LEARNING

Education for Synagogue Librarians at the Queens College School of General Studies: 1984–1986

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Introduction

Encouraging professionalism is a continuing concern of the Association of Jewish Libraries. In 1980, Barbara Leff, AJL president at that time, appointed a Chairperson of Continuing Education to survey all existing courses of study for Judaica Librarianship, on both the R&S and SSC levels.

Preparation for Judaica librarianship on the R&S level is clear-cut. One needs the MLS, plus a Jewish education and fluency in Hebrew, as a minimum. In fact, unless one has the last two prerequisites, a career in Judaica librarianship is seldom an option. Continuing education courses for R&S librarians most often take the form of seminars taught during one-day workshops or organizational meetings and special courses taught by an authority in the field, e.g., Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging, a 12-session intensive course taught by Dr. Bella Hass Weinberg at the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, or Introduction to Jewish Bibliography taught at Brandeis University (Cutter, 1985).

The people most in need of training in basic library skills, the bibliography of the Jewish library, [etc.] are librarians in school, synagogue, and Jewish community center libraries . . .

Pilot Program

The Queens College pilot program Library Skills for the Volunteer in Jewish Libraries was begun as a service to the community in conjunction with the Rabbi Simon Hevesi Jewish Heritage Library, which the college funds through a special grant as part of its Ethnic Studies Project. The idea behind the project was that there might be people in the community-at-large who would serve as volunteers in synagogue libraries if they received training in basic library skills and in Judaica bibliography. In January 1984, the School of General Studies announced four workshops to be taught mainly by Rabbi Nehemiah Ben-Zev, librarian of the Hevesi Jewish Heritage Library, and partly by myself and a specialist in conservation and preservation. The workshops were to meet for two hours, twice a week. Each session would deal with one of the following topics: Collection Development, Bibliographic Organization, Reference Work, and Conservation and Preservation. Although a mimeographed text (A Basic Course for Judaica Librarians, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Commission on Synagogue Relations, 1983. Draft-revision in progress)—which was written for Judaica library classes taught by the author at UJA-Federation—was distributed to the students, it wasn't used in this series. No continuing education credits were granted, and no fee was charged.

Twenty-two people enrolled, eighteen of whom completed the program. The students were a mixed group consisting of: volunteers and paid personnel in synagogue and day school libraries who had never had formal library training; three professional librarians—one who wanted to learn the Judaica aspect of librarianship and two working in Judaica libraries; former and present teachers who thought they might enjoy library work; and a few people from the community, two of whom were not Jewish but thought this an opportunity to learn a new, employable skill. When the series ended, two evaluation forms were distributed, one for those new to library work (Appendix I) and the other for those already working in synagogue or other Judaica libraries, or who were professional librarians (Appendix II). The purpose of the evaluation process was two-fold: to determine how effective they believed the course was in preparing them for work in the small Judaica library, and to shape the curriculum of subsequent courses. The dedicated students were very specific in their responses. The novices felt that the sessions, although stimulating, had proceeded at too fast a pace for them to absorb much. They wanted more time and more depth in the classes; time for questions and discussion; and they wanted to work with the text which they had not had the opportunity to use or discuss. The more experienced librarians wanted to go beyond their current levels of proficiency and were very motivated to learn and to practice skills, as well as to discuss the issues listed in Appendix II.

A Year-Long Program in Skills and Bibliography for the SSC Library

The School of General Studies of Queens College subsequently requested that a year-long program of Judaica library courses be developed which, when completed, would provide a level of knowledge and competency for volunteers, para-professionals, and professional librarians in small Judaica libraries. Two semesters were planned, beginning in Fall '84 and ending in Spring '85.
As it happened, the students continued their study for an additional year with Rabbi Nehemiah Ben-Zev.

**First Semester—Library Philosophy, Policy and Skills**

Two review sessions of six hours each were held for students who wished to enroll in the new course: Organization and Administration of the Judaica Library, but who had not participated in the pilot program or who needed a review. A nine-week semester was planned, with classes meeting once a week in three-hour sessions. The topics were: 1) Acquisitions and Technical Services (which included book-buying resources, ordering and receiving procedures, organizing the workroom, and breaking down technical procedures into efficient segments); 2) Acquisitions-Materials Selection (which included the types and proportion of books needed in a small Judaica library, polling the library staff and community, using book-review sources, catalogues, etc.); 3) Cataloging and Classification (in which various classification schemes were described—their theory and history discussed, techniques of determining classification numbers, subject cataloging, filing order, etc.); 4) The School Library-Media Center (this covered integrating fiction and non-fiction into the curriculum, and acquiring, organizing and administering a teacher's center which includes print and non-print materials); 5) Library Administration (including the use of statistics; the annual report; preparing the budget; relations with teachers, administrators, and library staff—both paid and volunteer; the place of the library in the institutional hierarchy, etc.); 6) Reader's Services and Reader's Guidance (including the construction of subject bibliographies, writing the book-review, the annotation, the library column, giving books-talks, story-hours, age-levels and interest needs of library patrons, the reference interview); 7) Collection Development (popular non-fiction circulating material in all categories and some reference sources); 8) Collection Development (traditional literature, including biblical and rabbinic literature); 9) Program Planning and Newsletters.

**Second Semester—Bibliography and Techniques of Reader Guidance**

During the Spring '85 semester, a course entitled *Spring into Jewish Children's [and Adult] Literature* was offered. Although the course description stated that "The course is designed to familiarize students with the literature of the Jewish children's library, to learn how to integrate children's literature into the Hebrew and Day School curriculum, and to become adept at techniques for extending the literary experience through storytelling, puppetry, role-playing, and booktalks . . . .," adult literature was demanded as well by the students and was included.

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Jewish children's literature and adult literature were analyzed by genre and subject, with attention to themes and analysis of content for Jewish values and historical experience. Wherever possible, adult literature was chosen which echoed the themes of the children's material (and vice-versa). Since a primary concern of the students was to prepare for imminent holidays, two of the earliest sessions dealt with books and media about the Holocaust and programs for observing Yom Hashoah; books and media about Zionism and Israel (Yom Ha-atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim); and for Passover—books about struggles for freedom and the history and customs of Passover.

After the material needed for immediate functioning in their libraries had been presented, the students relaxed and were more receptive to learning about book selection; criteria and types of picture-books and picture-story books, and illustrative styles; criteria for non-fiction biography and history, and biographical and historical fiction; folklore and legend; various types of fiction and non-fiction; and the bibliography of these groups. One session matched non-fiction books of Jewish ethics, concepts, values, traditions and practices with fiction that demonstrated the influence of the former on the actions of the fictional characters.

**Student-Teacher Interaction**

The entire year was one of interaction between lecturer and students. The course obliged them to do much more than take notes. The series of six three-hour classes were structured so that in the first hour, the instructor lectured, the second hour was devoted to class presentations, and the third hour to critiques and discussions. If, in one session, the lecturer demonstrated the use of puppets in the classroom, in the next session, students were obliged to demonstrate their own puppets and stories, and so on.

As no courses in Jewish Studies were required for admission to the program, information about Jewish history, Jewish holidays, and Jewish concepts, traditions and practices were features of all sessions. While some information was supplied by the lecturer, the students contributed much to these discussions as well.

No Hebrew language material was included in either course, although one student, an Israeli Hebrew school teacher delighted the class with her presentation of Israeli children's stories in Hebrew and in translation. I cannot emphasize sufficiently that the students of any class can offer as much to the group as the instructor, if they are given the time to speak (not to ramble, however). Our eldest student, a bibliophile with a classic Jewish education, was a former RAF pilot who had been sent to England as a teenage Jewish refugee. We matched books about children in that situation with his real-life experience. Wherever possible, adult literature was chosen which echoed the themes of the children's material (and vice-versa). Since a primary concern of the students was to prepare for imminent holidays, two of the earliest sessions dealt with books and media about the Holocaust and programs for observing Yom Hashoah; books and media about Zionism and Israel (Yom Ha-atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim); and for Passover—books about struggles for freedom and the history and customs of Passover.

It has been my experience in teaching classes of this type, that unless the students' perceived need for a particular skill or information is satisfied first, the students are too impatient to absorb the more professional, but subtle facets of librarianship, or they do not see their relevance. Therefore, when teaching non-professionals, I do not follow the logical developmental sequence of the library curriculum—history of the library, book selection, etc.—but immediately begin with "how to's"—where to obtain supplies and books, and how to classify and catalog the books. As noted above, with that business taken care of, the class is put at ease and is more receptive to the ensuing instruction and discussion. Completion of readings, writing annotations, preparation of oral presentations, and participation in class discussions were obligatory upon all students. No more than one lateness and two absences a term were permitted. Con-
continuing education credits were granted for both courses. As in the pilot program, no fee was charged.

**Graduation**

By May '85, the same students had studied for one and one-half years and were prepared to work in a small Judaica library. Ernest Schwarzc (Dean of the School of General Studies), Elyane Bernstein, (Program Associate), and I decided to have a "graduation" ceremony for the group. A certificate was prepared which attested to their completion of a course in Judaica Librarianship for Volunteers and was duly signed by the Dean; a ceremony was held at which various functionaries addressed the students. The college catered a special lunch for the group, and the local and college press took pictures and reported on both the project and the graduation exercises.

"Post-Graduate" Courses

The graduates still did not feel fully prepared. They felt a lack of knowledge in the area of traditional literature, which Rabbi Ben-Zev had onluy had the opportunity to touch upon in two half-sessions. The Dean therefore authorized a new two-semester series of six two-hour classes each: The Torah and Its Oral Tradition, to be held from Fall '85 through Spring '86. This was taught solely by Rabbi Ben-Zev. The textbook used was: Torah, the Oral Tradition: An Outline of Rabbinic Literature Throughout the Ages by Noah Aminoah and Yosef Nitzan (World Zionist Organization, 1983). (For a bibliography of the books discussed in the course see Appendix III.) Continuing Education credits were given for the entire series, and again, no fee was charged.

**Outcome**

All of the students but one, our elderly RAF bibliophile, are now employed in synagogue or day school libraries, some in more than one. No volunteers were gained for synagogue libraries (the original intent of the project), and some students who were formerly volunteers, subsequently found paying positions. As the program was publicized, I received many requests for librarians, which I forwarded to my students.

The non-Jewish members of the class eventually dropped out, as the Jewish component took up much of the class-time. One of the professional librarians dropped out after the first two sessions because she felt she wasn't learning anything she didn't already know (there was no Jewish content at that point), but another librarian with an excellent Judaica background, who had worked at the Jewish Theological Seminary Library, stayed with the classes and, when asked why she, who could be teaching the course, was a student in it, replied that she always learned something new, especially on practical techniques and during the discussions. All the students reported gains in confidence and enthusiasm. Furthermore, they established a network of Judaica librarians with whom they still share a special sense of fellowship.

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The group would like me to resume teaching, but I have not. A six-hour seminar in Librarianship for the School, Synagogue, and Center Library was sponsored by the Queens College School of General Studies in their Caumsett facility in Caumsett State Park, Huntington, Long Island in November, 1986. A special text was prepared for this marathon seminar which was interrupted only by lunch, and which was attended by eighteen people, including several married couples. (A four-week course had been scheduled in Spring '86, by Queens College School of General Studies to be given in Suffolk County, Long Island, but only three people signed up for it, and it was never held.)

**The Future**

As noted in the Introduction, other courses designed for SSC librarians will be reported on these pages. It is hoped that under the guidance of Barbara Leff, who is at present chairing the Committee on Library Education.

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**Appendix I**

CUNY—Queens College School of Continuing Education—April 26, 1984

**Library Course for Volunteers Evaluation Sheet**

For Those New To Library Work

I found that having had the basic courses in Judaica Librarianship offered in this series, I know enough to volunteer in a synagogue library. ______ y ______ n

If "no," specify what further information you need to learn. Please check those applicable and use the blank space for your own thoughts about this.

WHICH BOOKS TO ACQUIRE FOR THE LIBRARY ______ WHERE TO PURCHASE THEM ______

HOW TO ORDER BOOKS AND HOW TO RECEIVE THEM ______

HOW TO CATALOG BOOKS, FILE CARDS, AND CLASSIFY LIBRARY MATERIALS ______

HOW TO PROCESS BOOKS TOTALLY ______ HOW TO SHELF BOOKS ______

HOW TO CIRCULATE BOOKS ______ OTHER THOUGHTS OF YOUR OWN:

Did you find this course of value to you? Did you find it interesting? boring? Too fast? Too slow? How would you improve both content and teaching of the course? Would you prefer being in a class of beginners, only, or do you like being in a class with those presently working in libraries?

Name __________________________ Address __________________________

(optional, may be handed in without this information)

Would you be interested in having further classes? If so, hand in the above information on a 3 x 5 card.
Appendix II

CUNY—Queens College School of Continuing Education—April 26

Library Course for Volunteers Evaluation Sheet

For Those Presently Working in Synagogue or Other Judaica Libraries & for Professional Librarians Who Need Training in Judaica Librarianship

I found that I learned new techniques and other information in this course despite the fact that I am a Judaica librarian. _______ y _______ n

If "yes" please describe what you learned:

If "no" would you have preferred to have been in a more advanced class? _______ y _______ n How did you find the teaching in the series? Interesting _______? Boring _______?

Too fast _______? Too much _______? Too slow _______? Other (use reverse)

Are the following issues of interest to you and would you like to enroll in a new library course addressing these and other issues (which you specify)?

DESIGNING THE SYNAGOGUE LIBRARY AND MEDIA CENTER _______ WORKSHOP IN CLASSIFICATION OF BOOKS AND AV BULLETIN BOARD DISPLAY WORKSHOP IN WRITING AND PUBLISHING THE LIBRARY NEWSLETTER _______ THE REFERENCE QUESTION AND THE REFERENCE COLLECTION _______ HOW TO HANDLE OVERDUES AND OTHER CIRCULATION PROBLEMS _______ PUBLIC RELATIONS AND STRATEGIES IN OBTAINING GOALS FOR THE LIBRARY _______ TECHNIQUES OF COLLECTION BUILDING THROUGH EXTRA-BUDGET FUNDING _______ WRITING A PROFESSIONAL ANNOTATION, A READER'S CRITIQUE, A BOOK REVIEW _______ WRITING BIBLIOGRAPHIES FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES _______ LITERATURE FOR ADULTS _______ LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN FOR YOUNG ADULTS _______ THE LIBRARY PROGRAM _______ THE BOOK DISCUSSION _______ TEACHING IN THE LIBRARY _______ THE BOOK TALK _______ (THE STORY HOUR: TECHNIQUES AND PRACTICE FOR THE TWO LINES ABOVE) _______ WRITING THE ANNUAL REPORT _______ WRITING THE BUDGET _______

Please add your suggestions on the reverse. Add your name below, if you wish. Hand in a 3 × 5" card with your name, address, and phone no. if you are interested in taking further courses.

Name ___________________ Address ___________________ Phone ___________________

(Continued from p. 76, column 3)

and Accreditation for SSC Librarians with the help of Susan Freiband, Edith Lubetski, Toby Rossner, Ralph Simon, Anita Wenner, and myself, a curriculum and textbook will be prepared and made available to anyone who wishes to organize classes for para-professionals and for professional librarians on librarianship for the SSC library.

Reference


Appendix III

Selected Bibliography of Traditional Literature

(compiled for a course given by Rabbi Nehemiah Ben-Zev)

Bible

Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary translated into English and annotated by M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silberman in collaboration with A. Blashki and L. Joseph, Jerusalem: The Silberman Family, 5733. 5 v.

Bibliical Commentaries


v. 2. The Patriarchs (Genesis XII–XXII: Lech Lacha–Toledot).


Biblical Interpretations Philosophically Explained


Judah Halevi The Kuzari (Kitib al Khazari), and argument for the faith of Israel. (Translated from the Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld). Introduction by Henry Slonimsy. New York: Schocken Books (1964).
Moses ben Maimon


Moses ben Maimon


Halachic, Agadic Midrashim


Midrash Rabbah


Braude, William G.


Braude, William G.


Jacob ibn Chabib


Ginzberg, Louis


Kasher, Menahem M.


Derush

Yonah of Gerona


Kranz, Jacob


The Commandments


v. 1. Genesis and Exodus.

v. 2. Leviticus, part 1.

v. 3. Leviticus, part 2.

Moses ben Maimon


v. 1. The Positive Commandments.

v. 2. The Negative Commandments.

Mishnah

Blackman, Philip


Danby, Herbert


Mishnah Commentaries and Interpretations

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)


Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)


Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)


Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)


Bartinura, Ovadia

Mishnah, ... with commentary of Rabbi Ovadia Bartinura vocalized and punctuated. Translated into English and annotated by Jeffrey R. Cohen. Introduction to the Mishnah and its commentaries. Summaries of the Precepts mentioned in the Mishnah. (Brooklyn, N. Y.: Tanana v'Ray Publishers), 1979–


Yom Tov (Betsah), 5740–1980.


Rosh Hashanah, 5741–1981.

Bava Metziah, 2 v., 5743–1983.

Artscroll Mishnah Series


Moed

v. 1 (a) Shabbos.

v. 1 (b) Eruvim.

v. 1 (c) Beitzah.

v. II Pesachim/Shekalim.

v. III Rosh Hashanah/Yoma/Succah.

v. IV Taanis/Megillah/Moed Katan/Chagigah.

Mosheh

v. 1 (a) Yevamos.

v. 1 (b) Ketubos.

v. 1 (c) Nedarim.

Kehati, Pinchas


Kehati, Pinchas


Minor Tractates of the Talmud


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