Online Judaic Studies Consortium Brings Schools Together with Mussar

Submitted by James Hitchcock on Thu, 11/01/2018 - 15:57

Jewish Day Schools across the United States leverage online learning platform to help their students collaborate, build community, and lead meaningful lives.

Why is doing the right thing so hard even when we know what’s right? Mussar (ethics) is the Jewish wisdom tradition that teaches us how to act according to our highest values. Mussar teachings and practices help us make the choices most aligned with our best selves.

This year, students from day schools across the United States, including Westchester Hebrew High School, Frankel Jewish Academy, Tarbut v’Torah Community Day School, Gray Academy of Jewish Education, and San Diego Jewish Academy, collaborated in the Online Judaic Studies Consortium (OJSC) course Mussar: Practical Ethics for Living a Meaningful Life.

The course opens with an introduction to Mussar history and theory and how it compares to other theories of human psychology and development. Students explore specific character traits such as patience, trust and respect. Through learning and actual practice, students work together to apply the course teachings to their lives and reflect on the practical impact of Mussar on their thinking and behavior.

Acclaimed Jewish Role Model

Rabbi David Jaffe, the course developer, is the former Spiritual Advisor at Gann Academy in Waltham, MA where he created an acclaimed, school-wide Mussar program. He was the lead educator and curriculum writer for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality’s Tikkun Middot Project, which brought Mussar to over 40 synagogues, community centers and schools across North America. Rabbi Jaffe is a Senior Faculty member of The Mussar Institute. His book, Changing the World from the Inside Out (Shambhala 2016) won the National Jewish Book Award. The book integrates Mussar teachings with social change activism.

In Rabbi Jaffe’s words:

Mussar is such a great resource for high school students because it gives them a Jewish language and lens for the daily, social, emotional and real life experiences they encounter every day. It is a Jewish path and wisdom for living well and for bringing holiness into friendships, classwork and how we are on the sports field. Mussar offers our students another data point for why Judaism is relevant to their lives.

Providing a Wider and Deeper Educational Core

“The OJSC online learning platform lets day schools provide a wider and deeper offering for their students,” said Lisa Micley, OJSC Program Director. “Students share experiences and learn from one another and from nationally recognized experts, all while remaining within their local school’s environment and structure.”
Enhanced Academic Programs

To other Jewish day schools considering an online learning platform, Micley says it’s a great way for institutions of all sizes to expand their course catalogues and get students hands-on with the technology they’ll be using in college and in the workforce. Being able to offer an array of elective courses, training students to be independent learners, and allowing them to pursue in-depth specific topics of interest are all important goals to help schools prepare students for life after high school.

OJSC course registration is now open for the Spring 2019 Semester.