## Course Description

The Proseminar is designed to help students integrate knowledge and skill acquired in professional and Judaic studies courses with their field placements. It provides opportunities for participants to meet with professional and lay community leaders in their fields, to explore the relationship of personal and professional identity to the selection of career options, and to get peer feedback on leadership tasks they undertake in the field and elsewhere.

The Proseminar also serves as a setting for the exploration of emerging student interests of relevance to their professional development. It encourages them to address aspects of diversity such as: ethnicity, race, religion and national origin; class and culture; age and (physical and mental) ability; gender and sexual orientation. It provides a forum for examination of the intersections of social work professional ethics, American social values, and traditional Jewish commitments to social justice (*tzedakah*) and activism (*tikkun olam*).

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1. The Proseminar is required for completion of the Certificate Program in Jewish Communal Service and Judaic Studies. The Certificate is sponsored by the School of Social Work in cooperation with the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, and is open to students in Social Work and other relevant professional schools. It is awarded on completion of: professional studies (including a practicum), and 18 credits of graduate-level Judaic studies beyond the professional degree. The Proseminar can be counted toward those 18 credits.

2. Students who enter the program one or two semesters after beginning their professional studies will be given make-up assignments or may enroll for reduced credit at the discretion of the instructor and student's advisor. The same is true for other students who, though not working toward the Certificate, wish to participate in one or more semesters of the Proseminar. Prior participation in the Foundation Field Seminar can be counted toward the Proseminar.
2. Course Content

Topics likely to reappear periodically over the 2-year course cycle include:

- Governance in the voluntary sector and in the Jewish community, with particular focus on lay-professional sharing of trusteeship;

- Confronting ethical dilemmas in practice, in particular those that require reconciling professional, organizational, and cultural/historic approaches to problem-solving;

- The role of Jewish communal service professionals in promoting progressive multiculturalism that contributes to the well being of America's many ethnic communities and to the broader goal of an integrated and integral society;

- The impact of ethnicity on identity, affiliation, and participation in society, and on continuity in a Diaspora community.

3. Course Objectives

Proseminar activities are focused on enabling students to:

1. Integrate relevant professional and Judaic studies course work with field placement experiences, and to articulate these with emerging career interests;

2. Confront dilemmas inherent in the ways ethnicity, race, religion and national origin, class and culture, age and ability, gender and sexual orientation, and other aspects of diversity impact on professional practice and organizational policies;

3. Establish relationships with lay and professional leaders in Jewish communal service, relevant sub-fields, and allied occupational settings;

4. Apply both scientific knowledge and technical rationality with traditional knowledge/values and ethics to specific issues experienced in the practicum;

5. Use peer feedback in assessing strategic & ethical implications of their leadership efforts in field placements and elsewhere.

4. Course Design

Course objectives are supported by a course design that integrates: (a) an "emerging needs" orientation (similar to that which informs field instruction); with (b) a "problem-solving" approach (similar to the kind of learning that takes place in organizational development and consultation processes); and a "content" focus (typical of most courses in the Social Work curriculum). Typically, seminar sessions meet for 2 hours per week, sometimes on campus, other times in community or agency settings. Students are also expected to attend relevant professional conferences and special events. Examples of special events include: continuing professional sessions; U-M Holocaust Memorial Week; MLK Day sessions; United Jewish Communities' General Assembly conference, and Hillel lectures. Currently, Frankel Fellowships are available through the School of Social Work to cover some of the costs associated with conference attendance. One student per session is also required to present a Dvar Torah (an introductory teaching to frame the session) at the beginning of the seminar. All second year students are required to prepare and present a summary of their Drachler program experience.

The following activities are likely to be scheduled each term:
First Term Students
• 4-5 days of field trips to observe agency practice and interview staff (also aimed at selection of placement)

All Students Other Terms
• 2 sessions with Judaic studies and professional school faculty to explore integration and application of knowledge
• 4 sessions with agency CEOs focusing on executive leadership
• 2 sessions with local and national lay leaders, focusing on policy issues or lay-professional relations
• Attendance at 2 or more relevant special events on campus and in the community
• At the conclusion of each session, students present case examples of their own leadership efforts and/or challenges and critique each others’ work

Final Term
• As needed, career exploration and job interviewing support group sessions

5. Relation to the Four Curricular Themes

a. Multiculturalism and Diversity  The professional’s role in the celebration of difference and in creating bridges within and between communities are addressed. Proseminar sessions provide a safe locale for confronting personal experiences and emerging professional perspectives on very difficult issues. For example: within the Jewish community there are serious divides between Chassidic and Secular Jews; Jewish gay/lesbian/bisexual/and transgendered adults sometimes find more comfortable havens outside than within the Jewish community; and shared interests between ethnic and religious groups (for example, between African-Americans and Jewish Americans) are often obscured by historic and social experiences.

b. Social Justice  For more than 100 years, American Jews have been identified, disproportionately, with liberal politics, progressive social causes, and inter-ethnic coalitions. Changing demographics have begun to erode these patterns which, in turn, impacts on how Jewish communal professionals are expected to address issues of social change and social justice. Among the issues addressed are welfare reform, school decentralization, affirmative action, and the changing patterns of government/voluntary sector relationships.

c. Promotion and Prevention  The history of most sectarian and ethnic communities in the U.S. is replete with examples of efforts to promote desired behaviors and results and to prevent those that are perceived to lead to potential disaster. However, over one or more generations, shared understandings of what should be promoted and what is to be prevented are likely to undergo periods in which there is more difference than consensus. Whatever guidelines for appropriate professional behavior exist may reflect earlier rather than contemporary understandings. The Proseminar encourages exploration, with experienced professionals and community leaders, of alternative assumptions about promotion and prevention.

d. Social Science  Scientific and practice knowledge are used to address practice issues and dilemmas. Relevant professional literature and the work of sociologists, political scientists, economists, psychologists and anthropologists are drawn on.

6. Relationship to Social Work Ethics and Values
Several sessions each term are devoted to addressing practice issues reflecting changing values and ethical dilemmas that students confront in their internships and others reflect the experiences of those currently in leadership positions in social agencies and other community institutions. Unfortunately, many of the challenges noted above are not easily addressed by referring either to legal codes of behavior (as in the Jewish tradition) or to professional codes of behavior (as in NASW’s). Even though codes emerge or are renewed over time, social work practice rarely permits neat choices in which all relevant values are optimized. For this reason, the seminar places considerable emphasis on enabling each participant to grapple with ethical choice making and to develop skill the involvement of relevant clients, colleagues, and community members to participate in such choice making.

7. References


Don C Locke (1992), INCREASING MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING


See also reading lists for Contemporary Issues in the American Jewish Community

Partial List of Magazines and Journals:

Commentary
Harvard Business Review
Jerusalem Report
Journal of Jewish Communal Service
Moment Magazine
Sh’ma
The Jewish Forward
Tikkun

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