



Yeshiva University

THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS-HERENSTEIN  
CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

# Sacks Scholars Graduate Fellowship

Sacks Research Scholars • Sacks Impact Scholars

## Colloquium

**Sunday, May 19, 2024**

**Directors:**

**Dr. Shira Weiss • Dr. Erica Brown**

## Sacks Impact Scholars

The Sacks Impact Scholars fellowship is an interdisciplinary cohort comprised of graduate students from Cardozo School of Law, Ferkauf School of Psychology, Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Katz School of Science and Health, Sy Syms School of Business, and Wurzweiler School of Social Work. This diverse cohort collectively participated in monthly leadership training seminars and individually contributed to impact projects in their respective schools.



### Megan Priaulx

Cardozo School of Law

### Project: Re-investigation of Criminal Convictions

#### Project Description

With the goal of securing exoneration, I combed through thousands of pages of trial transcripts, dissected police reports, re-examined crime scene photos, and wrote Intake Assessments—where I read through the files clients sent us, and wrote memos assessing what, if anything, we could do for them.

#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*“Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope.” (Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World, p. 166)*

#### Impact

Looking back on my year as a Sacks Impact Scholar at the Perlmutter Center, I learned more about humanity combing through thousands of pages of legal documents at my desk than I have just about anywhere else in my life. I learned about the cruelty and unfairness of the criminal justice system. But mostly I learned about hope, about perseverance, and about the unbreakable human spirit—in a broken system. My project has ignited and fortified the passion in me to continue doling out hope in the world, wherever my legal career takes me.



## Shira Levy

Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology

### Project: Providing Resources for Asylum-seeking Adolescents

#### Project Description

My project identified and helped facilitate New York City's teenage asylum-seekers' access to essential resources across several domains, including healthcare, education, legal services, social services, and professional support. I planned and executed an event that featured two guest speakers who provided peer support to the group of over 60 participants, and inspired the attendees to share their own personal struggles. Five vendors shared valuable resources available to asylum seekers, from the New York Public Library to Anthem Blue Cross insurance. It was gratifying to watch the vendors, speakers, and volunteers work together to provide support and care. It helped me understand that events can help deepen the relationship between clinics and local communities. This project connected asylum seekers with Ferkauf's Parnes Training Mental Health Clinic and further established it as a vital service in the Bronx.

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*"The Bible commands us only once to love our neighbor. But it never tires of urging us to love the stranger. To have faith in God as creator and ruler of the universe is to do more than to believe that God has spoken to us. It is to believe that God has spoken to others, in a language which we may not understand."* (Jonathan Sacks, *I Believe*, p. 86-87)

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#### Impact

I worked closely with professionals in diverse fields, in pursuit of the shared goal of sustaining the dignity and humanity of asylum-seekers and disadvantaged communities. Energized by their passion and vision for a more just world, this experience has steered my training and clinical skills towards disadvantaged populations who may struggle to gain access to resources and have their story told and understood.



## Annie Short Squicciarini

Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

### Project: Teaching the Holocaust in Catholic Schools

#### Project Description

This project enhances Holocaust education curricula in the Diocese of Brooklyn's Catholic schools. Through impact programs, field trips, classroom resources and books for each school's library, 5th-12th grade Catholic school students have access to the facts in an age-appropriate manner, free from distortion, with special attention to survivor testimony.

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*"For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we are each free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world."*  
(Jonathan Sacks, "Why Chanukah is the Perfect Festival for Religious Freedom," *Washington Post*)

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#### Impact

This project has allowed me to help protect a critical chapter of history and share it with the next generation. As we reflect on current world events and the rise of antisemitism, educating our students about the Holocaust must be a priority. Rabbi Sacks' work with people of all faiths is so inspirational, and I look forward to developing the project long after the academic year is finished. I have found work that is deeply meaningful to me and I am truly grateful.



## Manish Kumar Thota

Katz School of Science and Health

### Project: Course Content Understanding Chatbot

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#### Project Description

We created a smart AI Chatbot to help students better understand online courses, especially in complex subjects like machine learning. We collected a rich dataset that includes images of lecture slides and the corresponding lecture transcripts, forming numerous question-answer pairs. This dataset helps our tool understand the content in depth. The AI model can interpret both images and text effectively. As a result, it can provide detailed and context-aware explanations to students' questions about their course material. This makes learning more interactive and engaging, helping students grasp difficult concepts more easily and improving their overall learning experience.

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*"Great leaders think long-term and build for the future."* (Jonathan Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, p.172) In the context of our project, the quote underscores the use of cutting-edge technology to build an educational AI system that not only addresses the academic needs of learners but also creates an engaging and intuitive learning environment. By developing a tool that personalizes and enhances educational experiences, we are striving to make online learning more appealing and effective, thus encouraging more students to actively engage with their course material.

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#### Impact

Working on the AI Chatbot has profoundly impacted my professional trajectory by enhancing my expertise in AI-driven educational tools and deepening my understanding of the intersection between technology and education. This project has not only honed my technical skills in machine learning and natural language processing but also underscored the importance of creating scalable, impactful solutions that address real-world educational challenges. As a result, I am now more committed than ever to advancing AI applications in education, aiming to develop innovative tools that foster personalized and effective learning experiences for students worldwide.



## Michelle Borde

Sy Syms School of Business

### Project: CAP Education Service Benefit-2 Sided Marketplace/Product to solve Adjunct/IHE Crisis

#### Project Description

Our project aims to research and identify the challenges faced by universities in hiring quality adjuncts and to explore how these institutions of higher education (IHEs) can offer better benefits and incentives to retain their top adjuncts. Currently, universities and colleges do not have a solution in place to address the steps to hire and retain their adjunct staff. The project proposes to design and develop an HR system that can address the challenges and inefficiencies in recruitment, onboarding, orientation, benefits, and training and development of adjuncts. The focus is to develop offerings to enable the delivery of great student learning experiences with contingent faculty and make it easier for universities to find great faculty and for adjuncts to find great jobs.

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

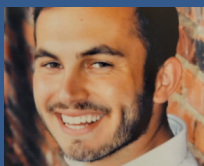
*“Good leaders create followers, but great leaders create leaders.”* (Jonathan Sacks, *Spirit of Things*) This quote means that good leaders can motivate others to follow them, but great leaders empower and develop others to become leaders themselves. Great leaders see the potential in others and provide them with the opportunities, guidance, and support to grow and develop their leadership skills. By creating more leaders, great leaders can have a more significant and lasting impact on their communities and themselves. This can be associated with transformational leadership, a style that encourages and nurtures individuals to develop their own leadership abilities.

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#### Impact

Working on this project has had a significant impact on my professional development. Conducting research, developing a product idea, and presenting it to investors are all valuable skills that can be applied in many different contexts. Working within a team to share ideas, research, and develop the specifications and cost of the

product has taught me the importance of collaboration and communication. Expanding my ideas and sharing them with others and adjusting based on their feedback has allowed us to improve product specifications and the market idea. Learning how to perform market research, build a pitch deck, and discuss our ideas with potential investors are all important steps in the process of developing a new product or initiative. These skills will serve me well in my career as I look to implement initiatives that will help to grow our department, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.



## Eitan Kastner

Sy Syms School of Business

### Project: CAP Education Service Benefit-2 Sided Marketplace/Product to solve Adjunct/IHE Crisis

#### Project Description

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*“More than wealth and power, education is the key to human dignity.”* (Jonathan Sacks, *From Optimism to Hope*, p. 116) Education needs to be valued above all else. How can we say education is being valued while we are not looking out for our educators? This is our mission.

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#### Impact

The project had an impact on me in terms of understanding how to create a product from the ground up, along with sensitizing me to the manifold issues educators face.



## Sharon Turnage

Wurzweiler School of Social Work

### Project: Psychoeducational Resources for Perinatal Loss

#### Project Description

In this country there exists a crisis of perinatal loss and premature infant death. Coupled with prolonged grief, individuals and families experience these traumatic events thereby causing long-term emotional and behavioral health challenges. Caregivers and providers will predominantly service this patient population, however, lack the knowledge, skillset, and abilities to do so effectively. My Sacks Impact project provided foundational knowledge about perinatal loss, grief, and the impact on families suffering from such loss, and trained caregivers and providers with educational resources to serve this community.

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#### Rabbi Sacks Quote

*“How can I stand and watch disaster befall my people?” pleads Esther to the king (see Megillat Esther 8:6). To be moral is to live with and for others, sharing their responsibility, participating in their suffering, protesting their wrongs, arguing their cause...”.* (Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, p. 141)  
As a perinatal loss survivor who is “turning her pain into purpose”, I utilized my platform to socialize and familiarize caregivers/providers and the public to the plight of perinatal loss.

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#### Impact

My project aimed to help caregivers and providers develop cultural competence and skills to help patients who have suffered perinatal loss. The results of this project will have a far-reaching impact on education, research, policy and practice.



## Sacks Research Scholars

The Sacks Research Scholars fellowship is designed to strengthen the professional skills and expand the leadership platform of graduate students in Azrieli, GPATS, Revel and RIETS through the learning, researching, publishing and teaching of the thought of Rabbi Sacks in engagement with contemporary Jewish ideas.



### Rabbi Tzvi Benoff • RIETS

Tzvi Benoff is a member of the Wexner Kollel Elyon and Kollel Hora'ah at RIETS and the Assistant Rabbi at the Riverdale Jewish Center.

#### **Academic Article** **Guiding the** **Invisible Hand:** **Judaism's Rip Van** **Winkel Answer to** **the Adam Smith** **Problem**

In his seminal work, *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argues that economic growth and utility maximization are catalyzed by individuals acting out of self-interest. This paper argues that while rabbinic literature also acknowledges this phenomenon, there are different approaches including those of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Rabbi Eliezer Dessler, and Rabbi Shimon Shkop as to whether such statements are proscriptive or descriptive. Using the Talmudic story of Choni Hameagel, one can suggest that these different approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather indicate parallel ethical paths that one can choose to follow.

#### **Popular Essay** **Know Thyself at Sea:** **Yosef's Strategy for** **Success in the Face** **of Failure**

This article presents a literary and psychological analysis of Yosef's encounter with Potiphar's wife and his response to failure and an existential crisis of identity.

#### **Teaching Series** **Active Hope in** **Dark Times**

This series analyzes the thought of Rav Kook's students, Rav Ya'akov Moshe Charlop and Rav Yitzchak Hutner, regarding the nature of hope and Jewish survival, highlighting the distinction between active and passive responses to exile and adversity.

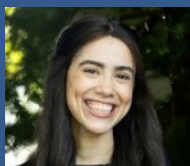
**Rabbi Sacks  
Quote**

“In an age of fear, moderation is hard to find and harder to sustain. Who wants to listen to a nuanced argument, when what we want is someone to relieve us from the burden of thought and convince us that we were right all along? So people mock. They blame. They caricature. They demonise. In an age of anxiety, few can hear the still small voice that the Bible tells us is the voice of God.”  
(Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion and the Search for Meaning*)

To me, this quote encapsulates the sophistication and beauty of Judaism, that I endeavor to use to inspire and empower others. Nuance is the “*kol demama dakah*” (I Kings 19:12) in which the angel tells Elijah the Prophet that God resides and encounters humanity at Sinai and beyond. It compels us to listen with thought and to think with heart. But most of all, it challenges us to stretch to uncover the spirituality, hope, and potential in all by listening for that small, thin voice.

**Impact**

The fellowship helped me gain a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Rabbi Sacks’ thought and unparalleled ability to educate and inspire diverse audiences, as well as the mentorship and peer support to hone my writing skills to begin to follow in his footsteps on the trail he blazed. In addition to being a pulpit Rabbi, I plan to pursue a career integrating my background in political economy and Jewish monetary law as both a religious judge and professor specializing in business ethics and economic public policy for faith-based communities. The knowledge and passion that I have gained through this fellowship have reinforced to me, the tremendous potential that Judaism and Jewish values have to contribute, not only to leading our own community, but to enriching the world and society as a whole. Whether speaking from the pulpit, teaching in a university or helping shape public policy, I am confident that the skills, knowledge, and passion I have gained this year will help me reach a broader audience without sacrificing intellectual rigor and religious authenticity, but on the contrary, augment their saliency.



## Tamar Yastrab Koslowe - GPATS

Tamar is a graduate student in YU's Graduate Program for Advanced Talmudic Studies and a student in Nishmat's Yoetzet Halacha program, which trains women to be experts in matters of Jewish family purity. She will be teaching Talmud in

SAR High School this Fall.

### Academic Article The Latent Prohibition to Write Oral Torah

The Torah prohibits a Jew from writing the Oral Torah down, and while this prohibition is mostly extinct in practice, Jewish writing throughout history suggests that the initial motives for this commandment remain as relevant as ever beneath the surface.

### Popular Essay Modern Metziah-Game Theory in the Talmud

This piece seeks to compare a Talmudic text dealing with tort law to modern game theory.

### Teaching Series The Virtue and Verdict of Team Playing and Playing Alone

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper paints a model of two contradictory Jewish practices; the rebellious elder who brazenly contradicts the Jewish High court, and the sacrifice the High Court is obligated to bring when they rule erroneously. Should we dutifully follow our leaders, or is healthy disagreement necessary to prevent widespread sin?

### Rabbi Sacks Quote

In his discussion of the twin commandments given to the Jewish people of (1) not desecrating God's name and (2) actively sanctifying God's name, Rabbi Sacks developed the idea that sanctifying God's name must be done actively and with intention. He writes "to have done something, even one act in a lifetime, to make someone grateful that there is a God in heaven who inspires people to do good on earth is perhaps the greatest achievement to which anyone can aspire." (Jonathan Sacks, *Emor, Lessons in Leadership, Covenant & Conversation*)

In days of moral collapse and tragedy that we see around us, I find tremendous strength in this message—we should not fear greatness, rather, focus on helping a fractured world in small steps, healing our global morality more and more all the time.

## Impact

Like most of my peers, I have a collection of favorite authors. As I've grown older and my passion for Torah has grown and matured, that list has come to include a host of writers who specialize in writing Torah pieces for scholars and laypeople, all seeking to bring down the lofty words of God to the people beneath the mountain. When the director of my graduate program sent me the application for the Sacks Fellowship, for the first time I seriously wondered: am I capable of being an author myself? I've had the rich opportunity of learning and sharing Torah for many years, but I never seriously considered organizing my thoughts and developing theses to share with a world beyond my class or community. The Sacks Fellowship has challenged me to sharpen my thoughts and words, and look beyond the people immediately around me. Rabbi Sacks had an incredible ability to take the meaning in his life and share it with others, and I am so grateful that my appetite for writing has been whetted and I look forward to taking the plunge to continue sharing ideas with the broader world.



### Neti Linzer Penstein - GPATS, Bernard Revel Graduate School

Neti Penstein is pursuing a Masters in Talmud and Jewish Law at YU's Graduate Program in Talmudic Studies (GPATs) as well as Masters in Jewish Philosophy at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of

Jewish Studies. She is also the Emerging Scholars Fellow at Maayan in Boston.

### Academic Article Forgiveness: A Philosophical Analysis of the Halachic Sources

On the face of it, Maimonides' halakhic discussion of forgiveness is troubling: how can expectations be so clear-cut and so demanding in an area as amorphous and as sensitive as forgiveness? In order to explain this, we need to look at Maimonides' rulings through the framework articulated by philosopher Aurel Kolnai, who argues that forgiveness is a paradoxical concept.

### Popular Essay What is Rabbi Soloveitchik's Descriptive Reconstruction and Why You Already Know the Answer

While *Halakhic Mind* is Rabbi Soloveitchik's most complex and least-studied work, I uncover how its main argument has already been implicitly adopted by the Modern Orthodox teachers.

**Teaching Series**  
**Spiritual and Philosophical Secrets of Sefer Vayikra**

In this series, we explore how each sacrifice presents a distinct mode of expressing ourselves to our Creator, and gives voice to a different spiritual sentiment and facilitates a particular religious experience. Rather than seeing the abundance of details in Sefer Vayikra as an impediment, it will be the tool through which we uncover the spiritual depth.

Four Component Classes:

1. "Ascent, Atonement, and Aspiration: The Lofty Sacrifice"
2. "Loaves, Levites, and Livelihood: Understanding the Meal Offering"
3. "Don't Know, Don't Care: The Significance of the Uncertain Guilt Offering"
4. "The Peace Offering: Sacrificial or Satiating?"

**Rabbi Sacks Quote**

"Hence the brilliant new concept that emerged in rabbinic Judaism: *cherut*, the freedom that comes to a society – of which Jews were called on to be pioneers – where people not only know the law but study it constantly until it is engraved on their hearts as the commandments were once engraved on stone. That is what the Sages meant when they said, "Read not *charut*, engraved, but *cherut*, freedom, for the only person who is truly free is one who occupies himself with Torah study." In such a society you keep the law because you want to, because having studied the law you understand why it is there. In such a society there is no conflict between law and freedom." (Jonathan Sacks, "The Birth of a New Freedom," *Covenant and Conversation*)

I originally came across this quote by Rabbi Sacks in high school when I was struggling with my love of learning Torah on the one hand but feeling confined by the strictures of Jewish law on the other hand. Rabbi Sacks taught me to redefine my terms: if I loved Torah, and really tried to internalize its messages, it would become seamlessly integrated into my identity, so that it was not an imposition, but an expression of my deepest self. This idea continues to influence how I learn and, more importantly, teach Torah: I look for the underlying values of the laws, think about how I (and my students) can identify with them, and make them a part of my spiritual personality.

## Impact

My undergraduate training in philosophy shapes the way that I approach Torah. This fellowship has given me the opportunity to develop those connections in a rigorous and careful way, and to share these insights with the general public.



### Asher Willner - RIETS

Asher Willner is a Rabbinical student at RIETS and serves as the Rabbinic Intern at the Young Israel of the West Side.

## Academic Article

### An Analysis of the Heter Aivah

This essay explores the halakhic exemption of “Aivah,” which means to avoid causing hatred to others, and how it demonstrates the Sages’ dual values to act out of an abundance of caution while promoting harmonious relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

## Popular Essay

### Reciting Tehillim in Times of Crisis

## Teaching Series

### Approaching the Other: Jewish Interactions with Non-Jews

For generations, the Jewish community has turned to Psalms in times of crisis, as Tehillim is a unique vehicle for prayer, empathy, and communal coping.

This series explores issues related to how Jewish tradition dictates how Jews interact with non-Jews, including the questions of whether to celebrate the downfall of an enemy and what to do if Jewish tradition causes animosity with non-Jewish neighbors.

## Rabbi Sacks Quote

“If Jews were condemned to die together, shall we not struggle to find a way to live together?” (Jonathan Sacks, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age*, p. 154)

This quote evokes two themes of Rabbi Sacks which resonate with me. First, Rabbi Sacks was always a person who promoted peaceful relationships between people, whether Jew and Jew or Jew and non-Jews. Rabbi Sacks always fostered love and understanding over hate and violence. Second, Rabbi Sacks was a person who always focused on the hope and potential of humankind instead of the despair and suffering that often subsumes our lives. This message of hope, that we can be better, was conveyed in a loving way that uplifted those who read and listened to Rabbi Sacks’ words.

## Impact

The Sacks fellowship has truly pushed me out of my comfort zone. As a computer science major in college, I had few classes that required me to write essays. However, the fellowship challenged me to explore new forms of expression and communication. Writing both a popular essay and an academic article broadened my horizons in distinct ways. The popular essay showed me how to write persuasively and inspire, harnessing the power of language to captivate audiences and convey compelling messages. The academic essay taught me how to write with sophistication and precision, emphasizing the importance of clarity, research, and scholarly language. Through these diverse writing experiences, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the versatility of language and the impact of effective communication.



### Alisa Zeffren • Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education

Alissa Zeffren is a doctoral candidate at Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. She teaches Tanakh and Jewish

history at Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Skokie, where she is also the Student Activities Director.

#### Academic Article **The Lessons We Didn't Learn from the Holocaust and the New Antisemitism**

This essay explores the recent surge of the anti-Zionist antisemitism, especially in light of recent college protests, and raises questions about how Holocaust history is currently taught and what lessons need to be learned.

#### Popular Essay **To My Fellow Educators: The Day After Plan Starts Now**

This essay highlights the critical moment we are at in Jewish history, how October 7th has been a turning point in antisemitic rhetoric, and what this means for us as educators as we prepare our Jewish students for the "day after."

**Teaching Series**  
**Prayerful**  
**Conversation for**  
**a Connected Life:**  
**Contemporary**  
**Thoughts on Prayer**

- Part I: Covenant and Prayer: The Power of Words
- Part II: How Prayer Transforms Us: The Psychology of Prayer
- Part III: The Art of Listening: Prayer in an Increasingly Distracted Digital Age

**Rabbi Sacks**  
**Quote**

This series on prayer is presented through the lens of contemporary Jewish thought and with relevance to the challenges many of us face when we pray. Each part of the series corresponds to the three pillars of prayer in the Shemoneh Esrei: praise, petition and gratitude.

“There is a profound difference between history and memory. History is his story – an event that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is my story – something that happened to me and is part of who I am. History is information. Memory, by contrast, is part of identity. I can study the history of other peoples, cultures and civilisations. They deepen my knowledge and broaden my horizons. But they do not make a claim on me. They are the past as past. Memory is the past as present, as it lives on in me. Without memory there can be no identity.”  
(Jonathan Sacks, *The Chief Rabbi’s Haggadah* (Essays), p. 29)

As a Jewish history teacher and a longtime student of history this quote resonates with me. Rabbi Sacks points out that the root word for memory, *zakhor*, is mentioned in *Tanakh* 169 times. Memory, and the converse of not forgetting, are pivotal commands in the Torah. We are commanded to remember and safeguard our core beliefs, to actively *remember*, and to ensure that our collective memory continues to shape Jewish identity and continuity. I always emphasize to my students at the beginning of our Jewish history survey course that our class is not only a study of the Jewish past but an exploration of who we are as a people, who we are in the present.



## Impact

The fellowship presented an incredible opportunity to workshop ideas together with peers and leaders in the cohort who I otherwise would not have met. The fellowship also allowed me to grow in my thinking and understanding of contemporary Jewish thought, empowering me to develop my ideas further through teaching and writing for new audiences. I especially enjoyed exercises that allowed us to give and receive feedback on each of our assignments, which not only gave me a unique perspective on my own work, but also created a deeper sense of community within the cohort. Participating in this fellowship has motivated me to grow as a leader in my community as well, and to seek opportunities that will not only allow me to continue my own growth but to share the knowledge I have gained with others.