than two Jewish educational activities as teen-agers (such as camp, youth group, high school, an Israel program). Examining this group alone, we find that the list of schools with the highest frequencies of Wexner applicants is virtually the same as before (Table 10): Brandeis University, University of Pennsylvania, Columbia and Barnard Colleges, Harvard, University of California at Berkeley, Brown University, UCLA, University of Indiana, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, and the University of Maryland. These eleven undergraduate institutions account for 37% of the Wexner applicants with weaker Jewish backgrounds. As compared with the earlier group of universities, this group does not include Yeshiva University (which caters almost exclusively to those with stronger Jewish backgrounds) but it does include the Universities of Indiana and Maryland, two schools that appear just a little lower down on the original list in Table 9.

Undoubtedly, certain schools attract the type of person who subsequently chooses a career in Jewish communal service. However, the correspondence between the schools which educate all Jewish communal professionals regardless of Jewish educational background (Table 9), with those which educate applicants with weaker backgrounds (Table 10) is certainly suggestive. This evidence suggests that the schools which attract those most likely to enter professional Jewish communal life are also those which for one reason or another manage to encourage the individuals with relatively little Jewish background to think of careers in the rabbinate, Jewish education, Jewish communal service, and Jewish academia.

**Table 10**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently attended by Wexner Applicants**  
**with Weaker Jewish Educational Backgrounds**

<b>University</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Brandeis	19	5.8	5.8
Penn	17	5.2	10.9
Columbia-Barnard	16	4.8	15.8
Harvard	13	3.9	19.8
UC Berkeley	12	3.6	23.4
Brown	10	3.0	26.4
UCLA	9	2.7	29.2
Indiana	8	2.4	31.6
Wisconsin	6	1.8	33.4
Michigan	6	1.8	35.3
Maryland	6	1.8	37.1
Cornell	5	1.5	38.6
Tufts	5	1.5	40.1
U. of Massachusetts	5	1.5	41.6
Illinois	5	1.5	43.2
Emory	5	1.5	44.7

Within each specific profession (rabbinate, education, communal service work, for example), generally the same schools supply the larger number of applicants (Tables 11-14). There are, however, some departures from this trend.

**Table 11**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently Attended by Wexner Applicants**  
**Planning Careers as Rabbis**

University	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Penn	24	6.6	6.7
Brandeis	24	6.6	13.3
Columbia-Barnard	23	6.4	19.7
Harvard	18	5.0	24.7
Yeshiva University	16	4.4	29.2
Michigan	13	3.6	32.8
UCLA	10	2.8	35.6
Wisconsin	9	2.5	38.1
UC Berkeley	9	2.5	40.6
Princeton	7	1.9	42.5
George Washington	7	1.9	44.4
Yale	6	1.7	46.1
Brown	6	1.7	47.8
Illinois	5	1.4	49.2
Northwestern	5	1.4	50.6
Maryland	5	1.4	51.9
University of Judaism	5	1.4	53.3
Cornell	4	1.1	54.4
Wesleyan	4	1.1	55.6
Boston University	4	1.1	56.7
Tufts	4	1.1	57.8
Rutgers	4	1.1	58.9
SUNY Albany	4	2.2	60.0
U. of Chicago	4	1.1	62.2
Stanford	4	1.1	62.2

**Table 12**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently Attended by**  
**Wexner Applicants Planning Careers as Jewish Communal Professionals**

<b>University</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Brandeis	11	6.8	6.8
Yeshiva University	7	4.3	11.1
Maryland	7	4.3	15.4
UC Berkeley	7	4.3	19.8
Columbia-Barnard	6	3.7	23.5
Michigan	6	3.7	27.2
UCLA	6	3.7	30.9
Rutgers	5	3.1	34.0
Ohio State	5	3.1	37.0
Indiana	5	3.1	40.1
Emory	5	3.1	43.2
George Washington	4	2.5	48.1

**Table 13**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently Attended by Wexner Applicants**  
**Planning Careers as Jewish Educators**

<b>University</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Yeshiva University	20	16.5	16.5
Wisconsin	6	5.0	21.5
Columbia-Barnard	5	4.1	25.6
Brandeis	5	4.1	29.8
UCLA	4	3.3	33.1

**Table 14**  
**Undergraduate Institutions Most Frequently Attended by Wexner Applicants**  
**Planning Careers as Jewish Studies Professors**

University	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Columbia-Barnard	10	12.7	12.7
Brandeis	7	8.9	21.5
Yeshiva University	6	7.6	29.1
Harvard	5	6.3	35.4
Brown	4	5.1	40.5

The schools producing the greatest number of future Jewish communal service professionals (Table 12) are somewhat less academically selective than are the schools that produce applicants to other Jewish communal professions (Tables 11, 13, and 14). In contrast, the schools providing the larger numbers of future Jewish Studies professors (Table 14) maintain academic entrance requirements higher than those associated with other Jewish communal careers. But, to be sure, these variations are rather minor: the same institutions generally lead the lists.

The patterns reported above testify to the high level of Jewish educational experiences among Wexner applicants during their childhood, adolescence, and undergraduate years. As a group, these future Jewish professionals differ dramatically from the larger American Jewish population. Yet this group shows some internal variations. This section explores the extent to which Jewish background characteristics vary by career choice, and, among the pre-rabbinical students, the extent to which they vary by denomination.

Using the Index of Jewish Education introduced above, we divided the applicants into three groups: those (18%) with a low number (0-4) of Jewish education experiences; those (36%) with a moderate number (5-7); and those (46%) with a high number (8 or more) of such experiences. The distributions on this index hardly vary among the future communal workers, Jewish education and Jewish studies professors; in other words, levels of Jewish socialization are about the same for individuals pursuing these careers (Table 15). In contrast, the future rabbis, as a group, report the fewest prior educational experiences. As compared with the other types of professionals, future rabbis are twice as likely to report a low number of Jewish educational experiences (23% versus 12-14%). Moreover, the levels of educational background vary sharply among graduates of the four rabbinical schools with the lowest levels of Jewish education being among the students of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

Not surprisingly, the extent of Jewish educational background follows a denominational pattern: the more traditional the rabbinical school, the more extensive the Jewish educational background of the prospective students. The prospective Yeshiva University (YU) students report the most



extensive educational activities, and those applying to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) report the fewest. The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) students fall somewhere in between Yeshiva University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion/Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

**Table 15**  
**Index of Jewish Education by Career and by Rabbinical School**

<b>Career:</b>	<b>Rabbi</b>	<b>Communal Service</b>	<b>Jewish Education</b>	<b>Judaic Studies</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Index of Jewish Education</b>					
Low	23.3	13.6	11.6	12.7	18.0
Moderate	39.3	35.2	28.1	34.2	36.0
High	37.4	51.2	60.3	3.2	46.1
N=	361	162	121	79	723

<b>Rabbinical School:</b>	<b>YU</b>	<b>JTS/UJ</b>	<b>HUC-JIR</b>	<b>RRC</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Index of Jewish Education</b>					
Low	5.6	20.0	29.6	25.0	23.4
Moderate	47.2	36.0	38.9	55.0	40.5
High	47.2	44.0	31.5	20.0	36.1
N=	36	125	162		

In short, the breadth of Jewish education experiences is similar for five pre-professional groups: the Yeshiva University and Jewish Theological Seminary rabbinical students, the communal workers, the Jewish educators, and the future academicians. Most notable is the relatively limited Jewish educational backgrounds of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College students.

As noted earlier, the Jewish background items allow us to locate the approximate period during which Wexner applicants in various career paths first become involved in formal Jewish education (Table 16).

**Table 16**  
**Period of First Signs of Significant Involvement in Jewish Education**  
**by Career and Rabbinical School**

<b>Career:</b>	<b>Rabbi</b>	<b>Communal Service</b>	<b>Jewish Education</b>	<b>Judaic Studies</b>	<b>Total</b>
After College	9.1	4.9	5.0	3.8	6.9
College	24.1	14.8	7.4	24.1	19.2
Teen Years	38.5	44.4	40.5	32.9	39.6
Day School	28.3	35.8	47.1	39.2	34.3
N=	361	162	121	79	723

<b>Rabbinical School:</b>	<b>YU</b>	<b>JTS/UJ</b>	<b>HUC-JIR</b>	<b>RRC</b>	<b>Total</b>
After College	2.8	4.0	16.0	10.0	9.9
College	13.9	27.2	20.4	32.5	23.4
Teen Years	11.1	36.8	48.8	40.0	39.9
Day School	72.2	32.0	14.8	17.5	26.7
N=	36	125	162	40	363

As a group, the Yeshiva University rabbinical students show the highest frequency of early involvement in Jewish education: over two-thirds went to day school while only one applicant seems to have begun intensive Jewish education after college. The Jewish educators tend to begin formal Jewish education somewhat later in their lives: 88% of this group became involved in Jewish educational programs during their teen years, more than any of the remaining groups. The communal workers, the Jewish Studies pre-academicians, and the Jewish Theological Seminary rabbinical students all became involved in Jewish educational activities somewhat later than did the Jewish educators. Finally, for the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College rabbinical students, involvement in Jewish educational life came later in life than it did for the five other groups. The proportion who develop visible Jewish educational interests after college reaches 16% among the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion students and 10% for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College students, as opposed to 3-5% among other groups. Predictably, day school alumni are no more than half as frequent among the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College students as they are among those in other schools or other career tracks.

Other noteworthy variations characterize the backgrounds of these future Jewish professionals. Each career track and each group of rabbinical students-to-be is characterized by distinctive patterns of Jewish education and professional Jewish work experiences (Table 18).

The communal service students report relatively high rates of attendance at Jewish summer camps, participation in youth groups and in organized trips to Israel for teenagers, working for Jewish camps and youth groups, as well as activity in Hillels. Common to all these experiences is the social dimension. These future social workers and community organizers are attracted to group activities in a Jewish context. That the Jewish educators are distinguished by relatively high rates of attendance at primary and secondary Jewish day schools, enrollment in courses in Judaic Studies, and employment in Jewish schools indicates an affinity for the Jewish classroom. The future academicians' high rates of enrollment in Jewish Studies courses and in study-oriented programs in Israel (as contrasted with the tours for teen-agers favored by the communal workers) suggests a pre-professional commitment to higher Jewish learning.

**Table 17**  
**Jewish Educational Experiences by Career and Rabbinical School**  
**(Percentages)**

	<b>Jewish Summer Camp</b>	<b>Youth Groups</b>	<b>Teen Israel Trips</b>	<b>College Campus Activist</b>	<b>Worked in Jewish Education</b>	<b>Worked with Jewish Youth</b>
<b>Total</b>	62	67	20	40	67	47
Commun. Service	70	72	26	47	60	56
Jewish Education	67	72	21	34	88	51
Judaic Studies	59	70	16	44	58	42

<b>Rabbinical School</b>						
YU	53	47	6	42	69	47
JTS	61	63	20	44	63	44
HUC-JIR	60	66	19	34	67	42
RRC	48	60	225	33	63	40

	Day Schools		Judaic Studies	Majored in J. Studies	Studied in Israel
	Elementary	Secondary			
<b>Total</b>	34	18	70	43	34
Communal Service	36	16	67	39	36
Jewish Educ.	47	29	76	46	31
Jud. Studies	39	20	86	65	43

<b>Rabbinical School</b>					
YU	72	56	81	47	67
JTS	32	17	80	53	39
HUC-JIR	15	7	58	30	21
RRC	18	10	63	35	35

The Yeshiva University rabbinical students exhibit high rates of day school attendance and attendance at secondary day schools (56% as compared with 18% of all the other applicants). Many also enrolled in undergraduate Jewish Studies classes and they heavily participated in study programs in Israel (67%). Relatively few were involved in Jewish youth groups, summer camps, and organized tours of teen-agers to Israel.

The background and experiences of future Jewish Theological Seminary rabbinical school students closely resemble those of all Wexner applicants. Enrollment in Jewish Studies courses, where the Jewish Theological Seminary students are represented in above average numbers, constitutes the one exception to this general trend.

The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College students display fairly similar patterns and can be discussed together. They are notable for their lower than average involvement of educational experiences. The differences are particularly pronounced with respect to day schools, but they also are less frequently involved than the population average in Jewish Studies courses and Hillel activities.

Of the applicants to all four rabbinical schools, about two thirds have worked in formal Jewish educational settings and at least two fifths have engaged in youth work (camp or youth groups). These findings indicate the seriousness with which the applicants have approached their careers as Jewish professionals. They also suggest that professional work opportunities in both formal and informal Jewish education are crucial channels for educating and socializing Jewish adolescents and college students. In other words, the young educators are themselves being educated, a phenomenon that ought to figure in the orientation of principals, directors, and other established professionals supervising the young front-line staff members who, as we see here, may well emerge as tomorrow's senior Jewish professionals.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

This analysis of the backgrounds of Wexner Fellowship applicants demonstrates clearly that most future Jewish communal professionals undergo both extensive and intensive Jewish educational experiences throughout their lives. In far greater numbers than the Jewish population at large, they have attended day schools, participated in and led Jewish youth groups, toured and studied in Israel, attended and worked in Judaically oriented summer camps, taken Jewish Studies courses as undergraduates, majored in Jewish Studies, participated in campus Hillels, and worked in Jewish schools, camps, youth groups and social service agencies. The application forms contain no information on other forms of socialization, such as that provided by parents, grandparents, siblings, rabbis, and peer groups. Yet, it is reasonable to assume that these emerging professionals also benefitted from informal Jewish socialization experiences in addition to the several kinds of Jewish education noted above. Most applicants report many types of Jewish educational experiences. The vast majority report significant involvement in Jewish education before college years, and an even larger majority become involved by the time they have completed undergraduate study.

Not only do the future Jewish professionals exhibit distinctive patterns of Jewish socialization, they also tend to choose certain kinds of undergraduate institutions and are heavily concentrated among the alumni of a relatively small number of colleges and universities. These institutions are not necessarily those with the largest number of Jewish students; rather they are distinguished by strong academic programs in Jewish Studies and by well-developed Hillels and other extra-curricular Jewish campus activities. These are the institutions which attract undergraduates with an interest in serving the Jewish community and enriching its life, and which foster this kind of commitment where it already exists.

Both parents and the wider community concerned with Jewish continuity would do well to consider the implications of these findings. Since certain institutions both attract students with a commitment to Jewish professional work and foster this commitment, they merit special attention from students, parents, and the organized community. Institutions linked with significant numbers of future Jewish professionals are found in most areas with significant Jewish populations, and they range moderately in terms of both cost and academic selectivity. Thus, it might be possible for communal or philanthropic agencies to recommend several regionally and academically diverse institutions to prospective Jewish undergraduates and to a community with scarce resources. For individuals, these findings suggest that Jewish youngsters and their parents who are concerned about Jewish involvement should focus upon regionally and academically appropriate institutions taken from the list of Jewish professional "hothouses" offered above. Elements of the organized community may consider publicizing certain campuses as highly desirable for committed Jewish youngsters to attend and for philanthropic agencies to support.

The findings related to high levels of Jewish education in all its varieties also have implications for the organized American Jewish community, which has become increasingly concerned with the prospects for its continuity, if not survival. Advocates of Jewish education repeatedly make the claim that strong Jewish educational experiences in an individual's younger years will lead to significant involvement in Jewish life as an adult. The findings here are consistent with that claim.

To be sure, the data available are suggestive, not conclusive. They cannot speak to the issue of whether the influence of parents and childhood communities (which the application forms did not assess) is primarily responsible for the emergence of strong Jewish commitment, as opposed to that of formal education. But the evidence does suggest that intensive Jewish educational frameworks are, at the very least, a virtual pre-condition to intensive Jewish involvement as an adult. Moreover, the synergistic combination of experiences and the frequency with which future Jewish professionals reported many such experiences suggest that no one form of Jewish education--whether schools, camps, trips to Israel, college--can alone ensure significant Jewish involvement during adulthood. Rather, these experiences operate in combination to generate Jewish commitment, competence, and involvement.

Strictly speaking, these results and inferences apply only to the emerging Jewish professional cadre. But it is reasonable to assume that they also apply to the future of active American Jews, so that this analysis of communal professionals illuminates the broader and urgent questions of identity, community and continuity that now demand the attention of Jewish leadership in North America.