

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Preliminary Proposal Narrative for FY23 Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

Project Title: “Revitalizing the Field of Judaica Research: A Collaborative Certificate in Judaica Librarianship”

I. Summary

This Implementation project addresses Goal 3 and Objectives 3.1 and 3.3. This professional certificate program in Judaica Librarianship will prepare 30+ specialists to respond to the urgent needs of libraries today and the public that rely on them, ensuring the survival of and access to exceptional Judaica collections by investing in the next generation workforce. The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (JTS), a preeminent institution of higher education that is home to one of the world’s outstanding Judaica libraries, requests a grant of \$242,600 to offer a Certificate in Judaica Librarianship. The certificate is designed as a 12-month series of seven online modules repeated in three cycles, offered free to qualified and highly motivated applicants who are completing MLS or Ph.D. degrees or who are currently working in positions within Jewish archives and libraries. JTS has partnered with the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) which represents the interests of 86 U.S. member organizations and hundreds more globally. Our certificate graduates will learn to better engage their communities, leading them to discover and learn about Jewish history and culture.

II. Project Justification

We are at a crucial moment where the pipeline of Judaica library professionals is in urgent need of replenishment. In 2021 our task force found that over 40% of key staff among AJL member libraries and archives (of which three-quarters are in the United States) are planning retirement within the next 5-10 years, amounting to over 150 job openings. This certificate will revive and update discontinued programs from the 1970s and 1990s to attract new professionals to the specialty. If these needs are not urgently addressed, the number of well-trained Judaica librarians will dwindle further and jeopardize the expert preservation of collections of Judaica. These specialists grasp the complex narrative of the Jewish past and the efforts necessary to generate nuanced understanding of Jewish history from surviving resources for both scholarly and wide public engagement. For this, librarians need to be trained in all aspects of accessing, reading, and recording the information in collections. They need to have the skills to curate digital content based on their library holdings with the goal of reaching the widest audience. In these times, Judaica librarians need to direct attention to the ways we can play a role in promoting civil discourse. The knowledge offered to us from sources written about and by Jews, among others, is essential in working toward this goal.

III. Project Work Plan

The curriculum was designed with input from library and archive experts of the AJL and the provost, faculty and library staff at JTS, all of whom have expertise in pedagogies and best practices related to accessing, reading, and recording knowledge about Jews. Led by a project director at JTS, a JTS faculty member, and AJL board members, this librarianship program will be offered online as a 12-month series of seven virtual modules, repeated three times during the grant period, each ranging from 5-7 hours of class time, and scheduled to accommodate participants across time zones. Our design ensures that students will gain maximum exposure to many experts in the field and to the many topics needed for their training. We have constructed a flexible program that allows students to address gaps in their prior training and areas of particular interest by including options for electives in addition to the core requirements.

We will enroll cohorts of at least 10 new U.S.-based participants each year by advertising through the AJL membership, professional associations, academic and library listservs, and directly to MLS faculty. We announced a pilot first module in Judaica cataloguing for January 2023 at the annual AJL conference in June 2022 that ignited early interest. Even before the application period for this pilot module was opened, we received inquiries from 8 individuals in the United States towards the goal of enrolling ~10-15.

In August 2023, recruitment will begin immediately for the first IMLS-grant funded cohort starting January 2024. We will screen and select applicants who show readiness to pursue careers in Judaica librarianship. Criteria for acceptance will include well-defined prerequisites including knowledge of Hebrew, Yiddish, and/or other Jewish languages. MLS degrees are not required; some applicants are expected to be in graduate school and others already working in libraries and seeking continuing education. We will manage inquiries and applications through a dedicated web page. In addition to student transcripts, we will review essay statements describing their commitment to the profession and letters of recommendation.

All certificate candidates will be required to take three modules: a course on Judaica reference; a course on Judaica cataloguing; and a course on collection development for Judaica libraries. Students will also choose two of four elective courses including working with special collections, archives, and digital humanities. Much thought has been given to turning knowledge into the practical skills needed specifically for today’s Judaica library professional. Students will learn from the finest experts in the field of Judaica librarianship who will serve as co-instructors of each module. Grades are Pass/Fail. During their course of study, we will meet with students individually to guide their choice of elective courses relative to

career goals and assess their progress. Students will be evaluated through attendance, group discussion, presentations, and written assessments and we will provide each student a final evaluation once their certificate is complete. Through course and instructor oversight we will enhance and modify the modules as needed.

The additional requirement of a 100-hour onsite internship in a recognized library or archive will give each student practical experience and specific competencies relevant to their job interests. Priority will be given to paid internships with flexible requirements, so that someone already working in a library can tailor a project to the internship requirements so as not to disrupt their employment. The project director will work closely with students and with host institution mentors to customize the internship. Each internship will have a clearly devised action plan with goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes. Assessment of each student's internship will be measured by successful completion of the action plan; student logs; mid-session review with internship supervisor and an evaluation with the internship supervisor. In the context of the internship, students also will create a final project – whether a publishable paper, a grant proposal, a digital project, or another creative endeavor – to share with potential employers. Our hope is that these outputs will also be useful to others in the larger field of library and information sciences.

IV. Diversity Plan

Judaica librarianship's diversity emerges quite naturally from the many different Jewish communities globally and historically and is reflected in the many different languages, including Ladino, Judeo-Italian, Yiddish, and Judeo-Persian, in which Jewish documents were written and the extraordinary ethnic, racial and cultural diversity of Jewish communities. In fact, the collection development module will emphasize collecting materials from little documented, lost, and remote Jewish communities from around the world.

We are preparing students to be part of libraries that are not exclusively Judaic and to conduct interdisciplinary research. It is this sense of interdisciplinarity that generates cross-cultural connections and furthers community discourse. Our students will be able to draw upon collections to make the content relevant to their broader local communities, Jewish and non-Jewish. For example, knowledge of documents from the Ethiopian Jewish community promises linkages to non-Jewish Ethiopian communities. Documents about the tensions between Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities introduces sensitivities to racial issues that speak to the American experience today.

In recruitment for the Certificate, we will welcome library professionals who are present in libraries that are stewarding Judaica collections but who do not have the requisite background training within their constituencies, particularly where Jews are in the minority. Judaica collections exist across the country – in Ohio and Texas, Alabama and Washington, Kentucky and Nevada – and this program will support their growth, care, and access. We thus aim to accept a cohort that represents the broad geographic scope of the United States, with an awareness that the collections far beyond the east and west coasts are the ones struggling most to find appropriate subject specialists. Our intention is to offer training in how to integrate collections representing different cultures for maximum use and knowledge production.

V. Project Results

30+ graduates of the Judaica Librarianship Certificate program will substantially increase the number of new and well-trained professionals entering this specialty field. They will be ready candidates for positions that are or will be available within the next five years. This program will also improve the versatility of library professionals already in the field, enabling them to enhance the usability of the collections in their institutions. Graduates will be prepared to serve U.S. communities in settings from university and seminary libraries to special research libraries and archives, as well as in community libraries. The AJL network will connect graduates with postings for open positions that are available and together AJL and JTS will guide participants through the application and interview process. Finally, the program leadership team will find ways to ensure that student's final projects are shared and broadly available to an audience of library professionals.

VI. Budget Summary

The budget includes costs of instruction (\$71,280), program coordination and administration (\$148,800), and other costs of supplies, support, online course hosting, publicity, and marketing (\$47,000). It includes an indirect cost rate of 10% on the grant amount (24,000). With a \$242,600 grant from IMLS, we will not charge participant fees for applicants located in the U.S. For the first two cohorts, AJL will contribute funds to cover a portion of program costs (\$48,480) using a grant they will administer to support additional participants from Europe. The total program cost is 291,080.