



ALLIANCE FOR CONTINUING RABBINIC EDUCATION: SURVEY OF RABBIS IN THE FIELD

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In an effort to increase the understanding of rabbis' needs and priorities in the area of continuing rabbinic education, the Alliance for Continuing Rabbinic Education (ACRE) commissioned JESNA to conduct an online survey of all current rabbis. These data were intended to provide useful information to help ACRE understand and support valuable continuing rabbinic education programming for rabbis.

JESNA developed the survey, which was reviewed and refined by ACRE's executive committee. The survey included key demographic questions along with questions that sought to understand the priority rabbis place on different areas of continuing rabbinic education. The survey links were sent to the rabbinic organizations on February 28, 2012, and the survey closed on May 22, 2012. As it was not possible to receive email lists of all rabbis who should receive the survey, the decision was made to access the rabbis through rabbinical organizations. As a result, the survey link was sent to representatives from the following organizations serving rabbis: Association of Humanistic Rabbis, Hebrew College, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, International Rabbinic Fellowship, JFNA Rabbinic Cabinet, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbis Without Borders, Rabbinical Council of America, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Shalom Hartman Institute, Academy for Jewish Religion, and Ohalah. Though JESNA requested lists of everyone to whom the email links were sent, JESNA did not receive this from each of the organizations. Therefore, it is not possible to determine a response rate.¹ The total number of rabbis responding to the survey was 371. Given that there are thousands of rabbis in the field, these data will illuminate the interests of the respondents but cannot be viewed as representative of all of the rabbis in North America.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Among respondents, the full age range was 27-81 years. One-quarter reported they were 40 years or younger. Two-thirds reported they were 55 years or older, with the median being 50 years of age. Over half (58%) of survey respondents were male.

The respondents were predominately from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), according to the rabbis' self-report about where they received *smicha* (rabbinic ordination). This is another indication that this is not representative or generalizable given the actual small percentage of rabbis from RRC compared to other rabbinical seminaries. The following chart details the numbers of individual respondents receiving *smicha* from each of the seminaries. Please note that rabbis were able to choose more than one seminary.

¹ Given the lack of consistency among the rabbinic organizations in reporting the dates they actually sent out the survey links, it is not possible to provide greater details. ACRE administration was in charge of keeping track of this and ensuring that the links were distributed to the proper recipients, as much as possible.

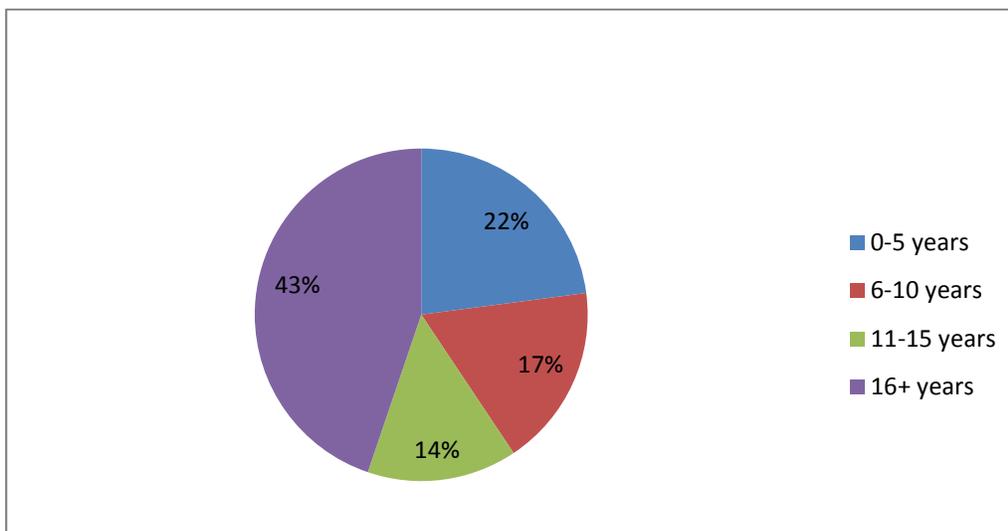
Table 1: Seminaries From Which Respondents Received *Smicha*

	N	%
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College	112	30%
Jewish Theological Seminary	100	27%
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion	76	21%
Hebrew College	20	5%
American Jewish University	16	4%
Academy for Jewish Religion	10	3%
Yeshivat Chovevei Torah	8	2%
Aleph	7	2%
Yeshiva University	7	2%
Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism	4	1%

In addition, 41 respondents (11%) indicated they received *smicha* from an organization or individual not listed. The vast majority of these were individual orthodox rabbis.

In terms of how long the respondents have been rabbis, most of the rabbis reported that they had their *smicha* for over 10 years. Figure 1 illustrates these findings.

Figure 1: Years Since *Smicha*



In addition to asking about the seminaries from which these rabbis received their *smicha*, the survey also asked the rabbis to report with which denominations they identified. Again, rabbis were able to select more than one response choice. Table 2 lists the respondents' choices from highest to lowest percentages of affiliation.

Table 2: Reported Affiliated Denomination

	N	%
Conservative	158	43%
Reconstructionist	121	33%
Reform	88	24%
Other	42	11%
Modern Orthodox	27	7%
I do not identify with a denomination	14	4%
Traditional	13	4%
Orthodox	10	3%
Secular Humanistic	7	2%
Chasidic	5	1%

Over half of the respondents (59%) indicated that they are pulpit rabbis (either solo/senior, associate, or assistant rabbis). Half of the entire sample (50%) reported they are solo or senior rabbis. Other represented positions include: teacher, chaplain, professor in university or seminary, education director, campus rabbi, executive director. No more than 11% indicated any one of these.

The majority of responding rabbis (71%) reported that they are employed full-time within one organization. Most of the rest of the responding rabbis reported they are employed part-time within one or more organizations. Of all the respondents, five percent indicated that they are not working at this time. Retirees make up four percent of respondents while two percent reported that they are unemployed or underemployed.

As for the settings in which these rabbis work, two-thirds of respondents reported that they work in a congregation and 13% reported that they work at a seminary or academic institution. The remaining responses included working for independent *minyanim*, continuing rabbinic education organizations, Federations/Central Agencies, Hillel, hospitals, Jewish Community Centers, Jewish day schools, Jewish Foundations, and/or Jewish summer camps. Each of these responses was noted by less than five percent of the respondents. Fourteen percent said they worked in another Jewish organization not listed such as a senior center or a social justice organization. The remaining 15% indicated that they worked in other capacities and organizations like the navy, independent work, or government.

The rabbis were asked to indicate their level of responsibility for certain tasks or roles within their positions. The vast majority reported that teaching and programming were among their main responsibilities. The full set of responses is listed in Table 3. The first column indicates the percentage reporting that the specified task or role was either one of their main responsibilities or that this task or role is not one of their main responsibilities, but they are integrally involved with this area. In addition, the second column lists the percentage of those who were not involved or responsible for the specified tasks or role at all.

Table 3: Responsibilities Within Rabbis' Positions

	This is one of my main responsibilities or this is not one of my main responsibilities, but I am integrally involved with this.	I am not involved or responsible for this at all.
Teaching adults	88%	4%
Implementing organizational vision	82%	8%
Pastoral care/pastoral counseling	81%	8%
Programming activities for adults	76%	12%
Working with a board of directors/lay leaders	69%	17%
Officiating life-cycle events	69%	13%
Delivering sermons	69%	16%
Leading <i>davening</i>	67%	17%
Teaching children/teens	65%	24%
Supervising staff	63%	20%
Advocating for Israel	57%	22%
Fundraising	45%	26%
<i>Laining</i> Torah	42%	27%
Programming activities for families with young children	42%	34%

	This is one of my main responsibilities or this is not one of my main responsibilities, but I am integrally involved with this.	I am not involved or responsible for this at all.
Communicating with funders	40%	28%
Implementing organizational budget	39%	27%
Programming activities for teens	36%	33%
University/Seminary instructing	22%	61%
Writing grants	18%	54%

Rabbis also reported serving as board members and/or advisory members for local, regional, and national organizations. Forty-eight percent said they served in a board or advisory position in a local/regional Jewish organization, and 36% in a national Jewish organization. In addition, 36% reported serving as a board member or advisor in an interfaith organization and 20% wrote that they served in a board or advisory position in another type of organization not listed on the survey. Overall, 24% did not select serving as board members and/or advisory members for any of the listed options (including organizations not listed in the survey).

CONTINUING RABBINIC EDUCATION

Rabbis were asked to identify the continuing education programs in which they had participated in the past five years. Most of them had participated in some form of continuing rabbinic education (CRE). Ten percent of rabbis said that they had not participated in any continuing education in the past five years. The following figure details these findings.

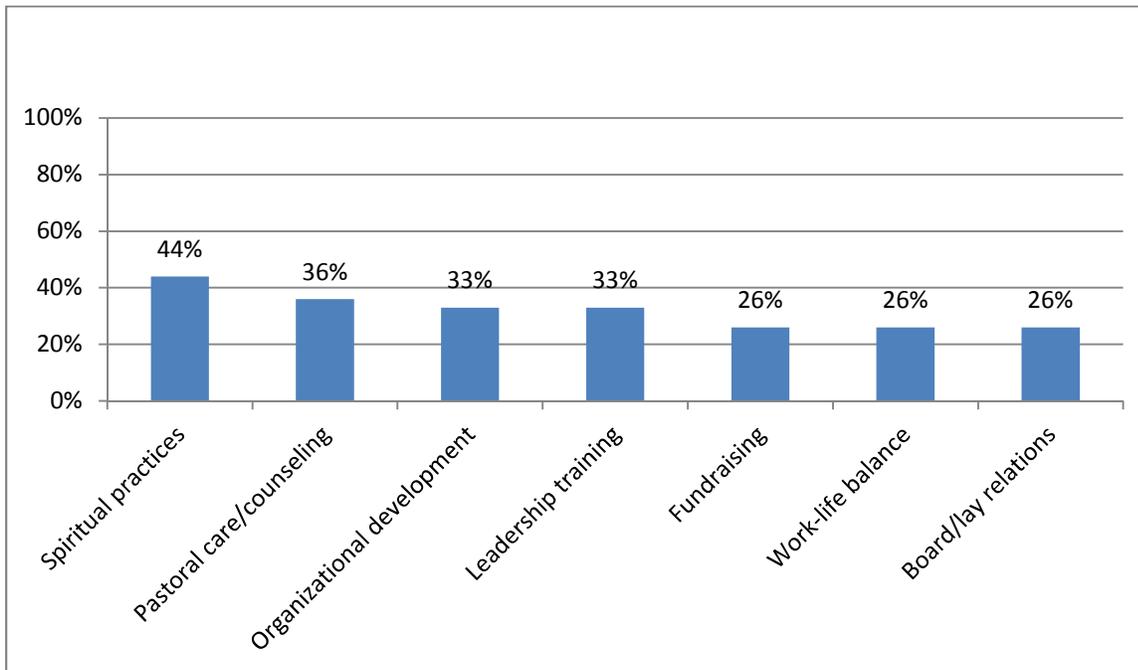
Table 4: Continuing Rabbinic Education Programs in Which Rabbis Participated Over Past Five Years

	N	%
Denominational Conference	167	46%
Other	124	34%
Seminary course/workshop (series of classes)	88	24%
Shalom Hartman Institute Rabbinic Torah Study Seminar (in Israel)	68	19%
Institute for Jewish Spirituality Rabbinic Leadership Program	60	16%
CLAL Rabbis Without Borders	44	12%
Oraita Fellowship	35	10%
University course (not connected to seminary)	30	8%
Shalom Hartman Institute Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (in Israel)	29	8%
STAR PEER Fellowship	23	6%
Good to Great Fellowship	11	3%

Some examples of the other types of continuing education programs in which responding rabbis had participated over the past five years include Kellogg programs, clinical pastoral training, and adult education in both Jewish and non-Jewish areas. In addition, 20% of responding rabbis indicated that they have taught and/or administered in continuing rabbinic education programs. Many of these respondents were teachers or administrators in the CRE programs listed on the survey such as Shalom Hartman and CLAL.

The rabbis were asked to rate the importance of continuing professional development opportunities in a variety of areas. The most highly rated areas were: organizational development, spiritual practices, pastoral care/counseling, leadership training, fundraising, work-life balance, articulating mission/vision, and board/lay relations. At least one quarter of rabbis indicated that these areas were “very important” to them on a rating from “not at all important” to “very important.” These results are illustrated in Figure 2.

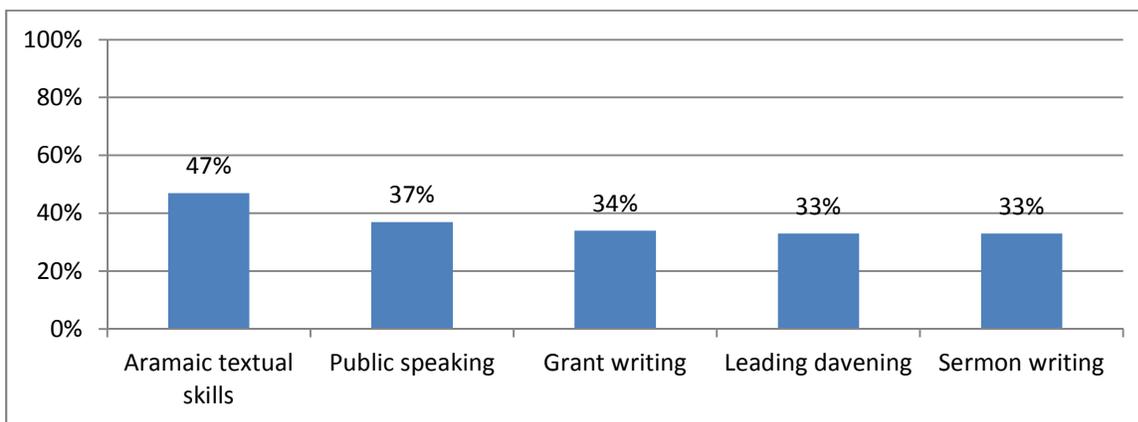
Figure 2: Most Important Continuing Rabbinic Education Areas



Note: Response choices were “not at all important,” “somewhat important,” “moderately important,” and “very important.” Figure illustrates areas where at least 25% of responding rabbis indicated “very important.”

Rabbis also indicated several areas of continuing rabbinic education as being “not at all important to them,” such as: leading *davening*, Aramaic textual skills, grant writing, sermon writing, and public speaking. Over 30% of rabbis indicated that these areas were not at all important. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Least Important Continuing Rabbinic Education Areas



Note: Response choices were “not at all important,” “somewhat important,” “moderately important,” and “very important.” Figure illustrates areas where the highest percentage of respondents indicated “not at all important”

Table 5 lists the percentage of rabbis reporting “very important” and “not at all important” for each of the continuing rabbinic education areas in the survey.

Table 5: Continuing Rabbinic Education Areas Reported as “Very Important” or “Not At All Important”

	Very important	Not at all important
Spiritual practices	44% (157)	11% (40)
Pastoral care/counseling	36% (131)	10.5% (38)
Organizational development	33% (122)	12.5% (46)
Leadership training	33% (121)	17% (61)
Articulating mission/vision	32% (115)	18% (65)
Board/lay relations	26% (96)	22% (81)
Work-life balance	26% (96)	28% (102)
Fundraising	26% (94)	22% (81)
Supervision of staff	21% (77)	26% (95)
Educational pedagogy	21% (76)	17% (62)
Hebrew textual skills	20% (72)	25% (92)
Israel advocacy	19% (71)	23% (84)
Leading <i>davening</i>	14% (52)	33% (119)
Relationships with other professional staff	18% (65)	27% (99)
Community organizing	17% (62)	21.5% (78)
Public speaking	17% (62)	37% (137)
Officiating lifecycle events	16.5% (60)	24% (88)
Sermon writing	13% (46)	33% (122)
Grant writing	11% (39)	34% (122)
Aramaic textual skills	9% (34)	47% (170)

When considering the issues that have been or may be obstacles to participating in continuing rabbinic education, the most often indicated obstacles (over half indicated these) were time away from work, money/funding, and time away from family . A few rabbis (seven percent) indicated they did not experience any obstacles to participation.

Final Thoughts

These data, though not representative of rabbis across North America, may serve as a guide to help develop and prioritize continuing rabbinic education. The areas of most importance to the responding rabbis seemed to fall in the areas of spiritual practices, counseling, and the category of organizational management (e.g., board/lay relations, fundraising, organizational development, etc.). Ongoing research to learn about rabbis' priorities for continuing rabbinic education in the changing Jewish landscape is important. In addition, collecting data on rabbis' feedback and perceived impact of continuing rabbinic programs in which they participate is valuable in order to plan and support continuing rabbinic education programming. Collaboration among organizations funding, planning, and executing continuing rabbinic education is invaluable.