



Jewish Education Innovation Challenge
Round II – Detailed Proposal

Basic Applicant Information

Applicant Name

David Stein
Judaic Studies Faculty,
Curriculum co-Author
Email: d.stein@shalhevet.org
Phone: 847-902-5778

Sponsoring Institution

Shalhevet High School
910 S Fairfax Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Phone: (323) 930-9333
Fax: (323) 930-9444

Project Title

LeHaVa:
Inspiring Leadership through
Heritage and Values

Authorization

Rabbi Ari Segal, Head of School

Project Overview

A Revolutionary Idea:

We are revolutionizing how Jewish high school students relate to their heritage by reimagining how to communicate the richness and relevance of Judaic studies. Our curriculum takes a bold departure from traditional modes of Talmud and Tanakh instruction, adopting an approach that focuses on the development, values, principles and mechanisms of our tradition - and then asks our students to apply these lessons to contemporary issues.

We're not just transforming Judaic studies for our students, though. By using our curriculum as the basis for a digitally interconnected network of Jewish educators who share training, resources and methodologies, this project will also revolutionize the experience of teaching Judaic studies for educators throughout the country.

The Problem:

The problem is simple: today's high school student doesn't recognize the relevance of Torah learning in modern daily life. Every Orthodox Jewish high school hopes to inspire Jewish learning, yet curricula often focus on teaching students *how* to learn Torah, but not *why* they should. The tragic result is that students fail to develop basic appreciation for Torah learning; they are often either uninterested in or unfamiliar with the basic discussions about Jewish faith, law, exegesis and values necessary to sustain their religious belief within the modern world. We seek to illuminate the tapestry of tradition that is so often lost in the linear model of traditional education.

At the same time, we also seek to address the acute problem of rising tuition costs and day school attrition. By creating a network of shared materials, experiences and methodologies for educators, we seek to professionalize training and elevate the impact of Judaic studies throughout the country and bring the down the costs associated with Judaic Studies programs. While the day school tuition crisis will not be solved overnight, we recognize that in order to address this problem, educational institutions must provide a structured, effective and professional Jewish educational experience that is inexpensive to administer and is worthy of a family's investment. By creating a shared digital network of training and resources for teachers, we can help facilitate cost effective and impactful Jewish education.

Project Inspiration:

What began with two faculty members exchanging ideas to transform a single classroom has since exploded outward and upward, transforming our school and community along the way. As graduates of Jewish day schools who went on to study in advanced yeshivot in Israel and America, we realized that there had been something missing from our high school educational experience: we were never shown why the ancient texts, conversations and traditions of the Talmud should matter to our lives. This curriculum seeks to address this educational gap.

Project Goals:

Our goal is to equip students with the tools to appreciate the beauty of our tradition, preparing them for a lifelong encounter with Torah study. Students will no longer feel that the sacred texts and heritage before them are arcane or irrelevant; instead, **this curriculum will help to inspire them to become a part of its continued development.**

Project Outcomes:

In the short term, the student outcomes that we have witnessed have been breathtaking. This curriculum has generated a passion for Judaism within our students that has been marked by three separate yet related student outcomes: First, the development of textual skills and the confidence to engage in Jewish learning. Second, the conceptual ability to appreciate the halakhic process and then apply it to contemporary issues faced by our communities today. Third, a drastic increase in the number of our students who commit to continuing their Torah learning beyond Shalhevet by applying to yeshivot and seminaries in Israel.

Our long term student outcomes are even more ambitious. By creating a truly effective nation-wide Judaic studies high school experience, we can directly impact communities and institutions, yeshivot, Hillel houses, synagogues and schools around the world. Preparing legions of students for the challenges to faith and practice that they will encounter throughout their lives will guarantee that our future rabbis, teachers, lay leaders and parents will have the tools to communicate and celebrate the vibrancy of Jewish tradition in a modern world into the future and beyond.

Classroom Impact:

The digitization of this project will allow us to harness educational technology to transform the way Jewish ideas are shared in the classroom. A digitized curriculum – published in e-book or App format for iPads – opens the door to vast educational opportunities in two separate ways. The first is through the student experience. Web resources, dictionaries, rabbinic biographies and related materials are now literally at the students' fingertips and are interwoven into the digital fabric of the core curriculum materials in a systematic manner. Secondly, the digitization of this project allows for an unprecedented level of teacher support and collaboration. A teacher in Memphis can upload a lesson plan that is immediately accessible to a colleague in Los Angeles. A new unit

authored in New York can be viewed and adapted by other educators throughout the country. At the center of this network lies conferences, training seminars, networking and shared innovation for educators throughout the country.

Working with JEIC:

We seek to more effectively transmit the beauty and relevance of Torah learning and to convey the richness of Judaism's beliefs, practices, and guidance in daily life. This project aims to inspire every student to a lifelong commitment to Torah learning, and we are excited by the opportunity to work with JEIC to achieve these goals by creating a national model for Judaic studies education.

Methodology and Implementation

Detailed Methodology:

Jewish tradition is not antiquated – it's living, breathing and responding to the world and our curricular methodology conveys that vitality. We begin with thorough introductions: For Talmud, freshmen and sophomores study the principles, development and procedures of Jewish Law: where does *halakha* come from and what are its foundational principles? Students explore the sources and nature of rabbinic authority, the role of logical reasoning, precedent, dissent and popular practice within *halakhic* decision making, and the process by which ancient Talmudic discussions inform decisions about modern-day issues such as electricity, medicine or society. For Tanakh, the introduction begins by asking a similar set of questions about exegesis and canonization, belief and values latent within Biblical analysis.

Armed with these introductions, our methodology challenges students to put theory into practice by analyzing modern topics that Judaism has grappled with: Zionism, war and peace, women and Judaism, electricity on Shabbat, science and morality in the Bible and responses to the Documentary Hypothesis. A question about the use of a particular technology on Shabbat may rely on multiple Talmudic passages, various medieval commentaries, heated debates between contemporary authorities and nuances of engineering and circumstance; similarly, Orthodox responses to Biblical Criticism require a combination of Biblical text, Midrashic interpretation and linguistic subtlety.

Behind every halakhic decision, underneath every contemporary Jewish issue, there lies a process of analysis, discussion and interpretation that spans millennia. By illuminating this process through a clear, scalable, spiraled and repeatable methodology spanning the entire high school experience we teach our students how to approach these issues and appreciate the solutions that have been developed by our tradition. We introduce students to the nature, function and values of their heritage and then challenge them to use these tools to understand Judaism's varied responses to modern issues.

Project activities:

This project is comprised of a multi-year, multi-phased effort. Presently, we are in the first phase of the program, involving classroom implementation of the curriculum and finalization of content and formatting. Our next phase is digitization, which includes programming, formatting, testing and iPad integration. Phase Three requires recruitment of partner institutions with whom we will implement our materials and train practitioners. Finally, Phase Four envisions the adoption of this program by a large segment of our target audience and the development of additional training seminars, conferences and expertise to build and sustain our educational network.

By empowering educators to develop and then share curriculum materials through our digitized platform, we envision the development of a cohort of expert practitioners who can play leadership roles in training new recruits, exploring new materials and presenting innovative methods and experiences at conferences and seminars built around the curriculum.

Materials and Timeline:

Full implementation of this project will require approximately 3-4 years. Digitization, initial rollout and testing at Shalhevet will be conducted in the upcoming year. After that, participant recruitment requires identification of partner institutions, utilization of professional networks, and incentives for early adopters. Funding for this project will allow for subsidized training, printing of course materials, travel expenses and iPad purchases to help recruit early partners. As we move beyond these early adopters, however, increased visibility will enable recruitment without financial incentive. Instead, the cost for services and resources will be provided by the implementing institutions, providing sustainability to support further development of our network.

Expected Resistance:

We offer a revolutionary idea to tackle an age-old problem, and we therefore fully expect to encounter resistance to our project. On the institutional level, we anticipate educational and organizational inertia from administrators, teachers and parents alike. At the initial phases of the project, this requires us to target partner institutions with innovative organizational cultures in order to build momentum and interest, with subsequent growth requiring careful introductions and adaptations of the curriculum. Our methodology can be applied flexibly across a diverse spectrum of schools and integrated with traditional modes of Torah learning, but successful expansion must address the needs, realities and priorities of each partner institution.

Pedagogically, we also face resistance to our approach of weaving together multiple Talmudic and rabbinic texts. The Jewish people are the "people of the book" - not the people of "a collection of assorted texts," and we recognize that replacing books of Tanakh and Talmudic tractates will have its challenges. To address this issue, we've worked exhaustively to ensure that the curriculum remains richly text-based with an uncompromising focus on the development of textual skills. We weave together Jewish tradition, with primary texts consisting of individual Talmudic discussions, as well as selected discussions from the gamut of medieval and contemporary scholarship, with a focus on developing language skills, analytical reasoning and basic familiarity with the major personalities and texts of our tradition.

Organizational Capacity

This program is a project of Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles, CA and has been developed by members of its faculty who have been solely responsible for the concept, research and development of the curriculum. We have spent countless hours researching, planning and conceptualizing the course of this project, and currently there are no others who know the materials and have contributed as much to this project. The staff at Shalhevet has been trained in our methodology and is directly involved in its classroom implementation, with crucial additional support provided by the school administration.

Key Personnel:

Rabbi David Stein is a co-author of this curriculum project and a faculty member at Shalhevet High School. David studied Physics and Political Science at Yeshiva University, graduating from The Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program at Yeshiva University and then studied for his Semikha from RIETS, YU's theological seminary. In addition to his Rabbinic studies, David holds a Masters degree in Mechanical

Engineering from Columbia University, a certificate in experiential Jewish education from YU, and has worked extensively in Jewish education as a camp program director, shul youth director and pulpit rabbi.

Noam Weissman is the Director of Judaic Studies at Shalhevet and a co-author of this curriculum. Noam graduated Summa Cum Laude from Yeshiva University with a degree in history, after which he also received a Masters degree in Jewish education from Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School, where he was a Legacy Heritage Fellow.

Rabbi Ari Schwarzberg received Semikha and master's degree in education from Yeshiva University, after which he spent two years in Cambridge, MA studying at the Harvard Divinity School, where he earned a master's degree in theological studies with a concentration in ancient Judaism. Rabbi Schwarzberg has worked in a variety of Jewish institutions, spending two years as the rabbinic intern at The Jewish Center in New York City and as an educator at the NYU Hillel before becoming a Judaic Studies faculty member at Shalhevet.

Atara Segal graduated Summa Cum Laude from Stern College with a bachelor's degree in pre-engineering, and then received her M.A. in Bible from Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School. After teaching Tanach at SKA High School for Girls, she moved to Houston where she pursued graduate studies in the Bible department at Rice University. She has taught in various adult education programs in both New York and Houston and has published in the Torah U'Madah journal. She is currently a Judaic Studies faculty member at Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy and Shalhevet High School.

Measurement and Evaluation

Measuring program goals:

The constant measure of success throughout the project will be the impact that this curriculum has on our students. To be sure, measuring learner impact is difficult - we are hoping to affect our students' relationship with Jewish learning, and standardized testing or factual knowledge are simply not enough to demonstrate this. However, we have found that our students' work can be powerful indications of our progress. When a student can apply methodology learned in the classroom to a passionate analysis of an unseen issue in contemporary Jewish law, we are seeing the impact of our project. Comparing and charting individual student work of this type through the course of a unit and over the lifespan of the entire four-year curriculum experience can give us ample indication of individual student growth, critical thinking and relationship to course material.

Additional metrics measuring the long-term impact of this project can be obtained by tracking participation in gap year programs in Israel and college Hillel houses, monitoring school enrollment and teacher satisfaction as well as by conducting long term surveys of our graduates.

Timing and Frequency:

Within the classroom, we recognize that each teacher and institution must tailor the type and timing of assessment to the individual classroom needs; at the same time, though, the digitization of the curriculum allows for the sharing of innovative assessment and evaluation experiences, thereby once again facilitating the development of more effective educational methodologies. Beyond the classroom, this project will include the development of long-term student tracking and assessment to monitor the impact of our project.