Early Career, Enduring Impact
Jewish Campus Service Corps Alumni and Career Development

JANUARY 2020
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Between 1994 and 2008, Hillel’s Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellowship (JCSC) successfully brought hundreds of recent graduates to college campuses to engage uninvolved or marginally involved students in Jewish life. The Fellowship introduced student engagement methods that have become standard practice in Hillel today. More than 10 years after the Fellowship’s final cohort, JCSC is still one of Hillel International’s best-known efforts for reaching students outside the traditional boundaries of Jewish life on campus.

Though the JCSC program was never intended as a talent pipeline, many current professionals in Hillel and elsewhere in the Jewish community trace their career paths back to the JCSC Fellowship. JCSC was also a precursor to Hillel’s current Springboard Fellowship for early career professionals. While there are fundamental differences between JCSC and Springboard, Hillel can learn much from JCSC alumni about the career trajectories of young adults who begin their work lives in an early career fellowship program. The lessons of JCSC are also relevant to Hillel’s recent invigorated interest in developing professional talent for the movement and the Jewish nonprofit sector overall.

This research, conducted between January and July 2019, is the first systematic study of the Fellowship’s long-term impact on JCSC alumni. The study addresses two questions:

1) What are the variety of professional experiences JCSC alumni have had post-Fellowship? and 2) How has JCSC influenced alumni in their careers and in their connections to the Jewish community?

The study’s multi-method approach included a survey of nearly 650 former JCSC Fellows and in-depth qualitative interviews with a select sample of these alumni. Of the 646 confirmed JCSC alumni, 433 responded to the survey, a response rate of 74%. Respondents

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1 JCSC was conceived by Richard Joel, former president of Hillel International. Initial funding was provided by Michael and Judy Steinhardt, and the Steinhardt Foundation/Jewish Life Network (JLN) was JCSC’s primary national funder through 2008. The Fellowship was developed by JJ Greenberg (z”l), JLN executive director; Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, JLN president; and Rhoda Weisman, JCSC’s founding director and former Chief Creative Officer at Hillel International.

2 Springboard was explicitly designed as a talent incubator for the Hillel movement and the broader Jewish community. The Fellowship is two years and includes ongoing professional development and Jewish education.
represent every year of the JCSC Fellowship and a wide variety of campus settings. Interviewees were selected to represent survey respondents based on Fellowship year, campus type, and different career trajectories, including those who remained in Jewish communal work and those who left the field entirely.

Research participants represent the full range of post-JCSC career experiences. Ranging in backgrounds from 11 to 25 years post Fellowship, survey respondents and interviewees include Hillel careerists and those who have moved in and out of the Jewish sector. As the research is representative of a particular point in time, the work experiences and career trajectories of JCSC alumni will continue to develop and change.

**Key Findings**

Findings from the JCSC alumni study provide an opportunity for Hillel to understand the long-term impact of an intervention aimed at engaging students and developing a cadre of early career Jewish professionals.

**Career trajectory**

“I really wanted to give back to my community and make the world a better place.”

JCSC alumni have been employed across the three major economic sectors: for-profit, non-profit, and public. For the purposes of this study, the non-profit sector has been divided into three categories: nonsectarian non-profit, Jewish nonprofit, and faith-based nonprofit (other than Jewish). Within these sectors, survey respondents have worked in different occupations or fields of practice.

In terms of career trajectory,

- More than half of responding alumni have consistently worked in the same job sector (55%) and in the same field of practice (52%) since JCSC.
- Of those alumni who have been consistently employed in the same sector since JCSC, 55% have worked and continue to work in the Jewish nonprofit sector.
- Of the alumni who have worked for Hillel, 54% stayed in Hillel immediately following JCSC, and 46% returned to the movement at a later point in their career.
- For many alumni, their career trajectory has included graduate school: 82% of respondents have earned a graduate degree.

**Current employment**

“JCSC was such a meaningful springboard into the work that I am doing today.”

Employment questions focused on alumni who are currently working full time (n=312). A plurality of JCSC alumni are working in the Jewish nonprofit sector (37%). The next largest group are employed in the for-profit sector (30%). Eighteen percent of alumni are working in the nonsectarian nonprofit sector followed by those in the public sector (11%). Three percent of alumni are self-employed.

Questions on employment included items on seniority within current organization. Of the more than JCSC alumni currently working full time, 23% of respondents are the top professional in their current organization. For those alumni who are not the top professional, 63% are one or two steps removed from the top professional position.
Leadership and community engagement

“I’m very connected [to the Jewish community] but not in the way my parents are.”

JCSC alumni are accomplished network and relationship builders and have been actively involved in different leadership activities in the years since the Fellowship.

Accomplishments. In their work on campus as young professionals, JCSC alumni developed engagement strategies for reaching unaffiliated students. Many alumni credit these early career experiences with teaching them valuable skills. More than half of all survey respondents (57%) consider themselves to be very accomplished in building networks or relationships. Almost 40% of responding alumni report that they are accomplished community builders, another skill emphasized during the JCSC Fellowship.

Lay leadership. Most JCSC alumni have not been extensively involved as lay leaders since the Fellowship. However, those alumni who took on lay leadership roles to a greater extent were more likely to do so in the Jewish community. Twenty-five percent of respondents are very much involved as lay leaders in the Jewish community, compared to 12% in the general community.

More than half (55%) of alumni currently working in the Jewish community have been somewhat or very involved as lay leaders in the Jewish community since their JCSC experience. In addition, alumni involved as lay leaders in the general community are more likely to work in the Jewish non-profit sector than in other sectors.

Connections to Hillel. Connections to Hillel have endured for 46% of responding alumni.

These alumni have been involved with Hillel as donors, professionals, lay leaders, or in another capacity.

Of the alumni with connections to Hillel (n=192),

- 78% have donated to Hillel since JCSC.
- 54% have served as Hillel professionals since JCSC, either on campus or at the Schusterman International Center
- 24% of JCSC alumni who worked in the movement stayed for six years or more.

In addition, 14 JCSC alumni were working for Hillel at the time of the survey.

Connections to the Fellowship experience

“I feel very proud and connected to the Fellowship. I also feel proud of what I accomplished and the experiences I had as a JCSC.”

In the survey and follow-up interviews, JCSC alumni expressed pride in having served as JCSC Fellows. Interviewees discussed the bond with other JCSC alumni developed through their shared Fellowship experiences. This view is held by interviewees who maintained close relationships with other alumni, and by those who had only minimal contact with other Fellows over the years.

Half of all survey respondents (51%) would be interested in an alumni network, currently under consideration by Hillel International. Interviewees think that an alumni network could be useful for building professional networks or for mentoring former JCSC Fellows or current Hillel professionals, including Springboard Fellows.
Impact

“You never recover from being a JCSC.”

The research sought to measure the impact of the JCSC Fellowship on alumni. Given the number of years removed from the Fellowship, the findings are particularly notable. The great majority of survey respondents are positive on all items:

- Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents have positive feelings about their JCSC experience.
- Some 79% said that JCSC had a positive impact on their career path.
- A majority of JCSC alumni report that the Fellowship has had a positive impact on their professional effectiveness (81%), involvement in the Jewish community (74%), and life decisions (73%).
- Almost 40% of respondents say that they have used their experiences from the JCSC Fellowship to a great extent. Most frequently cited skills are related to student engagement and relationship building.

Conclusion

The JCSC Fellowship was an unprecedented experiment in Jewish engagement, both in reaching students on campus and in introducing recent college graduates to work in the nonprofit Jewish sector. The significant number of alumni who have worked as Jewish professionals at some point in their careers indicates both the value of such an early-career experience and the potential influence of JCSC on the Jewish nonprofit field.

The research illuminates how, why, and when participants in an early career fellowship make decisions about a career path in the Jewish nonprofit sector, both in Hillel and other organizations. While the study answered these questions, it has also generated many more. Of particular interest are those alumni who have worked in the Jewish community. Additional research might focus on the career paths of those who stayed in or returned to Hillel and the factors that influenced their decisions to do so.

This research has provided the framework and basic data for a first look at JCSC alumni and has also created an opportunity to learn more. While research on early career professional development in the Jewish community is limited, Hillel is now well-positioned to fill the knowledge gap.