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Hebrew College Launches Interfaith Program for High Schoolers

NEWTON, MA – The [Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller Center for Interreligious Learning & Leadership of Hebrew College](#) is launching the Dignity Project, a 10-month fellowship program to train outstanding high school students from Greater Boston to serve as interreligious and cross-cultural leaders who engage diverse communities, foster understanding across difference, and build bridges of collaboration.

The program, which launches in late-August, will bring together a group of 15 teens from different spiritual, ethical, secular, and religious backgrounds, including students from [Hebrew College's Prozdor](#) high school program. The fellows will be mentored by graduate students and youth educators from a variety of spiritual and ethical traditions and will meet (virtually and/or in person) to build community through interactive dialogue, workshops, narrative-sharing, and community initiatives throughout the year.

“The overarching goal of this initiative is to provide the fellows with the experience, skills, and support to act as bold and empathic leaders, committed to the flourishing of an ethos of human dignity within and across their communities,” said Rabbi Or Rose, director of the Miller Center. “In this time of widespread illness, increased polarization, and resurgent intolerance, we need to help young people develop the ability and sensibility to find common ground when possible, and to engage in dignified discourse and debate when necessary.”

The program, an outgrowth of the Interfaith Youth Initiative (IFYI) previously run through the [Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries](#) and funded by a grant from [The Carpenter Foundation](#), is being developed by the Miller Center team in collaboration with leaders and educators from houses of worship, schools, and civic organizations throughout the city. The Miller Center coordinates similar programs for undergraduate students (the [Boston Interfaith Leadership Initiative](#)) and emerging professionals (the [Boston Bridges Fellowship](#)). Miller Center Program Director [Shelton Oakley Hersey](#) remarked that the IFYI program was “really meaningful and transformative for a lot of youth throughout its 15 plus year history.” Oakley Hersey previously ran the IFYI program and has worked with teens in South Africa and Los Angeles, as well as Boston.

Over the course of the academic year, fellows will explore their own identities and those of others, hone their communication skills, learn to engage in constructive dialogue, study the lives and work of “upstanders” from American and world history, and discuss how to create a more equitable, compassionate, and sustainable society. At the end of the program, participants will share their learning with their home communities in various creative forms.

“We want to empower teens within their own identities and also help them develop a mindset that encourages them to build bridges of understanding and cooperation and see interdependence as a strength. We want them to forge personal relationships with peers and mentors from different religious, cultural, and racial contexts,” she said. “We believe this collaboration is particularly important for teens who are closer to adulthood, preparing to leave home for college, university, or work life.”

About Hebrew College and the Miller Center: Hebrew College is a Boston-area institution of Jewish learning and leadership that offers community learning programs for all ages and stages within a pluralistic environment of open inquiry, depth, creativity, and compassion, as well as graduate programs in rabbinical, cantorial, education and Jewish studies. **The Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller Center for Interreligious Learning & Leadership of Hebrew College**, established in 2016 through a generous gift from Dan Miller, a former member of the Hebrew College Board of Trustees and husband of the late Betty Ann Greenbaum Miller, works toward providing current and future religious and ethical leaders with the knowledge and skills to serve in a religiously diverse society. For more information, please visit www.hebrewcollege.edu.