CONFIDENTIAL

Intermarried Students at HUC-JIR

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A question has been raised in a number of circles in recent months: should the current practice of the school regarding it Rabbinic, Cantorial and Education Programs which does not permit a student with a non-Jewish partner to join, or in other circumstances to graduate the program, be changed?

In this essay I want to say something about the ground rules for this discussion, to set out what appear to me the most salient aspects of this debate, and to propose a way in which the President of the College-Institute might proceed in addressing it.

Ground Rules for the Discussion

I regard the discussion over this topic as a) highly significant in its own terms, b) indicative of an even wider debate about the nature of Judaism and Reform Judaism in our time, and c) a debate waged between people of principle on both sides.

This issue is *highly significant in its own terms* because what we decide to do will affect the lives of men and women thinking of studying at the College-Institute, and the movement and institutions we serve. We currently have no evidence to let us know how many students would apply to the school if the policy were to be changed, nor for that matter do we know how many might decide to apply elsewhere following such a change. But even if the numbers are small, the issue under discussion is significant. In my view, the question has the potential to create a significant fissure within the institution, bringing into sharp relief fault lines which have been present within the College-Institute for decades.

This is in part due to the fact that this question touches upon a *wider debate about the nature of Judaism and Reform Judaism* in our time. It speaks to the way in which we conceptualize Judaism, and the extent to which we believe boundaries can and ought to be established. This issue brings a number of the core characteristics of Reform Judaism into conflict with each other. This is a decision in which keenly-felt questions of principle are at stake.

I reject attempts on both sides of this debate to demonize the other side. This is a conversation *waged between men and women of principle on both sides*. It would be much simpler if this issue could be characterized as a struggle for justice and integrity

against the forces of racism, or syncretism, or whatever one is portraying as the Other Side. In fact, however, such a simplistic presentation of the debate falls wide of the mark. Passions will run high – for many, what we decide on this issue may become a defining issue, and they will feel that their identity and core commitments are at stake. Nevertheless, we must find a way of conducting the discourse with respect and generosity of spirit, and in the finest traditions of Reform Judaism.

It's OK in my view to portray the implications of an argument proposed by the other side as leading to a negative result. It is even OK to go further and to suggest that the other person's view shows a poor understanding of Jewish history or current communal realities. It's not OK, however, to accuse them of being racist boors or pagan barbarians. In the months which have ensued since I first wrote this paper in October 2012 there have been some examples of respectful and principled discourse about this question. It is my hope that the coming months will see more examples, as our faculty and other key stakeholders engage with the issue.

A Range of Views

As I see it, there are not simply two views in this debate, but rather a range. The *libertarian* position would argue that the school should make no demands of its candidates when it comes to their lifestyle. In this version, a prospective student who is married to a candidate for ordination as a Christian minister and who lives in a home in which both religions are practiced would be a viable candidate. What happens in a student's home is private, and assuming they meet the standards of academic excellence, professional sensitivity and human probity – nothing else should matter.

Others in the change camp adopt a different view, which I will call *essentialist*. They do think it appropriate to expect that our students demonstrate a commitment to a Jewish home and to what might be called Jewish continuity, but they don't think that our current policy is the best way to achieve this goal. Rather than state that anyone with a non-Jewish partner is beyond the pale, they would call for another way of assessing the Jewish commitments of our candidates, one which was does not automatically disqualify a candidate with a non-Jewish partner.

Yet another position might be described a *clericalist* (I just made that up, and I am happy to find other terminology). This view differentiates between our clergy programs on the one hand and our Education program on the other. They would argue that our policy should change with regard to Education students, just as it is different for SJNM students. They would bring us into line with JTS, which does not insist that its Education students are subject to the same policy as its Rabbinical and Cantorial students. Some might even put the cantors in the same category as the educators, and put the rabbis in a unique category in this regard.

The *traditionalist* camp argues against any change to our current policy, either for pragmatic reasons (change will spark a harmful process which will weaken us) or as an expression of their beliefs about the nature of Judaism, the rabbinate, etc.

There are without doubt other positions and variations on the theme, but it may be useful to map out these various 'camps'.

I want to present what I consider to be some key dimensions of the debate. In my experience each of us decides which of these dimensions they consider crucial, and which peripheral. I don't pretend that I can resolve these questions, but I do want to name a number of them.

Demography and Inevitability

Some would argue that any reading of the demographic trends within the liberal part of the Jewish community will lead to the conclusion that a thorough-going acceptance of mixed marriages and their offspring is inevitable. They would point to our own student body, which we believe comprises a large number of products of mixed marriages. The argument is that by rejecting these candidates we lose out on great talent, and we further our Movement's eventual irrelevance, even obsolescence.

The argument is: we can run but we can't hide from these inexorable processes, and we are better off facing up to them and ultimately embracing them. We need to wake up and smell the roses, realize that intermarriage is a widespread reality, that many highly committed Jews are being raised in households such as these, and that our Movement will be consigned to irrelevance if it fails to address this issue. In response to this view, a number of objections may be raised:

a) Is it really the case that trends considered to be inevitable are really so? It seemed clear in the 1950s, for example, that Orthodoxy was in terminal decline, but that trend was emphatically reversed. Would changing our policy exemplify realism or defeatism?
b) Let's grant that this is an inevitable trend in terms of the Jewish community. Does it follow from this that our policy regarding the candidates we choose to ordain as our religious leadership should change?
c) By changing our policy, are we facing up to reality (as advocates of change are recommending) or are we in fact undermining attempts to offer alternatives? Just as we are offering a welcoming hand to those from mixed families who are looking for a home in our congregations and institutions, a number of our colleagues and graduates still seek a way to privilege the path of conversion. What chance is there of pursuing this approach if the rabbi working with them is herself married to a non-Jew? (See "Symbolic Exemplar" below).

The Essence of Reform Judaism

It should not surprise that people on both sides of this debate are likely to speak in the name of the finest traditions of Reform Judaism. The change camp argues that if Reform Judaism is to have a future, it can only be by tapping into our radical heritage and facing up to issues others prefer to fudge or to ignore. We have always been at our best when we have got out ahead of controversial issues (see 'Comparisons and Contrasts' below), and

we should not falter now. They also suggest that non-inclusion of intermarried candidates is discriminatory, and that our tradition of fairness and a commitment to justice demands that we change our ways. This is what Reform Judaism is meant to be: a campaigning force blazing a trail which the other movements will eventually tread.

Opponents to the idea of changing our policy will point out that what has characterized our Movement over the last years has been the balance it strives to strike between change and continuity. We are offering Judaism in a contemporary key, and this necessitates the setting of some boundaries, be they ever so general and liberal. To change the policy would be to separate ourselves from the community, to present a picture of Judaism which is radically dissociated from the peoplehood dimensions of Jewish identity. Now it is true that our Classical Reform forebears downplayed the dimension of peoplehood (see 'Peoplehood' below), but actually the principle that Reform Judaism knows how to change applies in this context. Jewish life in 2012 is significantly different to the mid-nineteenth century, and the epic and tragic events of the twentieth century cannot be ignored. Many of the great thinkers of our Movement, including members of the College-Institute faculty, have written at length about the necessity to make distinctions and set boundaries. Here the distinction to be made is not racial in nature, but it is in a sense tribal – our spiritual leaders cannot fulfill their roles if they do not exemplify an unambiguous commitment to Jewish life.

In short, all sides will claim that they are acting in the best interests of the movement and of the Jewish people. Is Reform about inclusion or continuity? Which side of the argument has integrity on its side? Does endogamy trump autonomy? We can predict that this conversation will be a struggle for the soul of Reform Judaism.

Justice, Rights and Identity

Many of the individuals concerned in this discussion are personally involved in the issue. They themselves are the products of intermarried families, and their own lives bear witness to the possibility of creating intense Jewish commitment in such an environment. Many – probably most – of us have close friends and family members who are married to non-Jews. The current practice of the school is, therefore, something of personal significance. Many of those in favor of changing the policy feel that at present the College-Institute fails to respect and value them and their families. Others with opposing opinions may also bring their personal life stories to bear.

To this biographical dimension we should add the fact that for many this is an issue of civil rights. It is interesting to note that (as I understand it) in a European seminary affiliated with the Reform Movement, a change in the policy was brought about not as a result of an internal change of heart but because of advice from legal counsel that in terms of European law there is no way to insist that a spouse of a student be Jewish. That seminary was externally coerced, and not necessarily internally convinced.

Many compare the justice of the issue to previous debates about who should be accepted as a student in HUC-JIR: women and GLBTQ individuals (see 'Comparisons and Contrasts' below). In their view, just as we defended the rights of these people, now the

time has come to defend the right of an otherwise appropriate candidate who has a non-Jewish spouse to study at our school.

It is interesting (if confusing) to note that for others a change to the policy would endanger their sense of belonging and their ability to identify with the College-Institute. There are faculty members, administrators and others for whom the idea of ordaining intermarried rabbis seems absurd, reprehensible, or both. That the school would make such a decision is likely to make it difficult for them to continue to identify with the institution.

As for the issue of rights, some would argue that this is in essence different to the gender and sexual orientation examples. A person who has decided to build a life with a non-Jewish partner has made a decision. This decision should be respected, and their right to make it defended. But like many decisions, it has implications, and one of them is – you won't graduate one of these programs from the College-Institute. This, it might be argued, does not smack of arbitrary discrimination.

Here again, both sides of this debate claim that this is an issue of identity and belonging. We should not be surprised if for a number of individual this issue decides their continued commitment to this institution and this movement.

Standards and Boundaries

Everyone would agree that there are some criteria which should define the suitability of our students to our various programs. The academic and professional criteria don't tend to be very controversial (although it is occasionally argued that our insistence on a BA and proven academic ability keeps some good candidates away from our programs). The problems begin when other criteria are discussed. Is it appropriate to demand that our students demonstrate commitments and behaviors which fall outside the dimensions which might be examined by an academic or a psychologist? I am convinced that it *is* appropriate to examine these extra dimensions. Many in favor of changing the current policy agree, but they argue that a disproportionate focus on the marital status of the candidate is unwarranted. Others, the ones I have called libertarians, disagree. They argue that any balanced and ethical person who meets the academic qualifications should be eligible for any of our programs.

Use of the term standards is complicated in this debate. Suggesting that our students should be held to a higher standard implies that there is something 'lower' about the family arrangements from which many of our students come. Such a judgment is insulting to many. It is often pointed out that a richer Jewish life is created in some of these mixed households than in some 'purely' Jewish homes.

It may be, of course, that pointing out the arbitrariness or clumsiness of this standard is no different than any standard. Once we set a boundary, anomalies and inconsistencies are bound to ensue (see 'Consistency and Hypocrisy' below). Does it follow from this that we abandon this particular policy, or policies in general?

Symbolic Exemplar: The Personal and the Professional

Some in the change camp insist that a distinction be made between the personal and professional domains. They suggest that how a person's suitability to act as rabbi should not be affected by decisions or practices in their personal life, beyond basic criteria such as respect for the law of the land and evidence of high moral purpose.

Others disagree, sometimes making use of Jack Bloom's phrase 'symbolic exemplar' to refer to the role which clergy people are called to make.

Like everything else in this debate, the issue is complicated. Those in favor of change but not in the libertarian camp agree that our students and graduates are symbolic exemplars, but they disagree that being intermarried disqualifies them from fulfilling this role. They point out that a student who has no partner or no children – by fate or by choice – is not disqualified on symbolic grounds, and no-one questions their commitment to Jewish life and Jewish continuity. Some go on to say that for our Movement to flourish in the future we will be well served by models of Jewish commitment which reflect the lived realities of so many of the people we serve. Folks on the other side, of course, disagree. They argue that our institutions should work in countless ways to reach out to intermarried families. But this should not extend to our graduates modeling them in their own lives.

Comparisons and Contrasts

Like the Talmud, we may ask the question: what is this issue like? For those who see it as parallel to the acceptance of women and GLBTQ students into our program, the dynamic is clear: we will vacillate and hesitate, and in the end we will decide to do the right thing and take a bold step forward.

I am not convinced that this is an exact comparison. In these earlier questions, a statement of principle was being made. A woman, a gay person, is in no way less qualified to be ordained in our institution than anyone else. We reject the notion that an issue of gender or sexual orientation should stand in the way of this person assuming a position of professional leadership in our community.

Some point to a similarity between this case and the debate concerning patrilineality. They suggest that there as here the dictates of Jewish tradition come into conflict with the dictates of equity. The argument is that in that case as in this, tradition draws a fixed line, but the reality of people's lives is more complex and less symmetrical. The idea that the child of a Jewish mother who does nothing to express their Jewish identity is universally recognized as Jewish, while a highly involved and committed child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother has their Jewishness impugned seems to defy reason. Here too, some argue, we need to look at individual circumstances in order to ascertain if they are keeping a Jewish home and building a Jewish life. In these ways the issue of intermarried students is likened to the debate about patrilineality and Jewish status.

Is this issue the same? Let me offer a different kind of case. Suppose a candidate met every possible criteria for acceptance to one of our programs except for one – they were not Jewish. To be more precise, the individual in question proclaimed a Jewish identity, but they had never taken any steps to opt in to the Jewish people through conversion. They demanded to be accepted to the program on the basis of their self-proclaimed passions and interests.

Should we accept such a candidate? I imagine that a strict libertarian would say we should, since there is no basis upon which they might be disqualified. Many others would hesitate about this case. We might want to say to such a candidate: we are delighted you feel Jewish, and we want you to affirm that commitment in community, through a process of conversion. Even if the candidate were to feel offended by the very idea that they were not immediately accepted on the basis of their own status, we might stand firm and insist that they bring their own self-understanding in line with the wider community in some way.

Those in favor of change think that this issue is just like women and GLBTQ students. Those against think it may be closer to the example I have just given. Inevitably, all sides in the debate will cite the precedents and examples which further their particular agenda. Tell me what you think this issue should be compared to, and I will predict where you stand on the substantive question.

Recruitment Implications

The Recruitment and Admissions team of the College-Institute recently suggested that we review our current policy. They are aware that a number of intermarried candidates are interested in coming to the school. This issue has become more acute recently, both because of the increasing prevalence of children of mixed marriages in our institutions, and because we are now offering more programs directed at older students. Our Executive MA in Jewish Education and our Certification Program in Sacred Music are directed at men and women who have been working in the field for years, whereas our residential programs tend to attract a younger cohort. We have received requests from applicants who have been married to a non-Jewish partner for years, and our policy has been more noticeable and more controversial as a result.

Until we engage in some research (see ‘Data Collection’ below) we can’t really tell if a change in our policy would have a significant impact on enrollment one way or the other. While it should not be the key consideration in this principled discussion, it certainly deserves consideration.

Differentiating Between Our Programs

At the Jewish Theological Seminary Jews married to non-Jews may be enrolled in the Jewish Education program. To this extent HUC-JIR is more rigorous in its application of the policy on endogamy than its Conservative counterpart. The Jewish Education faculty

has long argued that its graduates should be treated just as much as symbolic exemplars as their Rabbinical and Cantorial counterparts. Therefore, some of them argue, no change should be made with regards to the Educators until the policy as a whole has been changed.

I remain unconvinced. I can imagine adopting a policy which differentiates between students in our various programs. Indeed, we already do differentiate – no such policy applies in our School of Graduate Studies and D.Min programs (where many of the students themselves are not Jewish), nor in our School of Jewish Nonprofit Management.

One dimension of this whole issue to be discussed is whether we should put rabbis, cantors and educators in the same category.

Jewish Home and Jewish Life

A number of men and women with non-Jewish partners argue with passion that they are living a highly committed Jewish life. Indeed, often their situation forces them to pay more attention to questions which might appear trivial in a family with no non-Jewish parents. They often point out that many who come from 'normative' Jewish homes have a much weaker connection to Jewish life and learning. They also note that the picture of a 'normal' or 'normative' Jewish family – Jewish father, Jewish mother, Jewish grandparents, Jewish children – is less and less normal or normative. Ignoring the current question at hand, rapid social change in North America and around the world means that the family looks different today than the conventions of a generation ago would allow. It's time to realize that there are other ways of building a Jewish home and committing to a Jewish life.

Consistency and Hypocrisy

Reform Judaism has always prided itself on its low tolerance of cant and hypocrisy. Our current policy or stated practice (see 'How Was the Current Policy Set?' below) does give rise to all manner of inconsistencies and lends itself to a proliferation of hypocrisy. Here are a few examples:

- A student who conceals a long-term committed relationship with a non-Jew may declare their love a day after completing their studies. The only possible sanction would come from a prospective employer who may not wish to employ a rabbi/cantor/educator in this life situation: the professional organizations (CCAR, ACC, NATE) have no such policy. We have no evidence how prospective employers would see this (see 'Data Collection' below). The point is that in some sense students in such a relationship are given the message that if they keep it quiet, all will be well. It looks like a version of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'
- The URJ and its constituents are reaching out to intermarried families, emphasizing openness and accessibility. Some suggest that our current policy is at odds with such openness
- The policy does not apply to HUC-JIR faculty or administration
- Students who display little or no commitment to Jewish life in their private lives; or whose Jewish spouses display apathy or even antipathy – such students are not

> likely to be challenged or suspended. It appears that marital status is the only issue which triggers a negative response

Just in case you thought the problems of consistency and hypocrisy only apply on one side of the debate, they are also raised by those who hold the opposite view. They ask: at a time when we are striving to strengthen Jewish commitment out in the 'trenches', how will our efforts look if we now declare that intermarried candidates are welcome to study to become educators, cantors and rabbis? They suggest that our graduates are charged with the sacred task of presenting an enthusiastic holistic picture of committed Jewish life.

I am of the opinion that wherever there are policies, inconsistencies and absurdities will always arise. We need to think carefully about a policy which will minimize the need for casuistic acrobatics, duplicity and deception. We should strive for a result, whatever it is, which can be communicated with confidence and in a spirit of open-mindedness. One member of the community has compared this issue to the question of accepting gay students, and has told me that she is saddened to see students concealing aspects of their lives from the faculty and administration. She believes that this alone is reason enough to change our policy. I have great sympathy for this view, but I am not convinced that we can ever eradicate the risk of this kind of secrecy. We have to strive at all times to engender a culture of openness and honesty, even if we decide upon policies that some don't like.

Peoplehood

Since its inception, Reform Judaism has struggled with the peoplehood dimension of Jewish identity. In the twenty first century most of the external pressures keeping North American Jews together and differentiating them from their non-Jewish neighbors are dissolving. If our spiritual leaders themselves have an attenuated sense of being part of the Jewish people, what chance do we have of strengthening this aspect of Jewish identity in our adherents?

Some in the change camp are unimpressed by arguments from peoplehood. Heirs of their classical forebears, they think that such tribalism borders on chauvinism, and needs to be overcome.

Others in favor of change make a quite different argument. They suggest that Jewish peoplehood is alive and well in intermarried homes, and we are wrong to ignore or downplay the strength of Jewish feeling.

I don't know the answer to this. I do know that the voluntarism and individualism of North American Reform Judaism is sometimes at odds with the notion of *kelal yisrael*. I am concerned that a change to our policy will be understood as a significant retreat from our commitment to this notion, which is close to the heart of my own worldview.

There are philosophical, spiritual and also political dimensions to this question. If we are to change our policy we need to face up to how this will play out in the wider Jewish

world. I do think there are ways in which we can relate to this challenge, but it will take a lot of thought.

The Israel Dimension

Much has been written about the changing relationship of North American Jewry to the State of Israel. As we develop our thinking about the intermarried student question, we should consider the Israel dimension of this issue. Our Year in Israel Program is an expression of our commitment to the centrality of peoplehood in the development of our students. We would need to consider what implications there may be for this program in light of the current debate.

I suggest that we engage key stakeholders on our Jerusalem campus and others in Israel to add their voices to the conversation. My guess, for what it's worth, that we may hear a wide variety of opinions from our Israeli faculty, students and administration on this topic.

Research and Reflection

The College-Institute is blessed with an array of researchers in a variety of fields. We should make use of this impressive resource to replace our anecdotal hunches with firmer data. I believe that men and women of the caliber of Carole Balin, Sara Benor, Steven Cohen, Michael Meyer, Bruce Phillips, Gary Zola and a number of others can help us address the question at hand at a high level. We think we know how this issue has played out at the College-Institute over the years? Let's find out. We think we know where our stakeholders stand on this issue? Let's investigate.

We should also be asking our faculty and others to reflect on different aspects of this issue. I think it would undermine the purpose of our institution if we were to grapple with this question without the input that our faculty, our administration and our students can provide.

The Mood

I have noted in the section above that we lack systematic data. In its absence, I will just mention that my hunch is that if a vote were held among our key stakeholders – our current student body, our alumni, our Governors, our faculty, our administration, the leaders of our Movement – you would find a broad range of opinions. I guess that the opinions recently expressed in favor of a change of policy would attract significant support.

I don't suppose that this is a decision to be made on the basis of opinion surveys, but on the other hand, there is a long tradition of *puk hazey*, of going out and seeing where people stand. Attitudes to endogamy in Liberal circles have changed significantly over the last two decades.

My Own Current Position

I have tried to set out the issues as fairly and clearly as I can, but I am under no illusions that objectivity can be achieved when an issue as emotive as this is concerned. So for the record I want to set down where I currently stand on this.

I share the assumptions which underlie the current policy. I would be perfectly happy if the current practice of the College-Institute were to continue. However, I am not sure that it can, if only for the reason that it is a very rare example of a direct prohibition in our admissions policy.

I think that after research and reflection we may come to the conclusion that it makes sense to change the parameters according to which we assess the commitments of our students. I reject the position I have termed libertarian which suggests that what happens in the private lives of our students should be none of our business. I believe we are well within our rights to insist that our students show commitment to creating a Jewish home, living a Jewish life and furthering the Jewish people.

I think that as the currency of Jewish identity and commitment becomes more complex, we will need more nuanced criteria by which to relate to the identity and commitment of our students. We already know that it is possible for someone to grow up in an intermarried home and to emerge with strong commitments and passions. That said, I do think it is appropriate to expect that an individual who has chosen a position of spiritual leadership in the Jewish community to demonstrate personal commitment to Jewish life. I believe that what is playing out in the current debate is a rejection of the notion that the answer to the question 'Are you married to a non-Jew'? is the sole benchmark most likely to provide us with the tools we need to make a judgment about our student. Twenty years ago it might have been. Given the changes within the Jewish community, it may no longer be.

So I would be open to the idea of a) including a criterion in our admissions procedure which talks about a commitment to Jewish life, Jewish peoplehood and the Jewish future (or some such formulation), and b) challenges the applicant to speak to this criterion. Younger and older, single and partnered, all will be asked to demonstrate in writing and in interview that these categories are indeed significantly present in their lives.

Could I imagine a candidate for, say, the Rabbinical Program who has a partner is not Jewish meeting this criterion? In some cases, I could. My teacher Emil Fackenheim, one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of our times, was married to a woman who converted late in life (the children were all converted at birth). He would probably have been mortified to think that his example was being used to change HUC-JIR's policy, but it does demonstrate that Jewish identity in our day has become a highly complex business.

The result of the kind of change discussed here would be to put a great deal of pressure on the admissions committee. We would need to be sure that there were not significant regional differences, so that a committee in campus *x* would accept intermarried students while campus *y* would not. We would need to work with our committee members to discuss these complexities, respecting the conscience of our various committee members.

Another price we would pay would be the erosion of what I consider the heroic efforts of many of our graduates to encourage conversion. I am concerned that these efforts would be undermined if it became clear that the rabbi making the pitch has a non-Jewish partner, or that the seminary training this rabbi has changed its policy.

Another risk inherent in the policy I have outlined here is how this will play out in the more 'traditional' parts of our own movement, and in the wider Jewish world – not the Haredi community, where we are already considered to be in league with the devil. But in the mainstream Jewish community in North America, Israel and elsewhere - we are likely to take a hit. I don't know if my suggestion can avoid the fissure I fear.

I predict, however, that if we open into a thoughtful process of research and debate, if we demonstrate that we are taking this seriously and grappling with it in the best spirit of our Movement and the College-Institute, and if we invest time and attention in presenting whatever decision we take vigorously and unapologetically, we stand the best chance of prevailing.

I am full of respect and admiration for people to the right and left of my opinion, and I am also aware that my views on this issue may change.

How Was The Current Policy Set?

My proposal is that we ask the help of Gary Zola and others in researching how our current practice came to be. It is my understanding that in fact this is not precisely a policy of the College-Institute. It appears not in our Policy Handbook but rather in the application forms. I believe (and we need to research this) that for years this was not written anywhere, but it was simply an assumption. The idea that a person married to a non-Jew would want to become a rabbi was hard to fathom only a few decades ago.

With Norman Cohen's help we can try to reconstruct the circumstances in which the current practice was established. In the first iteration of this paper I mistakenly suggested that the sentence on our application forms was added as a result of some external pressure. In fact the process was somewhat different. It would be helpful for us to get a clear picture of the past as we think through our policy for the future.

Whose Decision Is It?

I believe that key policy decisions of this nature have been the prerogative of the President. That said, it behooves the President to engage a number of people in the conversation. Along with faculty, alumni, administration, and students, we also need to bring the URJ and the professional organizations - notably the CCAR, ACC and NATE - into the loop. Without doubt, this decision will have major implications for the Reform Movement as a whole, and not just for our institution.

Members of the Board of Governors bear fiduciary responsibility for decisions made within the College-Institute. Many of them have strong opinions on this topic, and some may feel that this is a decision which should rest with the Board. My own view is that

any attempt to place responsibility for this decision in the hands of the Board and to by-pass the faculty and administration would be a grave development. I hope that the Board will entrust the task of setting this policy to the President of the institution, while participating in the process of widespread engagement and consultation which were planning for the coming months.

Ultimately, in my view, the President of the College-Institute will need to make this determination. My suggestion is that we embrace this issue in all its complexity, and invite key stakeholders to be actively involved in the discussion.

The Process

As of May 2013, a committee comprising faculty members has been constituted. It will be working with me in the coming weeks to set up a comprehensive process of consultation. One colleague, for example, has suggested that we should be looking farther afield than the Reform Movement, and hearing voices from the wider constellation of Liberal Jews.

No decision on this question will be made during the Ellenson administration. I assume that any decision will be made in 2015 after substantive research and discourse. I will be happy to present further details of this process at the Fall meeting of the Board of Governors.

Michael Marmur, May 26, 2013