



Brandeis University

Genesis at Brandeis University

2018 Participant Report

Ben Schor

Genesis at Brandeis University is a residential summer program for high school students. Genesis brings together a select group of motivated high school students from around the world to pursue intellectual and Jewish exploration within a challenging, nurturing, and collaborative community setting. Our educational philosophy focuses on experiential learning, connecting curiosity with real-life experiences, exploring what it means to build a diverse Jewish community in an active partnership between educators and participants.

Each participant enrolls in one or two subject courses, which meets a minimum of twenty-five hours each throughout the summer. All courses place an emphasis on experiential learning and critical thinking. Beyond the course is an intense experiential Jewish educational component focused on exploring identity and the nature of community.

This report contains two parts: the first about course participation and the second about participation in the community education and residential life components of Genesis.

Course I: Social Entrepreneurship

Faculty: Jennie Kelly

The goal of this course was to introduce students to the world of business and social enterprise through the hands-on challenge of creating a startup of their own. Students brainstormed to come up with real-world problems they hoped to solve, and then formed teams around those ideas. Each day in class students were exposed to a real life example of a social enterprise as a case study for the tools and frameworks they would be using to create their own ventures. Throughout the course, we featured guest speakers and mentors that helped them refine and revise their solution and business model. In addition to the final presentation of their pitch-deck, students came away with tools for teambuilding and leadership, assessing and evaluating assumptions, researching techniques, planning and organizing tips, and a wealth of resources for further study and action.

Ben has a charisma and warmth that easily draws the attention of others. He is clever and is a natural performer, engaging others in his innovative ideas and proposals. Ben's additions to class discussion and activities contributed greatly to a sense of class cohesion, often breaking the ice or the tension in positive ways. While entertaining, Ben's sense of humor sometimes hovered on the line between good-natured and coming at the expense of others, a distinction worth noting as Ben



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grows as a leader and successful entrepreneur. Ben emerged quickly as a leader of our class -- efficiently organizing his team and delegating tasks to keep his group ahead of schedule. They accomplished a significant and compelling business plan in only two weeks. Much of this could be attributed to Ben's abilities to inspire others to do their best, and to set realistic goals and achieve them. Ben's charisma, intellect, confidence, good humor, and organizational skills will serve him well in the future.

Community Education

Experiential Jewish education is an integral element of Genesis. The residential community educators - graduate students and professionals in the field of experiential Jewish education - facilitate a rich program of community building, exploration and learning throughout the summer. This programming includes teaching "Expeditions," experiential mini-courses that explore an aspect of Jewish identity, co-planning Shabbat with participants, developing "*kavanot*," pluralistic approaches to developing a sense of presence and spirituality, and facilitating "*batim*," close-knit small groups that help participants process their experiences at Genesis.

It was a privilege to have Ben in our Genesis community this summer! Ben brought his humor, passion, kindness, and inclusivity to every aspect of the program. We could always count on him to engage thoughtfully in a serious conversation or to take on a leadership role whenever an opportunity was presented. Ben has a real talent for making his peers feel respected and supported. During the first week of the program, he stepped up to emcee an open mic night, which he did with a litany of prepared jokes and puns. He was mindful to structure the event in an accessible way -- taking care to make accommodations for a variety of Shabbat observances. In the first few days of the program, we also noticed that Ben was a wonderful support to his roommate, who was having trouble settling in. During Bayit, Ben always shared openly and vulnerably and gave encouraging feedback to his peers.

In his Expedition course, Jews and Justice, Ben encountered difficult information about the history and current landscape of race relations in America, and he jumped right into every conversation. He humbly acknowledged the limits of his understanding coming from a place of privilege and he asked important questions. Ben has the unique and important ability to hold multiple narratives at once and honor many perspectives -- a skill that will serve him well in many settings.

Ben has an obvious passion for music, and we appreciated how this seeped into everything he did at Genesis. During the second week, he helped to organize a session that created communal connections through sharing music. He performed rock songs with his guitar in three different showcase opportunities, including one Green Day duet. Most notably, he and another member of



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his Expedition wrote their own lyrics to Smash Mouth's "All Star" about being committed to racial justice as Jews. Another notable Ben moment was the Shabbat learning session that he taught about beans. What began as a playful suggestion became a serious undertaking as Ben created "source sheets" all about beans and advocated to have physical beans at the event. A highlight of the session was a competitive round of bean trivia.

Ben brought his entire personality to Genesis this summer and we are so grateful that we had the opportunity to learn with and from him. We wish him all the best!

This report certifies that Ben Schor has successfully completed Genesis at Brandeis University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Laura Bellows".

Rabbi Laura Bellows

Director of BIMA & Genesis / Senior Jewish Educator
Brandeis Precollege Programs