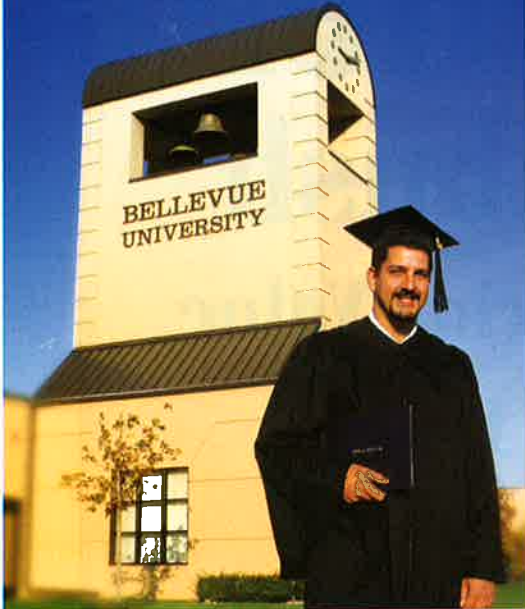


A Creative Program for a QUALITY MASTER'S DEGREE



by David Schallheim

Today, many *yungeleit* are seeking to contribute to Klal Yisrael by entering the fields of the rabbinate, Jewish outreach, and Jewish education. Some are on the threshold of finding their first position; others are already in the field and see the need to grow professionally. They are all, including the women working in *chinuch* or kiruv, interested in increasing their earning power. However, many yeshivah and seminary graduates (not including those women with an accredited BA) who both want and need to advance in their chosen fields, have no secular higher education or advanced degree. While they may have *smichah* and a BA in Talmudic Law, or a first rabbinic degree, this does not necessarily translate into financial and/or professional advancement.

As a leader and trendsetter in the field of rabbinic placement and training, the National Council of Young Israel (NCYI) already has an advanced rabbinic training program, now graduating its thirteenth class of future pulpit rabbis. The rabbinic field today is very competitive, and NCYI recognized the challenge presented by this situation. Many synagogues require rabbinic candidates to have an advanced degree, and although the rabbi might be very

learned, talented, and a charismatic speaker, without the advanced degree he often is unable to receive an interview. Even for someone already working in the rabbinic field, a graduate degree may be the key

to the next step in advancing to a larger, more challenging position or shul. In the field of education, the advanced degree may open the door to becoming an assistant principal, or principal.

The local university may not accept a rabbinic degree as the baccalaureate prerequisite for its master's program. Furthermore, rabbis already working in the field often cannot afford the time or expense, or may find it uncomfortable, to attend regular college-graduate-level classes.

With care and respect for the needs of these individuals, Young Israel invested their vast networking resources in finding a solution. Bringing a wealth of experience to the fore, Rabbi Pesach Lerner, the executive vice-president of NCYI, consulted with Torah sages, professional educators, and communal activists, and received their support and encouragement. NCYI responded with a creative solution, a solution on the cutting edge of contemporary educational opportunities.

The first criterion was to find a quality institution with an on-campus program with Web-based opportunities, so rabbis from across the country, or in Eretz Yisrael, could participate. The next step was to find a university willing to accept a BA in Talmudic Law/First Rabbinic Degree, which is recognized by the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools (AARTS), a federally recognized accrediting agency.

Affordable tuition was a must.

Most importantly, a practical, widely recognized and accepted Master's Degree program was the ultimate goal.

After six months of extensive research and meetings, NCYI came to an agreement with Bellevue University in Omaha, Nebraska, which offers a Master of Arts in Leadership (MLDR), with some of the courses in education, as well. For the second year in a row *Leadership Excellence* magazine has ranked Bellevue University among the top fifteen colleges and universities in the country for its ability to develop leaders.

The twelve- to fourteen-month MA program is mostly Web-based, combined with an intensive, four-day series of classes



in New York, once at the beginning and again at the end of the program.

The classes in this program are exclusive to this cohort program of Young Israel; only Orthodox Jewish students attend, and the professor is sensitive to the needs of Orthodox Jews.

The challenging program includes a strong interactive element, as students interact with the professor, and each other, and prepare papers via the Web. The students work in the privacy of their homes, at a time convenient to each student, at the steady pace of the course.

Obviously, this program works around Shabbos and Yom Tov, and there are two weeks off for the Pesach and Succos holidays.

In addition to the MLDR program, which has averaged twenty students in each of the past three years, NCYI and Bellevue University are now offering an eighteen- to twenty-month Master's in business administration.

Often, someone wishing to enter the workforce after many years of Torah learning, will find himself with few marketable skills or with limited education. But an MBA can open doors. For example, an Orthodox bank vice president told Rabbi Lerner that he would not consider an interview with a Talmudic scholar, even if he was extremely well versed in Shas and *poskim*, but if he had an MBA, he would certainly be granted an interview. Many other employers concurred that an MBA would open many doors in the workforce.

Past and current program participants relate that they received a quality education, in a Torah-true environment. Many students have had new and additional job opportunities, advanced to better positions, and received salary increases as a result of their MA.

Government loans of up to 100 percent of tuition and course books are available toward the low, almost unheard of, \$13,000 program tuition. ■



Additional information can be obtained by viewing NCYI's Webpage:

www.youngisrael.org, and clicking on educational programs.

Or contact Rabbi Pesach Lerner, executive vice president, National Council of Young Israel, at masters@youngisrael.org, or 212-929-1525 ext 115.

New program begins August 2008. Registration is now underway.