

**BUILDING BRIDGES, CREATING COMMUNITY:  
HOW HILLEL AND CHABAD REACH OUT TO STUDENTS ON CAMPUS**

By

**HEATH A. WATENMAKER**

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

SCHOOL OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

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Approved By:

Sarah Benor 5/11/06  
Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director

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LOS ANGELES SCHOOL


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## Abstract

College students are historically an elusive cohort for organized programs. Over the years, many organizations – from the most secular to the most religious – have tried to make lasting connections with college students. Two Jewish organizations, in particular, seem to have found a formula to do this work well: Hillel and Chabad. This study, in seeking to better understand why these organizations are successful, asks three questions: 1) What are the similarities and differences in the ways Hillel and Chabad reach out to students? 2) How do students respond to these different approaches? And 3) How does their relationship with each other work on campus? Using the University of Southern California as a test case, this paper answers these questions through observations, interviews, a survey, and document review.

The main finding is that Hillel and Chabad share a common goal – ensuring Jewish students maintain a positive Jewish connection throughout college and beyond – but they have distinct approaches to achieving this goal. For Hillel, this is achieved through creating a “secure, inclusive and nurturing” environment, in which Jewish students are given the space they need to explore their Judaism through a number of diverse, pluralistic programs (e.g. the Weekly BBQ, which attracts 50-100 Jewish students each week for free kosher food and schmoozing). For Chabad, this is achieved through modeling traditional Jewish family life, demonstrating the warmth and beauty found within the traditions and rituals of Judaism (e.g. the sights, sounds, and smells of a home-cooked Shabbat meal). Of particular value to the larger Jewish community, this study found that both organizations highly value constant input from their constituents (students) and are very responsive, regularly incorporating this feedback into their programs.

Another finding is that there is much interplay between the two organizations. Ranging from Hillel’s efforts to infuse their own Shabbat experience with a more *haimish* (family) feel, to Chabad’s paintballing events, both organizations have adapted to create programs already proven to successfully connect with students. In moving forward, it will be critical that this relationship continue to develop, and that both organizations continue to blend their own missions with the elements necessary to reach Jewish college students in a time when a myriad of other groups are vying for their attention. Finally, looking at how this research can be applied to the larger Jewish community, I found that the viable presence of both Hillel and Chabad on campus is important, in that they provide students with a diversity of options, allowing them to choose how to engage with Jewish life on campus on their own terms.

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## Introduction

How do Jewish organizations today reach college students on campus? Is it through flashy advertising or sincere appeals to their spiritual needs? Is it through sexy programs or home-style Shabbat dinners? In a time when so many different organizations on campus are vying for students' attention, how do organizations make themselves stand out above all the others? Two Jewish organizations, in particular, seem to have found a formula to do the work of outreach well: Hillel International and Chabad on Campus. These groups share the goal of ensuring that students in college and beyond continue to feel some positive connection to their Judaism. But their approaches to this goal are somewhat different. This study, in seeking to better understand why these organizations are successful, asks three questions. First, what are the similarities and differences in the ways Hillel and Chabad reach out to students? Second, how do students respond to these different approaches? Finally, this study looks at how these organizations' relationship with each other works on campus. I will argue that the presence of both of these organizations is important, in that they provide students with a diversity of options for engaging with Jewish life on campus. Based on staff and student opinions, as well as the organizations' publicity materials, I show how Chabad and Hillel offer different entry points to Jewish life. Chabad provides students with a model of a traditional Jewish family, whereas Hillel offers a number of ways for Jewish students to connect – through social, religious, educational, and social action programs. Both organizations can be seen as successful models of how to reach Jewish college students and prepare them for a future of Jewish identification.

For the past few years, the concept of outreach to young adults has permeated the Jewish community. In 2001, the National Jewish Population Survey, or NJPS (UJC, 2004) found that 18-24-year-olds are less likely to have a connection to Israel, have weaker feelings about Jewish peoplehood, attend religious services less than older Jews, and feel less connected to Jewish institutions than their parents and grandparents. Upon receiving this information, the Jewish community entered a period of great concern over the Jewish well being of this generation, and a number of studies (e.g. Greenberg, 2004, 2006; Keysar & Kosmin, 2004; Sales & Saxe, 2006) were conducted to better understand the thoughts, feelings and priorities of this younger generation of Jews. This body of research conveys a nuanced picture of the Jews of Generation Y (loosely defined as anyone born between 1980 and 2000), and it provides greater insight into what captures their spiritual attention, suggesting that things might not be as bad as they appeared in 2001. Despite these recent studies, there has been little research focused on how Jewish organizations reach out to this generation of Jews. This study takes a closer look at how USC Hillel and Chabad @ USC, both local branches of international Jewish organizations, approach the Jewish students at USC.

The topic of outreach has interested me since my college days. When I was an undergraduate at USC, Hillel (on campus and the larger national organization) was a significant part of my college experience, and it was through Hillel that I was able to explore my Judaism and my connection to the Jewish community in many different ways. As my college career ended, Chabad came to USC, and I spent a few Shabbat dinners at Rabbi Dov Wagner's apartment, along with the three or four people that came to be the core of Chabad @ USC's student leadership. On a more personal note, Rabbi Wagner



also played an important role in my perception of the Orthodox community, in that he showed me how warm and accepting traditional Jews could be, at a time when I had gone through a very difficult, negative experience with another Orthodox group.

As an outgrowth of my student leadership at USC, I left college committed to a career in the Jewish community. I worked as the Assistant Regional Director of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization's New England Region and then as the Office Manager at USC Hillel. Through all of these experiences, as well as in my time as a graduate student in Jewish communal service at Hebrew Union College, I found myself constantly engaged in conversations focused on how to create effective outreach. Over time, outreach and engagement have become something of an obsession, and this thesis is an exploration of what constitutes effective outreach.

The two outreach groups I have chosen to analyze are both international organizations, but they have different missions and different relationships with their campus chapters. Hillel International is dedicated in its entirety to meeting the needs of Jewish college students. As part of this international organization, each campus Hillel has access to a number of different staff and student resources, an international program database (available on Hillel's website), and access to funding for both specific programs and institutional support (Hillel FJCL, 2001; p.c. S. Mercer April 28, 2006). Chabad is also an international organization, but it does not focus solely on college students. Chabad's goal is to ignite the Jewish spark in as many Jews in the world as possible, from college students to actors to prisoners. The Chabad on Campus movement, which began in the 1960s under the guidance of Chabad's seventh Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, is focused on college students. The international infrastructure provides

some resources to individual Chabad Houses, but these resources are still not as extensive and formalized as Hillel's (Fishkoff, 2003; p.c. D. Wagner, February 14, 2006). As the local branches of international organizations, Chabad @ USC and USC Hillel provide a test case for how these groups accomplish the task of outreach to Jewish students.

### Literature Review

Before examining these organizations, it is important to take a close look at what recent research has said about the students they work with. Two studies funded by Reboot (Greenberg, 2004/2006), sought to better understand and quantify the religious habits of members of Generation Y in general (Greenberg, 2004) and, more specifically, the Jewish members of this cohort (Greenberg, 2006). Reboot, a Jewish non-profit organization, believes that “every generation must grapple with the questions of Jewish identity, community and meaning on its own terms” and seeks to “facilitate [this] process for [Generation Y] and to help [them] ‘Reboot’ the traditions [they have] inherited and make them vital and resonant in [their] lives” (Reboot, 2006).

Greenberg (2004) finds that there are three distinguishable groups within Generation Y: “the Godly (27%),” defined as those for whom “religion and God are a central part of their lives and are comfortable with traditional forms of religious practice;” “the God-less (27%),” for whom “religion plays little role but who may have spiritual or ideological aspects to their religious identity;” and “the Undecided (46%),” who make up the large middle of the sample, and are “uncertain, yet positive, about their religious identities and lean towards informal and expressive practices over the formal and institutional involvement” (p. 6). In order to be welcoming to students who fall into each of these categories, it is important for organizations like Hillel and Chabad to provide a “diverse menu of opportunities,” in the words of USC Hillel’s Rabbi Jonathan Klein (p.c. February 9, 2006).

Focusing more specifically on Jews, Greenberg (2006) identifies a number of positive traits within this cohort, which suggest that Jewish organizations may still be

able to develop connections, but only if they re-think their approach. According to Greenberg, Jews of this generation view their Judaism as one of a multiplicity of identities, which is common throughout this generation. Additionally, Jews of this generation feel a greater Jewish self-confidence but demonstrate a decreasing institutional awareness, which Greenberg notes may be part of a more general decline in denominationalism and a blurring between American and Jewish values. Another finding is that this generation feels "tied to a global Jewish community," which Greenberg defines as "an abstract feeling of a people, more than a localized community or institution" (p. 8). In place of institutions, Greenberg identifies culture as a "convener, communicator and catalyst" (p. 9). Greenberg defines "culture" here as music, DVD's, or the written word, and she points to the popularity of Matisiyahu, a Jewish Reggae artist (and Chabadnik) who has commanded a large following within this generation. Institutions like Chabad and Hillel may find that cultural activity is a more effective focus for outreach than institutional affiliation.

Although Greenberg, in both studies, looks closely at the thoughts and motivations of this generation, she does not appear to be as concerned with explaining how Jewish organizations approach this generation, which is of particular interest to my study. Greenberg does offer a few suggestions of how Jewish organizations should use her work, including the need for organizations to create a multiplicity of approaches, the importance of respecting the intelligence of this generation, and an openness to experimenting with boundary-stretching programs.

Keysar and Kosmin (2004) also focus on Jewish students, more specifically how Jews from the Conservative movement manifest their Jewish identity once in college.

This study, which follows a cohort raised in the Conservative movement from their *b'nai mitzvot* into college, looks at where Judaism ranks in these students' lives and how that ranking has changed as these students have grown older. Keysar and Kosmin's analysis mirrors the Reboot findings in several ways. They report that Jewish student activity is more focused on the social and political aspects of Jewish life, rather than on the religious, that the majority of students lean more towards liberal Judaism, and that they are constantly trying to "create individual Jewish lifestyles with which they can feel comfortable" (Keysar and Kosmin, 2004, p. 43). Additionally, this study finds that these students remained loyal to their Judaism and notes that "none of the more than 1,000 respondents report that they are attracted to other religions or had fallen prey to missionaries and cults" (p. 43). From this data, it appears that these students' prior and continued involvement in Jewish life has strengthened their Jewish identification.

From all of this research, it is clear that Jewish students are by no means a lost cause. Summing up a number of these studies, Fishkoff (2006) reports that the Jews of Generation Y are "proud to be Jewish, avoid institutional affiliation, are interested in Jewish culture and have diverse allegiances" (p. 16). Offering some suggestions on how organizations might use these findings, Fishkoff points to the recent study conducted by Sales and Saxe (2006), which suggests that organizations should look carefully at how they can customize each campus branch to meet the needs of those specific students.

Looking at the role of religious organizations on campus as part of the larger college experience, Cawthon and Jones (2004) describe how "campus ministries" have changed over the years as the priorities and religious values of their target populations have changed. Through an analysis of various models of campus ministries, Cawthon

and Jones discuss three types of campus ministries: the presence model, defined as a ministry with a campus presence that is "a passive voice, interpreting and responding to the changes of the academic community...operat[ing] under the assumption that the students and faculty had an understanding of the church's mission"; the network/resource model, in which "campus ministries led students to activities" but "would not so much do ministry as enable ministry to occur"; and the church-on-campus model, which "provided persons on campus the worship and study of the tradition of a local church, yet outside of the local church setting" (p. 158).

Both Hillel and Chabad have elements of each of these models. During the High Holy Days, Shabbat, and Passover, as a few examples, Hillel and Chabad both demonstrate characteristics of the church-on-campus model, in that they offer services, meals and other familiar elements that students may find in their home congregations. Additionally, Hillel is highly committed to providing opportunities for their students to engage in activities they are passionate about, ranging from social action projects to their annual Jewish Student Film Festival, and many of these programs fit into Cawthon and Jones' network/resource model, in that they allow students to engage with this Jewish organization on their own terms. Chabad also demonstrates some elements of the network/resource model, in that they frequently bring in speakers and scholars to teach classes, offering students an opportunity to learn with various experts in a number of different fields. Finally, Chabad, I would argue, tends to operate within the presence model more than Hillel, in that they are not as vocal on campus issues that do not affect them directly.

In order to understand how these organizations approach students, it is also important to better understand how they view Judaism and a Jew's connection to their community. One of the most in-depth studies of the Chabad world is Sue Fishkoff's *The Rebbe's Army* (2003). Fishkoff looks at a number of different aspects of the Chabad movement, from its origins in Eastern Europe to the current state of the billion-dollar organization, with particular emphasis on the motivations and duties of Chabad *shlichim* ("emissaries").

As part of her analysis of Chabad on Campus, Fishkoff (2003) offers a brief comparison of Hillel and Chabad, noting that "Hillel hires professionals, but Chabad grows True Believers" (p. 100). Because of the dedication and lifelong commitment that Chabad *shlichim* make to the organization, she suggests they bring a certain level of focus and commitment that Jewish professionals simply can't match. Building upon Fishkoff's reference to professionalism, Sussman (2004), in her Master's Project, compares Chabad's *shlichim* and the more general Jewish professional, offering a number of areas in which the Jewish professional might be able to learn from *shlichim*.

Despite the presence of research focusing on this generation of Jews and how they interact with traditional Jewish organizations, there has not been much research comparing the approaches of different organizations. The current study fills this gap with a comparative analysis of Hillel and Chabad. Despite the changing wants and needs of this generation of Jews, my study finds that there are still many opportunities to create serious Jewish connections. Both Chabad and Hillel are accomplishing this work through their diverse offerings for Jewish college students.

### Methodology

In examining each organization's approach to outreach, I conducted interviews with several of the staff members of each organization. At USC Hillel, I interviewed a diverse cross-section of the staff, ranging from the programmatic side of the organization to the administrative side: the Rabbinic Director, Rabbi Jonathan Klein, the Assistant Director of Student Affairs (who asked that her name not be published), and the Executive Director, Steven Mercer, Ed.D. Because Chabad @ USC has a much smaller staff, I was able to interview the entire staff – Rabbi Dov Wagner and his wife, Runya, who together oversee the entirety of Chabad @ USC's program and operations. The primary goal of these interviews was to better understand the outreach strategies of each organization, how they measure success, and some of the challenges they have experienced in implementing these strategies. In addition to understanding the goals of the local organizations, I was also interested to learn more about how each of these campus organizations related to and functioned within their larger national bodies. I also asked the staff of each organization to discuss what they thought their organization offered students, and what they thought the other offered as well.

In addition to staff interviews, I conducted a number of observations throughout the year at each organization. At Hillel, I attended a variety of programs, ranging from their Weekly BBQ to Shabbat services to Passover meals. At Chabad, I attended Shabbat services, visited their Pre-Purim Carnival on campus, and reviewed some footage from other events (e.g. the Sinai Scholars' graduation ceremony) on the Chabad @ USC website. In attending Shabbat services at both organizations, for example, I was interested in learning more about the atmosphere each organization creates and how they



use this weekly religious event as an outreach tool for other programs they offer. I also reviewed the general weekly e-mails sent by each organization, as this is one of the primary methods both organizations use to reach the majority of their students each week and keep them informed of the programs they offer. In addition to the observations conducted for this study, I have been involved, in varying capacities, with both organizations over the years, and I will be drawing upon these experiences as well.

Finally, I distributed a survey to the student leaders of both organizations to evaluate these students' perceptions of each organization using quantitative and qualitative measures. Out of approximately thirty leadership positions between the two organizations, twelve student leaders completed this survey posted on [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com) (three of Chabad's ten leaders, five of Hillel's seven student board members, and five of Hillel's approximately committee members). As background information, the survey asked students for basic demographic information, including year in school, gender, and denominational background ("In what denomination were you raised?"), as well as the factors that were important to this group when choosing to go to college. Students were also asked a number of questions about their current Jewish involvement, including percentage of close Jewish friends on campus, frequency of Shabbat observance, and their perceptions of Hillel and Chabad. The goal of this survey was to gain an understanding of which students choose to become involved in campus Jewish life, what leadership roles they take on, and how they perceive both Hillel and Chabad.

### Missions and Goals of Hillel and Chabad

Both Hillel and Chabad share similar goals, but I will argue that these are manifest in different ways. Both organizations are deeply committed to providing students with positive Jewish experiences with the hopes that they continue to remain connected to the Jewish community throughout their lives. For Hillel, this goal is achieved through creating a “secure, inclusive environment” (USC Hillel, n.d.) that provides students a variety of opportunities to find their niche within the Hillel community. Chabad approaches this goal with a “more specific view of the ideal” (p.c. J. Klein, February 9, 2006), in that they provide students with a model of a traditional Jewish family, demonstrating the warmth and beauty found within the traditions and rituals of Judaism.

#### *Hillel's Mission*

For a long time, beginning with Richard Joel's appointment as Executive Director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (also known as “Hillel International”), Hillel was guided by the mission statement: “Maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews” (Rubin, 2003, p. 12). While this mission was quite broad and far-reaching, it simultaneously represented great opportunities and great challenges. Under the auspices of this mission, Hillel staff and students were given license to create a number of innovative, cutting-edge programs, all designed to engage Jewish students in new ways, offer them new opportunities, and help them get in touch with their Jewishness. Under this statement, Hillel broke ground on campuses in the Former Soviet Union, Uruguay, Argentina, and throughout North America. In Joel's words, Hillel had begun a time for Jewish “Renaissance” (Rubin, 2003), in which students were

encouraged to celebrate their Judaism.

Working as a volunteer student leader for Hillel International, I saw how this mission statement manifested. For three years, I served on a committee that reviewed proposals and distributed grant money to innovative student-initiated Hillel programs. I must have read through hundreds of applications that espoused the ways in which they would “maximize the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews” – from ski trips to Israel fairs to eco-Judaism. All of these programs did, indeed, fit within the mission in some way. Not all of them, however, accomplished all three elements, and some of them barely covered any at all. Those that received funding from our committee tended to be cutting edge and innovative, brought something new to the applicants’ campuses, and often contained what we deemed a worthy balance between Jewish content (“doing Jewish”) and social interaction (“with other Jews”).

One of the greatest challenges with such a far-reaching goal is that it allows for a breadth of different programs, but sometimes at the expense of depth. In creating a culture in which Judaism can take on so many different forms, it sometimes becomes difficult for students to determine just what Judaism looks like and, perhaps, more challenging for students to explain what their personal definition of and connection to Judaism are. Is Judaism defined as ski trips or services? Do you explain your Jewish identity in terms of peoplehood or personal preference? As illustrated throughout this chapter, Hillel would say “Yes” to all of these.

Since Richard Joel’s departure from Hillel International in 2003, the international organization has adopted a new mission statement:

Hillel’s mission is to enrich the lives of Jewish undergraduate and graduate students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

Hillel student leaders, professionals and lay leaders are dedicated to creating a pluralistic, welcoming and inclusive environment for Jewish college students, where they are encouraged to grow intellectually, spiritually and socially. Hillel helps students find a balance in being distinctively Jewish and universally human by encouraging them to pursue *tzedek* (social justice), *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and Jewish learning, and to support Israel and global Jewish peoplehood. Hillel is committed to excellence, innovation, accountability and results (Hillel: FJCL, 2001).

Hillel, in working to reach out to as diverse a student population as possible, still maintains a fairly broad mission statement, but with much more emphasis placed on specific areas in which they want to touch the lives of students. Through Hillel's emphasis on plurality and creating an inclusive environment, the organization charges its professionals with creating campus programs that allow students to express their various views and feelings about Judaism in a number of different ways.

Across the country, Hillels respond to their students in different ways. Some Hillels operate as the church-on-campus model, in Cawthon and Jones' (2004) terminology, providing High Holy Day services, weekly Shabbat services, and a number of other celebrations of the Jewish calendar throughout the year. Others serve as a space for networking and resources, providing a mix of religious and social programs; and many Hillels illustrate elements of both models. Each campus Hillel tries to develop programs based on the needs and input of its students (Hillel FJCL, 2001).

USC Hillel's Executive Director, Steven Mercer, noted that USC Hillel operates as a combination between an "educational institution and a community center" (p.c. April 28, 2006). As an educational institution, Hillel has a full-time staff, which oversees both formal classes (e.g. Introduction to Judaism or Mystical Torah Study) and a number of informal educational experiences (most notably the teachable moments that occur when

staff members interact with students). In looking at USC Hillel as a community center, the Executive Director described the fact that Hillel is housed in a building that is open to students, providing meals, programs, lectures and a range of activities. Both the Executive Director and the Assistant Director of Student Affairs also pointed to USC Hillel's connection to the university, and view the work of USC Hillel as being "part of what the university does."

Looking at the interplay between Hillel International and its local, campus-based Hillels, it is interesting to note that USC Hillel has been operating under a mission similar to Hillel International's newer statement for the past five years. According to their mission statement, USC Hillel

Provides the foundation for Jewish student life at USC, offering a secure, inclusive and nurturing environment for all Jews who are part of the USC community. USC Hillel fosters social relationships and spiritual enrichment, enabling the personal and communal exploration of Jewish culture, values, traditions and scholarship and affirming the principle of *Tikkun Olam* (USC Hillel, n.d.).

This statement grew out of the local organization's desire to better quantify the work they were doing, in a more specific manner than Hillel International's older "Maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews" (p.c. J. Klein, February 9, 2006).

From their mission statement, it is clear that USC Hillel is focused on engaging students in a way that will make them feel comfortable (note the words "secure," "inclusive," and "nurturing"). The Assistant Director, referring to the "Student Affairs" part of her title, noted that what Hillel does "isn't just about programming...we try to serve the whole student."

Another hallmark of the USC Hillel approach is variety. They offer a variety of events that speak to a variety of students in a number of different ways. According to

Rabbi Klein (p.c. February 9, 2006), USC Hillel tries to “offer [Jewish] stimulation in different ways...socially, culturally, religiously, educationally, academically...for students to grow in their connection to their heritage, and do it in a way that is relevant...and edifying to them.” Essentially, Hillel’s approach is to provide a menu of opportunities for students to connect, regardless of their level of Jewish knowledge, practice, and interests.

In order to successfully do this important work, Steven Mercer, Hillel’s Executive Director, pointed out that part of his job is raising the funds required to keep Hillel running. According to Mercer, staffing is both the biggest expense of Hillel’s budget and the most difficult area to raise money for. Mercer did acknowledge that USC Hillel has a dedicated Board of Directors, who give the program staff the freedom to do their jobs as they see fit and who are committed to the success of the organization.

In trying to create a balance of worthwhile programs that combine impact on students with marketability to donors, Mercer said that USC Hillel tries to develop “alignment programs,” which draw upon elements of Hillel’s mission, Jewish values, and appeal to donors. As an example, Mercer discussed the recent Alternative Spring Break trip to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In partnership with USC’s NAACP chapter and Habitat for Humanity, 33 students (16 Hillel students and 17 NAACP students) spent a week in Baton Rouge helping to rebuild some of the homes affected by Hurricane Katrina. Looking through the lens of Mercer’s “alignment” model, this program involved dialogue and relationship building with USC’s NAACP students, furthering Hillel’s mission of creating a secure and inclusive environment, engaging in the work of *tikkun olam* by building homes for those people that had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina, and was

highly appealing to donors, given the significant amount of public attention focused on this region and the incredible work these students were engaged in.

### *Chabad's Mission*

When asked to describe his approach to reaching students, Chabad's Director, Rabbi Dov Wagner also discussed the importance of creating "positive Jewish experiences for every Jew, wherever they are at," noting that "every positive experience is valuable." One element of Chabad's program that distinguishes Chabad from Hillel is their focus on integrating their own *halakhic* (legally-binding) Judaism into the creation of college-age appeal and exposing students to new ideas, while "not compromising on [their] ideals." Rabbi Wagner explained the interplay between these two elements as creating a constant "tension" that he struggles with, as he tries to reconcile the typically secular lives of his students and his own beliefs. For the most part, Rabbi Wagner says that he has been able to reach an internal balance and that there is an "interaction between being non-judgmental" and his own "absolute truth." In some ways, Wagner argues, this is an advantage, in that "students want to know what someone stands for," and he tries to remain clear on who he is and how he views Judaism.

When asked to explain Chabad @ USC's mission, Rabbi Wagner was hesitant to define a specific "mission," explaining that he felt that an organization working with college students, who are continuously coming and going, and are somewhat of a moving target, "should not be limited" in scope by a mission statement. Runya Wagner, the Chabad *rebbetzen* (the term for a rabbi's wife, though Runya feels that this term does not accurately describe her role), was also hesitant to identify a specific mission. But she

noted that one of their core goals is for students to walk away from their experiences with Chabad @ USC feeling “proud of being Jewish” (p.c. April 25, 2006).

For Rabbi Wagner, the only real “goal” he has for students is that they “keep on coming to things” and “keep on moving” in their relationship with Judaism. Runya and Dov Wagner were both careful to point out that their goal is not to turn every Jew that walks through their door into an observant Jew, but rather to help them explore their Judaism and their own Jewish identity. In trying to summarize the essence of how Chabad seeks to impact students’ lives, Rabbi Wagner recounted the story of a student who was among the first group of students he worked with upon his arrival at USC. According to Wagner, this student had had an arms-length approach to Judaism and was hesitant to engage in anything too overtly Jewish. After spending some time with Chabad, he said, “Friday night became Shabbat for her – it became a part of her life...she took a step forward from where she was.” Wagner shares this story as one of great success – she did not become “religious,” but Judaism gained a new meaning for her, and she left with a greater pride in her Judaism.

The staff of both organizations identified a tension that exists between trying to create programs that draw large crowds (which are appealing to both students and donors) and programs that make a profound impact on each individual participant. According to Rabbi Dov Wagner, Chabad tries to keep their donors focused on impact rather than numbers. Runya did mention that one benefit of having large numbers of attendees is that “numbers are more visible” to both fundraisers and students who are trying to figure out how they view Chabad.

In looking more abstractly at the work he does, Rabbi Wagner referred to a number



of the “principles of Chabad theology,” explaining that Chabad on Campus is only a small part of a much larger “organization and a movement.” In describing the tenets of the larger Chabad movement, Wagner discussed several principles: the “value of every *mitzvah*” (in fact, the bottom of every e-mail Chabad @ USC sends out reads, “Your next act will change the world. Make it a good one!”), the “purity of the Jewish soul,” the concept of reaching out to other Jews based on “*Ahavat Yisrael* (love of Israel/Jews), and bringing “joy, spirit and passion” back to Judaism. Wagner defined the role of any *shaliach* (emissary) as bringing “light to anywhere where a Jewish community is being underserved...each place according to its needs” and “lighting a spark” within every Jew they meet. *Shlichim* can be found working in schools, kosher restaurants, drug rehabilitation facilities, and prison chaplaincy roles, just to name a few. Chabad on Campus, and, more specifically at USC, is simply, according to Wagner, “a natural outgrowth of [Chabad’s] principles.”

In looking at the missions and goals of both organizations, it is interesting to note that there is a certain level of vying for position that occurs on the USC campus. Both organizations present themselves as central to the USC Jewish experience, with Hillel staking their claim as “the center for Jewish life at USC” (USC Hillel, n.d.) and Chabad stating that they are “the heart of Jewish student life on campus” (Chabad @ USC, n.d.). Based on my observations and analysis of publicity materials, it would appear that both organizations mean different things to different students, and there is, in fact, a good balance of students that choose to go to only Hillel, only Chabad, or both.

Both Hillel and Chabad are focused on creating welcoming environments. In many

ways, their highlighted programs demonstrate the different approaches of each organization, but the myriad of other programs each organization offers illustrates their similarities and the ways in which they have learned from each other over the years. In the next few chapters, I will look at a number of these programs, focusing on their differences but also on how the two organizations have influenced each other. Rabbi Klein and Rabbi Wagner both argue strongly for the importance of a multiplicity of approaches and seem to understand that there is no single program that will be attractive to every single Jewish student. By offering opportunities for students in fraternities and sororities to connect to Hillel on their own terms, or by creating varied learning opportunities on campus, both rabbis try to reach their target audience from a number of different angles. And the presence of both groups on the USC campus allows for even more entry points for Jewish students.

### Crossing the Threshold: Physical Space

Upon entering the Chabad and Hillel buildings, a visitor immediately notices the two organizations' different approaches to Jewish life. Chabad is set-up and run primarily as a traditional Jewish household, demonstrating to students how a traditional Jewish family functions. Hillel, in contrast, immediately feels more like an institution that caters to large numbers of students.

Chabad is located in a fairly unassuming, newly renovated three-story Victorian-style house, just steps off of USC's Fraternity and Sorority Row. Walking into the Chabad House, you feel as if you're entering someone's home – and you are; the Chabad Rabbi and *rebbezen* and their three children reside upstairs, along with two students who rent rooms. The walls are decorated with Judaica and pictures of the Rebbe, and the entry way boasts a small table with a calendar of events and scattered brochures and flyers advertising upcoming Chabad programs.

From the moment you enter, you are acutely aware that this is a religious Jewish home – there is a large mezuzah on the front door and smaller ones on every interior doorway, and there are hand-washing sinks scattered throughout the house – but it does not immediately feel like a building that houses a Jewish organization as well. As you explore the house, the more organizational aspects become apparent, although they are expertly blended into the warm, homey-feeling décor. Hidden behind French doors is a large office, used both as Rabbi Wagner's study and the main workspace of Chabad @ USC, with the office managed by Runya Wagner; at the end of the hall is a small synagogue, which could seat about 30; in the back of the house is an industrially equipped kitchen; and on Shabbat the large living room is transformed into a dining hall

with seating for dozens of students. The Chabad House appears to be built to serve as a home away from home for significantly large numbers of students. It expertly combines elements of a traditional Jewish home – more specifically, the Rebbe’s home in Crown Heights, New York (based on photographs in Fishkoff, 2003). Hirsch Zarchi, a *shaliach* who runs Harvard’s Chabad House, sums up the feel of a typical Chabad house: Jewish students “are away from home...there’s nothing specifically Jewish about it. It’s a human thing. We create a certain warmth, a feeling of being with family. So they won’t say ‘We’re going to Chabad,’ but, ‘We’re going to a place that in some way we can call home’” (as quoted in Fishkoff, 2003, p. 106).

Walking into Hillel’s main entrance, the experience is quite different. Upon entering, you are met by a formal reception area on your right, usually staffed by either the Office Manager or a work-study student, a large multi-purpose room to your left, and a courtyard, painted in red and yellow (mirroring the USC colors cardinal and gold), surrounded by Hillel’s staff offices directly in front of you. Throughout most of the year, there is art on the walls – part of a rotating Art Gallery that Hillel has kept up over the years. If the Chabad house feels private and small, then Hillel feels larger and more institutional, with large windows throughout the building and huge spaces clearly designed to hold functions for large groups of students. The Executive Director’s description of Hillel’s function as a “community center” is immediately palpable, with the large multi-purpose room stocked with folding chairs in one corner, a lounge area with a television in another, and the *Aron Hakodesh* (“Holy Ark”, containing the Torahs) on another wall.

From the main entrance, it is not immediately apparent that you have entered a Jewish institution. The traditional markers are present, but you have to know what to look for: there is a small mezuzah on the door, and the *Aron Hakodesh* is located in one corner of the large room. Upon first glance, it would appear that you have walked into a clubhouse or recreation room, rather than a Jewish organization. I would argue that this fits with Hillel's mission of trying to provide an "inclusive environment," in that it is a place where any student might feel comfortable hanging out with friends. It is not until you begin to speak to the staff that you obtain a true sense of this being a Jewish building. If entering from the opposite side of the building, there is a more overt sense of the Jewishness of this building, though this is the less common entrance for students. On the front of this side of the building is a large artistic installation, which quotes the famous words of Rabbi Hillel, the organization's namesake: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go, study."

In short, both buildings are clearly designed with specific purposes in mind. While Chabad is meant to feel like a home, Hillel blends in more with the college experience. The very layout of each building is indicative of what each organization strives to achieve: Hillel's large multi-function room can accommodate a wide variety of programs, and Chabad seems to be focused on creating a homey atmosphere and providing a more traditional Jewish experience.

### Institutional Structure

Aside from physical space, the difference in the staff structures of Chabad @ USC and USC Hillel is one of the more drastic areas of divergence between these two organizations. Rabbi Dov and Runya Wagner comprise the entire staff of Chabad @ USC, following the traditional Chabad model of individual *shlichim* starting and maintaining a new organization in an underserved area. Conversely, USC Hillel has a staff of six, each of whom oversees a different facet of Hillel's operations.

The configuration of Hillel's staff might best be defined by the word "structure." When discussing the differences between Hillel and Chabad, Runya Wagner (p.c. April 25, 2006) may have described it best, noting, "Hillel is an organization with a structure...people can come and go, but the structure [of the organization] remains constant." For Hillel, it is through this structure that they are able to thrive. This year, for example, has brought a number of staff transitions for USC Hillel, and despite any behind-the-scenes difficulties, these major staffing changes have not affected the majority of Hillel's students (p.c. USC Hillel Assistant Director, April 24, 2006). Because of the structure and training of the staff, as well as the organization's ability to work toward a clearly defined mission, USC Hillel was able to continue serving students and maintain a high quality of programs. The tight structure of Hillel allows for professionals to come and go within each position without disrupting the continuity of the organization as a whole.

Looking at how the staff is structured, Rabbi Klein explained that it is primarily divided between three "program staff" and three "administrative staff." The program staff are responsible for developing program ideas, working with student leaders to

implement and evaluate them, and general student outreach. As the most senior member of the program staff, Rabbi Klein is responsible for general oversight of the program staff and programming, as well as a number of "special projects" such as the recent Alternative Spring Break trip to Baton Rouge and the ongoing "Tzedakah Collective," both of which teach the values of *tikkun olam* to students. Additionally, Rabbi Klein also teaches a number of classes at Hillel, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Also part of the program staff, the Assistant Director of Student Affairs works primarily with student leaders, such as the Hillel Student Board. In addition, the Assistant Director also supervises the Jewish Campus Service Corps (JCSC) Fellow, manages USC Hillel's annual Student Film Festival, conducts the recruitment and follow-up programming for Hillel's birthright israel trips, and works closely with the other program staff to shape USC Hillel's program. According to the Assistant Director, engagement and outreach is the responsibility of the entire program staff. Each staff member is committed to building relationships with students on campus. One of the main ways they do this is by meeting a variety of students for "coffee dates," opportunities for the student and staff member to get to know each other.

As the third member of the program staff, the JCSC Fellow acts in a predominantly outreach capacity. Designed to make Hillel more accessible to students, the Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellowship was created out of a generous gift from philanthropist Michael Steinhardt. The Fellowship, which recruits recent college graduates for one-year fellowships on 100 campuses, seeks to engage Jewish students and provide Jewish programs on campus (Hillel: FJCL, 2001). JCSC Fellows, who are very close in age to undergraduate students, are typically given the responsibility to plan

programs that deal with the engagement of uninvolved students, ranging from incoming freshmen to students in fraternities and sororities. At USC Hillel, the JCSC Fellow is one of the more identifiable faces among the staff, as she spends most of her time on campus, outside of the Hillel building, meeting students for coffee or Jamba Juice (the program is actually called "Jamba Jews"), or promoting upcoming Hillel programs.

Although the program staff determine the programmatic bent of USC Hillel, the administrative staff keep the organization running on a daily basis. As the Executive Director, Steven Mercer, Ed.D., oversees the entire organization and also acts as the liaison between USC Hillel and the regional and national branches of Hillel International. Mercer explains that his duties include oversight of USC Hillel's program, as well as fundraising, lay board development, general facility needs, staffing, and the general administration of the organization. Because of the time he spends with administration, budgeting and staffing, Mercer admits that he "participate[s] a little less in the program." Although he views his responsibilities as more of an educator, he notes that many Hillels still define the role of the Executive Director as the "CEO" of their organization, focusing more on the business elements and less on the programmatic/student aspects of Hillel work.

Hillel employs a number of well-trained, dedicated individuals to create a "breadth and depth" of programming (p.c. S. Mercer, April 28, 2006). Although professionalism is one of Hillel's greatest strengths, it is also what distinguishes them most from Chabad. In looking at the differences between Chabad and more mainstream Jewish organizations, Sussman (2004) writes:

Mainstream Jewish organizations' definition of professionalism can roughly be summarized by its strict boundaries between personal and



professional, with a sense of aloofness towards incorporating the two, while maintaining access to 'means of livelihood.' Chabad's definition of professionalism roughly equals 'get the job done right and quickly,' with far less conception of the boundaries between personal and professional. Chabad expects its shlichim to go 'out of bounds' (p. 23).

If Hillel is about structure, then I would argue that Chabad is about family. According to Runya Wagner, Chabad is "family run...more of a mom-and-pop organization," and it is centered around herself and her husband, Rabbi Dov Wagner. Runya Wagner states that her primary responsibility is to focus on her children and her family. She sees this as an important part of what Chabad does for students, who do not generally see families around campus. At Chabad, "they have to see what a normal family is like, especially since my kids are involved in everything that goes on here." In addition to her family duties, Runya Wagner does also deal with programming and administrative aspects of Chabad @ USC. In trying to define her job title, she said that her job is closest to that of a Program Director, as she comes up with many of the programs with student input. Her other jobs include Chef (she cooks all of the meals for Chabad @ USC) and Office Manager (she oversees the database and general administration of the organization).

As the Director of Chabad @ USC, Rabbi Dov Wagner works closely with his wife to develop, implement and oversee their entire program. In addition, Rabbi Wagner also teaches a number of classes at Chabad, including "Talmud and Tanya," which focuses on various Hassidic teachings, "Pizza and Parsha," in which he discusses the weekly Torah portion with students over lunch, and one of their newest programs – Sinai Scholars (discussed in greater depth below). Rabbi Wagner also spends a significant portion of his time engaged in one-on-one Jewish text study with students. In addition to

teaching and working with student leaders to develop programs, Rabbi Wagner is also responsible for all of Chabad @ USC's fundraising efforts.

When looking at Chabad, it is important to understand the tremendous role that *shlichim* ("emissaries") play in the success of the organization. Fishkoff (2003) illustrates this through a comment by Menachem Schmidt: "When you meet a Chabad *shaliach*, you meet a living example of self-sacrifice...to a college kid, who's putting his life in perspective, this is a tremendous lesson in values" (p. 101). In describing the lives of *shlichim*, Fishkoff places a great emphasis on the fact that *shlichim* have voluntarily dedicated their lives to fulfilling the mission of Chabad and to bringing Jews back into the fold, inspiring them to connect with their heritage. The dedication, passion, and faith that exist within these *shlichim* are, perhaps, the reasons for Chabad's great success. Rabbi Wagner was careful to point out that those *shlichim* selected to found a Chabad on Campus are seen to have a certain level of "personality:" charisma, Judaic commitment, approachability, and open-mindedness, which he said are critical in creating a successful Chabad on Campus program. Sussman (2004) also noted a number of these traits, as well as an advanced level of Judaic knowledge, as comprising some of the distinguishing factors between Chabad *shlichim* and many mainstream Jewish professionals.

As Rabbi Wagner mentioned when I spoke with him, Chabad rabbis and their families "move for life." Because their entire lives are focused on creating a balance between their families and reaching out to Jewish students, Chabad *shlichim* demonstrate an unparalleled level of dedication to their professional goals (which are closely intertwined with their own personal goals). In looking at the structure of Chabad, Rabbi Wagner outlined the highly independent nature of each Chabad House. According to

Rabbi Wagner, each Chabad House operates with a “sink or swim” mentality – that each pair of *shlichim* are independent and must raise the entirety of their operating expenses each year in order to survive. Wagner identified the “need to be rooted in the community” as crucial to Chabad @ USC’s survival.

Upon his arrival at USC, Rabbi Wagner said that he only ran Chabad @ USC on a part-time basis, inviting students into his home for Shabbat meals, and only occasionally offering services – essentially trying to develop a base of student interest. During this first year at USC, Wagner earned a living working for Chabad of California, and when he finished his assignment for Chabad of California, according to Runya, the couple decided together to continue their work at USC. With this decision came the need to create a Board of Directors, responsible primarily for fundraising and relationship building. According to Rabbi Wagner, the national Chabad on Campus movement has only recently begun to develop resources available to Chabad Houses, ranging from small amounts of startup funds to a limited number of professional development and skill building workshops for *shlichim*.

### Student Leadership

Just as Chabad's staff structure is less formalized than Hillel's, so, too, is the way they approach student leadership. Hillel, with a clearly defined student leadership system – including recruitment and ongoing development and skill building – dedicates a significant portion of their resources to their student leaders. Chabad is also dedicated to its student leaders, but the structure through which these leaders are identified and become involved is far less formal.

At Hillel, students are elected to seven board positions by their peers and serve a one-year term. Positions include President, Programming Vice President, Public Relations Chair, and Treasurer, to name a few. In addition to these more formal positions, there are a number of interest-based committees that exist under the board, ranging from Hillel Hiking Adventure Club to 'SC Students for Israel. At Chabad, the student leadership structure is rather different, as students sit on a board that functions as more of a planning committee than a board with specific positions. As students express interest in specific programs, or as new opportunities arise, Chabad tries to find ways for them to get involved. Board membership is offered to students who are identified by either Rabbi Dov or Runya Wagner, and who are typically more frequent participants in Chabad programs.

According to the Assistant Director of Student Affairs, Hillel is committed to creating an atmosphere between staff and student leaders in which there is a constant focus on education. For the Assistant Director, who oversees student leadership development, including the seven-member Hillel Student Board, "Anything [Hillel] does can be a learning experience," ranging from the planning process to program evaluations.

In many ways, she views the goal of her work with any group of students as "connecting students to their Jewish identity...whether this is through a coffee date or their participation in birthright israel [a free 10-day trip to Israel]."

Hillel places a significant emphasis on leadership development, offering a variety of entry points for potential student leaders, ranging from serving on the Hillel Student Board to participating in a number of conferences. For the last few years, USC Hillel has offered current and prospective student leaders a chance to spend a weekend in Palm Springs developing their leadership skills, as part of an ongoing leadership development program. As part of a national organization, USC Hillel is also able to send students to Hillel International conferences and workshops that bring students from campuses across the country together to work on their leadership skills. One Hillel leader discussed her leadership experience with Hillel in my survey, noting that they "run amazing programs and leadership opportunities."

In my personal experience as a student leader with Hillel, I found that the ability to work closely with the Hillel staff to develop programs for my peers was an incredibly fulfilling experience, and in many ways, this influenced my own decision to pursue a professional career in the Jewish community. Through my involvement in Hillel, I was able to develop a better understanding of myself as a Jew, while simultaneously developing leadership skills, including working with my peers, planning programs, creating publicity, and program evaluation. In looking at the "teachable moments" that Mercer identified as one of the pillars of Hillel's work, I would argue that Hillel's continued emphasis on student leadership development is of inestimable value for both the organization and its student leaders.

One of Hillel's greatest strengths is the network of resources available to students interested in taking on leadership roles. At the local level, student leaders are supported, encouraged, and trained by the staff of USC Hillel, and as mentioned previously, they also have access to the national level, with opportunities to attend a number of leadership development seminars. Although USC Hillel has a substantial staff, the students are, in many ways, responsible for planning, advertising, and evaluating a significant portion of Hillel's programs, with as much or as little staff input as they desire. In the hopes of remaining relevant to their student population, the staff of USC Hillel meets with students at the beginning of each year to set goals and review the vision of the organization. (On a personal note, these sessions had a major impact on me as both a student leader and a staff member: I was able to help set the course of an organization that I knew would continue long after my graduation or employment.) The Hillel Student Board then continues to meet monthly to discuss upcoming events and new program ideas and to respond to any unforeseen issues that may arise on campus. Throughout the year, members of the Hillel Student Board work closely with Hillel's staff to plan and implement their diverse programs, ranging from spreading the word about Hillel's late-night broomball events to brainstorming programs to add on to the Weekly BBQs.

As mentioned above, Chabad's approach to leadership is less formal. According to Runya Wagner, students are "actively involved in the implementation of many programs" and continue to give their input throughout the year. She did note, however, that if a student does not take initiative, the Chabad staff will take over, as the staff are committed to making sure programs come to fruition. Although Hillel staff also have the ultimate decision on whether a program happens or not, they will sometimes cancel a program if

there is not enough support from student leadership, and, according to the Assistant Director, the cancellation of a program can be used as an excellent learning opportunity.

In outlining the typical structure of student leadership, Runya Wagner discussed the recent regional Shabbaton hosted by Chabad @ USC. With the supervision and support of both herself and Rabbi Wagner, one student acted as the liaison with the other schools participating, another coordinated housing for the weekend, another coordinated set-up of the Chabad house, and another was responsible for getting flowers and overseeing registration. This provided opportunities for a number of students to be involved in the planning for this event as much or as little as they wished.

At the end of every year, Chabad's student board (currently made up of ten members) meets to discuss programs for the upcoming year. Runya Wagner was careful to point out that, because Chabad is committed to upholding traditional Jewish values, she and Rabbi Wagner "discuss with students what we will do and what we won't do." Because Chabad is a *halakhicly* ("legally") based Jewish organization, certain restrictions are placed on when programs can occur (for example, there could not be a field trip on Shabbat, as driving is prohibited) or what kinds of programs can be planned (Chabad @ USC does not hold speed-dating events, because they have no way of guaranteeing that only Jews participate; as a Jewish organization, they believe that Jews should date only Jews).

Although the student leadership opportunities of both organizations share a number of similarities, Hillel appears to be much more invested in creating a culture of leadership throughout the organization. At Hillel, student leaders are regularly integrated into many facets of the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs, whereas Chabad

utilizes their student leaders as specific needs arise and for general program brainstorming. For Chabad, student input is highly valued and occurs through the formal channels of their student board, but there is not as much emphasis placed on ongoing leadership development.

Who are the students who choose to become leaders in Hillel and Chabad at USC? The survey I conducted provided a number of insights. Out of approximately seventeen formal positions (seven student board positions at Hillel and ten at Chabad) and a more general group of leaders involved in various Hillel committees twelve students participated in this survey. Of those twelve, two students self-identified as leaders at Chabad only, nine self-identified as leaders at Hillel only, and one student self-identified as involved with leadership at both Hillel and Chabad. Of the Hillel student leaders, positions included the Student Board President, the Public Relations Chair, and the Programming Vice President, two general Student Board members, as well as five past board members who are still active in peripheral board committees. The Chabad student leaders, mirroring the less formal structure of Chabad's student leadership, described their responsibilities as including programming, Shabbat planning, and event recruitment – none of them identified holding any formal "positions."

When asked what being Jewish means to them, these students demonstrated that their Jewish identity is multi-faceted: all twelve identified culture as an element of their Jewish identity, eleven identified religion, nine said that they view themselves as Jewish because their family is Jewish (all three of Chabad's leaders identified this factor, compared with seven Hillel leaders), one student wrote that ethnicity was also a factor, and another added that Judaism is their "connection to spirituality." Looking at



denominational affiliations, two of Chabad's three leaders identified as having been raised in the Conservative movement, and one identified having been raised in the Reform movement (interestingly, this is the student who also self-identified as a Hillel leader). At Hillel, five of the ten leaders identified as having been raised in the Conservative movement, and four students identified as having been raised in the Reform movement. Overall, there do not seem to be major differences between the two groups in terms of their childhood denominations or what being Jewish means to them now.

Although this survey did not ask for students' current denominational identification, the staff of both organizations emphasized the diversity of students' current religious practice. Rabbi Dov and Runya Wagner both emphasized that their goal is not to push students to become Orthodox, but rather for them to walk away from their experience with Chabad with a renewed (or new) excitement about their Jewish identity. Rabbi Wagner noted that Chabad also serves the small percentage of students that already identify as Orthodox. This small group of Orthodox students may contribute to the general perception of Chabad as more traditional.

Looking at the transition between high school and college, I asked students to identify the factors that were important to them when deciding where to go to school. Factors included the size and offerings of the Jewish community on campus, relative location to students' home, the academic strength of schools, and social opportunities. Of these factors, students identified the academic strength of the school as being most important, with a mean score of 1.08 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Important" and 5 "Not Important at All"). Of particular interest to this study, students also ranked the presence of a large Jewish community and active Jewish groups on campus as highly

important, with each factor receiving a mean score of 1.58. From these statistics, it is clear that these students came to USC with a commitment to being involved with Jewish life on campus. When asked to comment on his involvement, one student summed these statistics up well, noting, "it seemed natural to participate in Jewish groups on campus...what else would I do?" Additionally, once on campus, these student leaders have a relatively large percentage of Jewish friends. For 92% of respondents, Jews constitute at least one-third of their close friends on campus. Of those, 36% said that more than three-quarters of their close friends on campus are Jewish.

In this survey, I also asked students to rank their view of both Hillel and Chabad on a scale ranging from "Very Welcoming" to "Very Exclusive." Looking first at how the student leaders of Chabad view Hillel, Hillel received a mean score of 3.6 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Welcoming" and 5 being "Very Exclusive"). Conversely, Hillel student leaders ranked Chabad with a mean score of 1.5. This discrepancy can be interpreted in a few ways. It could be that students involved in Hillel, mirroring the organization itself, have a pluralistic approach to Judaism and are more accepting of viewpoints different from their own. It is also possible that Chabad's leaders may have had some sort of negative interaction with Hillel before going to Chabad. It is also important to note here the low response rate of Chabad student leaders (three out of ten, versus Hillel's five out of seven, in addition to five other peripheral Hillel leaders) and that these views may not be indicative of *all* Chabad student leaders.

On the survey, students were given the opportunity to explain their views in greater depth. Chabad student leaders stated that Hillel is "too much of a social awareness organization," that they "care more about social justice programs than Jewish programs,"

and that Hillel students tend to be "cliquey." On the other hand, one Chabad student described his experiences with Hillel as being "very welcoming." Hillel students, when asked to describe their feelings towards Chabad, also had some negative responses: some said that they do not feel as comfortable at Chabad, that they are "too religious for me," and that they believe Chabad is "friendly, but due to a certain agenda." One student identified Chabad as being "anachronistic and not my group of friends." Another stated that Chabad is "too Orthodox...they alienate me," and another said that they do not like Chabad's "separation of the sexes." However, Hillel leaders also had positive comments, saying that Chabad is "friendly," "welcoming," and "feels like a family."

When asked to look at the organizations they themselves are involved in, student leaders' comments were predictably more positive (with all three of Chabad's leaders and nine out of ten Hillel leaders describing positive experiences). In describing Chabad, one of Chabad's student leaders stated that they have "great programs, looking to educate and attract Jewish students," and others noted that Runya and Rabbi Wagner are "very friendly." Students' friends also play a significant role in what events they attend and which organization they become involved with. One Chabad leader noted that they "prefer to go to events with friends, none of which go to Hillel." This was also found when looking at how Hillel's student leaders view Hillel, as one student noted that she "enjoys the people there," and other students commented on the quality of Hillel's "social scene." Other Hillel leaders referred to Hillel as their "home away from home" and noted that the staff of Hillel are "willing to meet you where you're at" (as opposed to Chabad, which this student identified as having a "certain agenda").

Through these survey responses, students demonstrated their awareness of the

different approaches. Even if some Chabad students have a negative view of Hillel's focus on social action, they understand it as a difference between the two groups. Similarly, many Hillel students recognize the family elements in Chabad's approach. Students involved in both groups understand the value in having various approaches available on the USC campus.

### Highlighted Programs: Shabbat at Chabad, Weekly BBQ at Hillel

In illustrating how the missions of Hillel and Chabad play out in programming, I will first focus on the program each organization identified as most representative of the work they do, and I will then look at some of their other programs to further explore their different approaches to students' Jewish needs. Each organization has one program that they are particularly committed to. In looking at the nature of these programs, the distinction between Chabad's approach of modeling traditional Jewish family life and Hillel's more social, pluralistic approach becomes more palpable.

For Chabad, it is not surprising that the most central element of their program is Shabbat. In Chabad @ USC's general weekly e-mails, Shabbat always appears to be the paramount program, taking precedence over several other Jewish-content programs. Shabbat is the first item mentioned each week, and is usually given the most in-depth discussion. Additionally, when I was setting up an ideal program to visit, Rabbi Wagner mentioned that Shabbat was the best one to attend. In discussing his view of outreach, Wagner said that he focuses "on different people for different programs" but added that Shabbat services and dinner are something in which "everyone can feel at home."

The Shabbat experience at Chabad is a unique opportunity for students of varying backgrounds and denominational (or unaffiliated) ties to participate in a traditional, family-style Shabbat. Each week, services are held in a small synagogue in the back of the Chabad house, with a *mechitza* (partition) running from the front of the room to the back, separating women from men. When I attended services, about 15-20 students were present (compared to the 20-30 students that usually attend Hillel services), although I noticed that the women came and went throughout services, as they were helping Runya

with meal preparations. Although the liturgy was traditional and the service was fast-paced, Rabbi Wagner stopped occasionally to provide introductions to a few sections of the service, such as an explanation of the structure of the Kabbalat Shabbat service or a few words about the meaning of the *Shema*. During the service, the sounds of dinner preparation echoed through the halls of the Chabad house, and as a number of students helped Runya prepare the final touches of the meal, it was clear that a larger crowd was gathering for dinner. The meal took place in the large living/dining room around long tables seating around thirty students, as well as Rabbi and Runya Wagner and their three children. As more students arrived, there was some shifting, and tables were added to make room for more. Once the shifting subsided, there was room for everyone to sit around the one large table.

While Hillel typically chooses to have student volunteers recite the blessings over the bread and wine, at Chabad, Rabbi Wagner leads these blessings, surrounded by his wife and children. Students were, however, encouraged to participate in other ways. Famous (or infamous) in the Chabad movement, is the "ritual" of *l'chaims* (literally "to life," in this context referring to a toast of wine or soda with a few inspirational words). Rabbi Wagner modeled this act, discussing the week's Torah portion, and throughout the night, students were encouraged – through light, friendly pressure from Wagner – to say a few words of their own. Within this culture of participation, nearly everyone around the table did introduce themselves by the end of the evening, and many of them shared some of their own thoughts. Students also helped to bring food to the table, or clear it away, and the room was constantly buzzing with activity. Throughout the evening, conversations ranged from small talk to more in-depth debates on the week's Torah

portion, or something particularly pressing on a student's mind. One student made a *l'chaim* encouraging students to educate themselves on the current developments in the relationship between Iran and Israel, and this was met with mixed responses.

Although Shabbat is quite important to the staff of Hillel as well, when asked to identify their "highlighted program" the Hillel staff all discussed their Weekly BBQ. As one of their most successful programs, the Weekly BBQ offers students a free kosher dinner on Wednesday evenings. This program draws Hillel's largest crowds – serving between 50-100 students any given week – and is, for the most part, purely social. The only Jewish elements of this program are the facts that the food is kosher and the students are Jewish. Rabbi Klein was careful to point out, however, that the conversations and interactions at these barbeques range from purely secular to intellectual religious debates (p.c. February 9, 2006). He also added that Hillel does sometimes bring speakers to the BBQ to discuss a particular current issue or Jewish topic.

According to Hillel's Assistant Director, the Weekly BBQ is not only the most attended program offered by Hillel, but it also serves as one of their best engagement tools. Prior to each BBQ, she works closely with students to brainstorm new ideas for how to make better use of this weekly event. In constantly trying to enhance the "integrity of the program," Hillel staff and student leaders use the captive audience at the BBQ to advertise upcoming events, by placing flyers on the sea of tables that line the outside of the Hillel building, and making announcements to students throughout the hour-long dinner.

Despite the purely social nature of this program, it is truly compelling to see 100 Jewish students (sometimes more) sitting together, engaged in conversations while eating

kosher hamburgers and hot dogs. The large number of these students each week is also an incredible symbol for non-Jewish students who walk by, in that it is a demonstration of the "Jewish Renaissance" occurring on the USC campus. The students who come to these BBQs, whether willing to admit it or not, are making a statement: they are acknowledging their pride in and comfort with identify as Jews. In providing the most basic elements of a free kosher dinner, USC Hillel has found a way for students to engage with their Judaism in their own unique way.

Each student may be at that dinner for different reasons, but the fact that they are there is not insignificant. According to Greenberg (2004), the Jews of this age cohort are deeply rooted in their culture. In the conclusion of her study, she suggests that Jewish organizations cannot "underestimate the power of culture" and that culture should be viewed as "a mechanism to distribute and convey meaning through personal networks as opposed to institutional membership" (p. 31). The Weekly BBQ, I would argue, does this very well: they provide a free kosher meal to any Jewish student that chooses to partake, without asking them to join Hillel, or make any kind of commitment – they are simply asking students to come and participate, starting at a rather minimal level.

Conversely, Greenberg (2004) also makes a strong argument in favor of Chabad's more content-based approach. Under the heading "Respect Intelligence," Greenberg argues that organizations must recognize this generation's traits of "individuality and non-conformity by encouraging [them] to debate compelling questions about meaning, value, life and death" (p. 32). In looking at the highlighted programs of each organization, Chabad appears to be more focused on creating an environment in which students are encouraged to explore the rituals and traditions of Judaism, in a warm,



welcoming manner. I would argue that Hillel's approach focuses on allowing this search to come in its own time, by providing a forum for students to come together to discuss whatever is on their mind at any given time. As I illustrate in the next chapter, however, both organizations try to provide a multiplicity of opportunities for students to connect to their Jewish identity and the Jewish community at USC.

### Reaching a Diversity of Jewish Students: Other Programs

Both organizations realize that the programs highlighted in the previous chapter may not be right for every student. Rabbi Wagner and Rabbi Klein both spoke of the importance of creating a multiplicity of opportunities for students to connect to their organizations.

USC Hillel's mission is manifest in a number of different ways, as one can see from their diverse catalogue of programs. Ranging from their Weekly Wednesday BBQ to lectures to Shabbat, there are constant opportunities for students to take their first steps into Hillel. Every week, Hillel provides Shabbat services. Typically, there are two services held simultaneously: a Reform service, which is led by either a student or Rabbi Klein, accompanied by a guitar, and a Conservative service, which follows a more traditional format and is also led by either a student or Rabbi Klein (without guitar).

Services are followed by a free kosher dinner, and, like at Chabad, the size of the crowd tends to increase as dinner time approaches. Perhaps in response to the family-style feel of Chabad, Hillel has, in recent years, experimented with a variety of table configurations. Their current setup consists of a number of round tables, which allows smaller groups of students to engage in conversations, but occasionally they try longer tables, with students sitting on either side. Regardless of the setup, there is typically a good deal of conversation and food moving about. I will note here that in my own experience attending dinner as somewhat of an outsider, I found that everyone already had a group of friends to sit with, and deciding where to sit was somewhat difficult. Once I did decide where to sit, students were interested in why I was there and were generally friendly. Given this experience, I had to wonder what this experience must be

like for someone who had never been to Hillel before; I would imagine this might be a somewhat daunting experience. This was in fairly sharp contrast to my experience attending a service and dinner at Chabad, as I was approached throughout the evening by a number of different students and friends of Chabad (for example, I sat with a student visiting from a local Orthodox *Yeshivah*).

With Shabbat events available weekly at both Hillel and Chabad, how do students decide where to go? Obviously, the student survey respondents go to the organization where they hold a leadership position. But what factors influence their weekly decision when it comes to Shabbat activities? According to the survey data, "A place where I feel comfortable" was identified as the most important factor, with a mean score of 1.16 (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Important" and 5 being "Not Important at All"). This statistic is further supported by Fishkoff (2005), who identified the importance of Jewish organizations' ability to provide a safe environment for Jewish students to express their Jewish identity. Other factors in the survey further supported this assertion, with "A sense of feeling accepted for who I am" receiving a mean score of 1.33 and "Seeing my Jewish friends" receiving a mean score of 1.5. Clearly, for all of these student leaders, social factors play a significant role in their decisions to participate or not.

Hillel and Chabad student leaders gave similar responses for these factors. Although statistical analysis is not possible on such a small sample, some slight differences could be extrapolated. All three Chabad leaders ranked "A sense of family/home," as "Very Important" (each wrote 1.00), whereas the mean score among Hillel students was 1.4 (out of the ten Hillel students, six said this was "Very Important" and four said this was "Somewhat Important"). This implies that Chabad students are

slightly more likely to value the "family atmosphere" approach, whereas some Hillel students are less concerned with family atmosphere and more focused on feeling comfortable, for example. Additionally, when asked to rank "Opportunities to meet Jewish men/women for a relationship," the mean of the entire group was 2.41, but this received a mean ranking of 1.33 among Chabad leaders and 2.6 among Hillel leaders. This may be a result of Chabad's "absolute truths": as discussed above, Rabbi Wagner believes that Jews should only marry other Jews, and he does not hesitate to share this view with students. Hillel staff members may view this as important, but from my own experience and discussions with staff members, they tend to be more hesitant to express this view publicly, and it is apparent in the Hillel students' responses that it is not as central to their decision of where to go for Shabbat.

In addition to the Shabbat activities, both Hillel and Chabad provide a number of opportunities for Jewish learning. Hillel offers two weekly classes: "Soul Food" and "Introduction to Judaism." "Soul Food" is an hour-long program of Jewish text study and discussion led by Rabbi Klein over lunch (provided free of charge). Although this program does not receive quite as much attention as others, and sees relatively small numbers, it is an important element on the "full menu of opportunities," as Klein refers to the programs offered by Hillel. In addition to this more intermediate learning opportunity, Klein also teaches a weekly "Introduction to Judaism" class, which offers students a forum to learn about the basics of Jewish thought and practice.

Building upon these weekly offerings, Hillel also offers a number of special programs that cover four areas identified in USC Hillel's mission: religious observance (fostering "spiritual enrichment" and exploration of "Jewish values, traditions and

scholarship”), social life (fostering “social relationships”), Jewish culture, and social justice (“affirming the principle of *tikkun olam*”). These programs provide a number of different ways for students to take their first steps into Hillel. Religious programs are mostly surrounding holidays. As an example, on Simchat Torah, Rabbi Klein takes students *shul* hopping through the Pico-Robertson neighborhood into the wee hours of the morning. Additionally, Hillel offers students and their families a large, joyous Passover seder, drawing approximately 100-150 people each year, and Rabbi Klein also opens his house to students who need a place to go for a second-night seder.

A number of Hillel’s other non-weekly programs are purely social. Programs like Hillel’s broomball event or their murder mystery dinner are essentially opportunities for students to engage in fun activities with their Jewish friends, to get to know new people, and to meet the staff. As mentioned earlier in students’ decisions on where to go for Shabbat, the sense of feeling accepted or being comfortable may be factors at play at these more social events as well. Cultural programs include the rotating exhibit of Jewish art in Hillel’s main room and an annual festival of Jewish student films.

As illustrated in their mission, USC Hillel views *tikkun olam* as a pillar of their program. An example of a social action event was the recent Alternative Spring Break trip to Louisiana discussed above. USC Hillel also organized programs focused on the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, with a number of ways to get involved, ranging from attending a documentary screening to participating in a rally. It is not surprising, then, that some Chabad student leaders mention social justice when discussing the differences between Chabad and Hillel.

Just as Hillel is not only about the Weekly BBQ, Chabad @ USC is not only about

Shabbat. In trying to find different ways for students to connect, Chabad offers a range of programs, some quite similar to those offered by Hillel. Rabbi Wagner asserted that he tries to infuse "real Jewish scholarship" into every program run by Chabad. Chabad's programs range from discussions with Judaic and/or secular scholars on topics sometimes considered taboo in the Jewish community (such as "Jews Booze and Drugs," facilitated by a therapist from Chabad's Residential Treatment Center, discussing the warning signs of addiction) to more social programs (such as paintball). Wagner said that in promoting these various programs, he tries to constantly ask the question, "What makes sense for whom?" When planning the calendar, Wagner tries to balance student input, social opportunities, and important Jewish holidays, and he tries to "provide programs for students that are accessible to both the completely unaffiliated and more actively engaged." Of utmost importance for Wagner, however, is that his programs have "at least some meaning," which he tries to achieve by infusing programming with some kernel of Judaic content. However, some programs, like paintball, are purely social and meant as initial points of connection. In looking at these more social programs, it becomes apparent that there are some informal areas in which Chabad has adopted some of Hillel's successful programs as well.

Discussing the balance between crowd appeal and Judaic content, Runya Wagner pointed to Chabad's annual Purim Party. She was very careful to point out that they do not use Purim as an excuse to throw a big party, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate how the four *mitzvot* ("commandments") of Purim are fulfilled: they conduct a *megillah* reading (from the Scroll of Esther, which contains the Purim story), collect *tzedakah* (which I will translate here as "charity") from students, eat a large festive meal,

and encourage students to put together *shalach manot* ("gift bags") for friends, family, and the needy. This past year presented a challenge, in that Purim fell during Spring Break. Although there were requests for the party to be held prior to Purim, Runya and Rabbi Wagner decided that this was not acceptable, since the party was held to fulfill these four obligations, and not simply for the sake of having a party. As a compromise, Chabad @ USC created a "Pre-Purim Carnival" on campus, to get students excited about the upcoming holiday. In walking around the carnival, students were able to sense the fun and excitement of Purim through booths and games and to engage with the Wagners as much or as little as they desired. This was also an opportunity for non-Jewish students to get some information on the rituals, traditions and festivities of this upcoming Jewish holiday.

Chabad also introduced a new program this year – Sinai Scholars – that provided a select group of participants with the opportunity to study the Ten Commandments in depth with Rabbi Wagner on a weekly basis. According to the description of the program found in weekly e-mails and on Chabad's website, Sinai Scholars was designed to delve deeper into this specific section of text, and it includes discussion and lectures "about the Ten Commandments and their application in Jewish philosophical and ethical thought" (Chabad @ USC E-mail, September 8, 2005). In a speech given at the first group of Sinai Scholars' graduation ceremony, Rabbi Wagner said that this program was designed to de-mystify serious Jewish text study and to teach students that Torah study has always been viewed by Jews as a birthright, rather than a privilege reserved for the elite.

As an organization with an emphasis on their family, Chabad often invites students to participate in family rituals. After the birth of their third child, the Wagners

sent out an e-mail inviting students to their son's *brit milah* (ceremonial circumcision of eight-day-old boys) and when their older son turned three, they invited students to his *upsherin* (ceremonial cutting of a boy's hair on his third birthday – a Hassidic custom). As Runya mentioned earlier, her priority is her family, and the students that regularly go to Chabad know this. Perhaps the best example of Chabad's family bent are their flyers advertising Passover at Chabad, which shows a picture of two of the Wagners' children eating *matzah* with big smiles on their faces.



### Influences and Interactions between Hillel and Chabad

Hillel and Chabad are certainly aware of each other. They maintain strong relations, both in terms of events that they plan together and in how they learn from each other. Rabbi Klein and Rabbi Wagner have engaged in regular dialogue and learning over the years, and both groups have incorporated elements of each others' approaches into their own programs.

Largely in response to Chabad's presence on campus, Hillel has actively tried to incorporate more of a family feel into their Shabbat experience. They have done this through the set-up of their tables and the use of real dishes and silverware during Shabbat, through the Lunch and Learn series and Mystical Pre-Shabbat Jewish Text Study with Rabbi Klein, and through the various ways in which staff have tried to make themselves more accessible to students. I can still recall during my time as USC Hillel Office Manager discussing how we as a staff and an organization planned to respond to students' comments about how much they loved the family feel of Shabbat at Chabad and the personal attention they received whenever they set foot in the building. I saw it as my role to be a welcoming presence, as I was usually the first person students interacted with upon walking into the building.

Perhaps as an adaptation to Hillel's ability to successfully reach large groups of students with highly social events, Chabad now holds events like paintballing, they have created their own weekly kosher dinner (the "Kosher Meal Plan," where students can come for dinner on Tuesday nights, although there is a small fee for this meal), and they have monthly social gatherings entitled "Chabad Café," during which students can watch movies or just schmooze.

As a demonstration of the unity that exists between Hillel and Chabad, each semester, the two organizations hold a "Jewnity Shabbat," which rotates venues between Hillel and Chabad. For Hillel students, it is an opportunity to de-mystify some of the perceptions of Chabad as too religious (as mentioned in some of the comments of Hillel's student leaders); for Chabad students, it is an opportunity to better understand the Hillel program; and for the USC Jewish community, it is a way to demonstrate the solidarity of the Jewish community, despite its diversity. This is historically a very well attended event (attracting crowds ranging from 50-75 students, usually balanced evenly between Hillel and Chabad), which blends the customs of both Hillel and Chabad Shabbat dinners, to create a fun, lively program for all in attendance. Rabbi Klein also used this Shabbat as an engagement tool this year, sending out a targeted e-mail to students who had not attended a Shabbat dinner in some time. This event is seen by members of both communities as an evening dedicated to fostering communication and building bridges.

In addition to the "Jewnity Shabbat" program, Hillel and Chabad's co-existence on campus can be seen in the general marketing of USC. Each year, the Office of Religious life (whose Dean is a past Executive Director of USC Hillel) creates a "Jewish Life at USC" brochure, containing the mission statements of both Hillel and Chabad, pictures from events at each organization, and an opportunity to receive more information from both organizations. As part of USC's continued commitment to fostering Jewish life at USC (such as a history of hiring Jewish recruiters to work in the Admissions Office), the presence and continued success of both Hillel and Chabad on this campus represents the vibrancy of Jewish life on campus. As such, I would argue that the

university, when trying to recruit Jewish students, is able to use this as a selling point that might distinguish them from other institutions of higher education.

### Marketing Tactics

Marketing represents a distinct challenge for both USC Hillel and Chabad @ USC. Given the limited number of advertising and promotional outlets at USC, both organizations have developed a mixed-media approach to spreading the word about their programs. Both organizations use a range of approaches: from more traditional outlets, such as flyers and banner space on campus, to more cutting edge sources such as facebook.com and E-vite, both organizations are constantly seeking out new ways to reach out to students.

### *Using Technology*

A website just doesn't seem to be enough anymore. While both USC Hillel and Chabad @ USC do maintain calendars and organizational profiles on their websites, they also utilize a number of alternative sources to keep students up to date. In a recent article in *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles* Jane Ulman (2005) looked at how Jewish students use a new online networking service -- facebook.com -- to connect with other Jews on campus. Through facebook.com, students are able to create an online profile explaining who they are -- from their hometown to hobbies to favorite ice cream flavors. In addition to basic identifying information, students have also come to use the service to show off their multiple identities. In response to this growing trend, both Rabbi Klein and Rabbi Wagner have their own profiles on facebook.com, each nearing about 500 friends. In addition to the two rabbis' facebook.com pages, there are also nearly a dozen different Jewish-related "groups" for students to join, each marking their Jewish identity in a slightly different way. As Ulman explains:

For many of those freshmen who are Jewish – approximately 90,000 according to Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life – they are using the site not only to scope out fellow members of the tribe, but also to announce their own allegiance to Judaism by joining Jewish-related groups (p. 17).

Both rabbis have begun to use this service to interact with students in a whole new way – posting messages on digital bulletin boards, using the service to send out e-mails about upcoming events, and posting pictures from events they have attended. Greenberg (2004) would argue that this is exactly what these organizations should be doing: reaching students through a medium that they already use in their everyday lives. In short, facebook.com has provided yet another avenue for Jewish organizations to connect to Jewish students, in an arena that is highly trafficked and increasingly useful for students.

This is not to say that both groups do not still utilize other, more “traditional” forms of technology. Both organizations have detailed websites, providing students with explanations of each organization, as well as full calendars of programming. The Chabad website even has a function for students to submit various forms and requests via the web. Both organizations also send out regular weekly e-mails, to keep students informed of upcoming events and other interesting items going on around campus. It is interesting to note, however, the difference in tone between Hillel and Chabad’s e-mails. While Hillel tends to send out colorful, graphically formatted e-mails with programs listed in bullet-point format, Chabad’s e-mails are more text-based, with a short list of upcoming programs at the top, followed by detailed information on the upcoming Shabbat, and more explanation and details on other programs. Each of Chabad’s weekly e-mails ends with Rabbi Wagner’s thoughts on the week’s Torah portion or some other Jewish insight.

*Other Marketing Tactics*

According to Runya Wagner, one of Chabad @ USC's most effective marketing strategies has proven to be word of mouth: the Wagners ask involved students to tell their friends about upcoming Chabad events. Rabbi Wagner points to the fact that this is highly effective in trying to "break the stereotypes and misconceptions people may have about [Chabad]." Through word of mouth, friendly peer pressure is combined with the demystification that occurs when students hear about Chabad events from friends that they know well; if a student hears from a friend that Chabad is a warm, welcoming place that isn't pushy, they might be much more likely to take the first step through the door with their friends.

Hillel also appears to see the value in word-of-mouth marketing, to the extent that a public relations position was added to the Hillel Student Board this past year and student leaders are encouraged to tell their friends about all of Hillel's upcoming events. In addition to student-to-student advertising, the staff of both Hillel and Chabad make significant efforts to call students to remind them of upcoming events, extending personal invitations. Several of the professionals I spoke with at both organizations mentioned the satisfaction they derive from making successful connections with students.

In addition to the tactics mentioned above, both organizations also create a myriad of flyers for each of their programs and events. Runya Wagner mentioned that without a personal relationship or initial connection to back up a flyer, it's not much more than a piece of paper. She added that flyers do often serve as effective reminders for students who are involved with a number of different activities on campus. For bigger events,

Runya said that Chabad will also try to employ a number of different marketing tactics simultaneously, such as banners on campus, facebook.com advertisements, e-vites, flyers, and advertisements in the *Daily Trojan* (USC's campus newspaper). At Hillel, the Assistant Director mentioned that she typically acts as the "gatekeeper for information," in that she is responsible for making sure that flyers and e-vites are prepared in a timely manner for upcoming events.

For the most part, both organizations approach marketing from a number of different angles. Both Hillel and Chabad have found that student-to-student marketing is most effective, as it allows potential participants to hear about each organization from their friends rather than staff members. Looking more specifically at e-mails, Chabad does appear to be more focused on using this medium as an educational opportunity to a greater extent than does Hillel. Both organizations, however, use e-mail as their most regular, far-reaching marketing tool.

### Challenges Facing Hillel and Chabad

For both organizations, one of the greatest challenges is simply getting students in the door for the first or second time. Rabbi Wagner pointed to one challenge that is slightly more Chabad-specific, in that they must get past students' pre-conceived notions of what Chabad is all about and what their goals are.

Runya Wagner also identifies students' busy lives as one of the greatest challenges, noting, "students are involved in so many things and prior commitments" that it "takes people time to come [to Chabad]." According to Runya, another factor is the time it takes for students to "get over their misconceptions...that are just sort of around because we're religious" and which she says are sometimes based on previous negative interactions with other Orthodox Jews or the stereotype of Orthodox Jews looking down upon less religious Jews. She was quick to point out that Chabad is much different, and she works hard to dispel these misconceptions that students might have. According to Runya, Chabad's approach is not to be pushy but to provide students with "lots of programs...and hopefully they'll come to one."

In referring back to the more structured nature of USC Hillel, Runya also identified this as a Chabad-specific challenge. Because many Jewish students that come to USC grew up in synagogues with youth groups and structures that defined how they engaged with the Jewish community, they enter college looking for a similar structural experience. Because of Hillel International's focus only on college students, Runya argued that Hillel is something students know to look for when they get to college, and that this is not the case with Chabad. Runya added that for some students, who "didn't



grow up in 'structural Judaism,'" they find that they are "more comfortable at Chabad than at Hillel," because of their less structured, family-run setup.

In looking at some of USC Hillel's other challenges, the Assistant Director identified one challenge that she perceived to be an outgrowth of Chabad's presence on campus. From her point of view, she said that some of Hillel's staff are "sometimes too close to students," in that they make themselves available to talk with students outside of the normal workday. She notes the influence of the Chabad *shlichim*, who invite students into their home and allow them to participate in their family life. For Runya Wagner, though, Chabad's openness to students is both a blessing and a challenge, and she says that "we don't have 'office hours' here...this is our life, not a job, and sometimes that means students can come talk to us in the middle of the night if they need to." As mentioned earlier, this is one of the most difficult aspects of this work for Hillel staff to try to match. Despite their long work days and irregular hours, Hillel staff members do go home to their families at the end of each day, whereas for Chabad, there is no separation between work and home – they are blended into one. Even so, Hillel's staff try to make themselves as accessible to students as they can while they are on campus, and Rabbi Klein also invites students to his home to celebrate various holidays throughout the year (such as Passover and Sukkot).

### Conclusions

The most significant difference between Hillel and Chabad, identified by both students and staff, is the family bent of much of Chabad's programming and the more pluralistic and social action-orientation of Hillel. Based on survey responses and my informal conversations with students during events, these differences seem to be what the students that attend their respective organizations value. From interviews with the staff, one of the distinguishing factors that I discovered was their approach to student leadership. For Chabad, student input is valued, and they do have a basic structure for student leadership, but leadership development is not as prevalent. For Hillel, student involvement and leadership development is a priority, with a number of programs and other experiences focusing on nurturing future Jewish leaders.

Although each organization's differences are acknowledged by students, when looked at comparatively, Hillel and Chabad appear to have more similarities than differences. Both organizations are committed to providing their students with a diversity of Jewish experiences. Both want to make a profound impact on each and every student that walks through their doors. Both try to find the things students are passionate about and build programs based upon those interests. And both are committed to making sure that Jewish students leave college with a pride in their Judaism and a sense of connection to their faith.

Over the years, each organization has influenced the other, mainly through informal channels. Chabad's focus on creating a family atmosphere has lead to Hillel's efforts to create a more intimate feel in many of their programs, from their Shabbat experience to the weekly Lunch and Learn program staffed by Rabbi Klein. Similarly,

Hillel's ability to reach large numbers of students with highly social programs has led to Chabad's efforts to create programs with wider appeal. Despite the slight adjustments that have been made over the years, both organizations still seem to attract different groups of students, with a small group of students that have one foot in each organization.

Both organizations have a lot they can continue to learn from the other. In many ways, Chabad appears to be a quick study of what has been effective at Hillel. In trying to reach out to different kinds of students, Chabad offers a number of programs on a range of issues, opportunities for learning, and fun, social events. What Hillel might find particularly useful, though, is some of the authentic Jewishness Chabad brings to campus. Every weekly e-mail Rabbi Wagner sends out from Chabad @ USC includes his brief thoughts on the Torah portion of the week. While Hillel does try to infuse all of their programming with some kernel of Jewish content, Chabad tries to build their programming around Jewish content and expand these programs to include more social elements, maybe with the exception of paintball. Although this is a significant distinguishing factor between the two organizations, this is something that Hillel can continue to consider when working on vision setting and program planning.

It is clear from recent research (Greenberg, 2004/2006; Cawthon and Jones, 2004; Keysar and Kosmin, 2004; Fishkoff, 2005; Sales and Saxe, 2006), as well as comments from the staff of both organizations, that college-age Jews are constantly moving targets. They are engaged in a powerful search for meaning and identity. They are searching for experiences that speak to their individuality, while also nurturing their desire for authentic, true expressions of peoplehood (Greenberg, 2004/2006). The presence of both

Chabad and Hillel on any given campus provides multiple tools for these young Jews as they carry out this search.

In many ways, the findings of this research demonstrates the need for a shift in the Jewish communal paradigm. Hillel and Chabad represent two viable models for engaging Jewish students (and by extension, the larger Jewish community), in that they work towards similar goals, but do so as different organizations with different structures and from different approaches. The presence of both groups on one college campus offers students a multitude of opportunities to connect to the Jewish community on their own terms.

Moving forward, it will be crucial for the Jewish community to find ways for people to express their Judaism in as many ways and at whatever level is comfortable and meaningful for them. If Jewish organizations today are able to understand the importance of creating many diverse, positive, and truly meaningful opportunities, they may very well bring about a "Jewish Renaissance."

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