

Strong-Arming the Denominations

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A new education grant that is forcing inter-denominational collaboration for teacher training on the MA level raises some interesting questions.

Tablet magazine **reported** on a recent **Jim Joseph Foundation** grant that requires the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform universities whose Education MA programs it supports to fund collaborative joint-teacher training endeavors. Meaning that for at least some portion of their education, future Orthodox-trained, Conservative-trained, and Reform-trained educators will themselves have studied and trained together.

The danger for the liberal Universities is that as their ideology seems to move closer and collaboration increases, the distinction between them and need for distinct organizational structures and identities weakens. For Yeshiva University, the threat seems to be more of brand dilution and credibility within the larger, more splintered orthodox world. According to Tablet's characterization, Richard Joel, head of Yeshiva University, "took pains to minimize its significance in an interview."

Economically difficult times do and always have lead to compromises (and hopefully innovation). The current wave of research, articles like,

The Unfolding Economic Crisis: Its Devastating Implications for American Jewry and Doing More With Less: Can Jewish and Other Nonprofits Turn Crisis Into Opportunity? (2009)

echoes over and over again:

Jewish Communal Service and the New Economy , Managing Jewish Communal Agencies in Difficult Times: Cutting and Coping (1992),

A Jewish Communal Response to the Current Economic Crisis (1983).

The Foundation seems to be using its economic leverage to (attempt to) bring Jews, or at least Jewish educational institutions, closer together. Personally I think that's a good thing, but it is another example of the power of money to set the agenda for Jewish organizational life. I do think it's ironic that after what seems like so much angst and ink spent on the impact of the 'new trend' of **independent minyanim** on the established denominations, apparently anti-establishment pressure can come from arguably the most established place of all - wealth.