

# Working their way up

## Kohn interns go deep into the world of Jewish nonprofits

ana forman | j. intern

When school let out for the summer, 31 college students left their swimsuits in the closet and, clad in business casual, headed for work at 19 Jewish nonprofit agencies in the Bay Area.

Since 1986, the Kohn intern program, sponsored by the S.F.-based Jewish Vocational Service, has placed more than 400 college students in the nonprofit organizations that make up the backbone of the Bay Area Jewish community.

The Kohn program gives college students the opportunity to learn about nonprofit organizations, connect with the professional Jewish community and gain real-world work experience. It is funded by the Jewish Community Endowment Fund of the S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation, as well as the East Bay federation and the Libitzky Family Foundation.

Danielle Beres, coordinator for the Kohn program, began working with JVS and Kohn only this March — but as a former Kohn intern herself (she worked at the S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children's Services in 1994), she was prepared for the challenge.

Months of preparation go into creating the eight-week program, which began on June 16 and will end with a commencement ceremony on Aug. 8. Before the program started, Beres and her supervisor, JVS career development manager Debbie Mendel, hired the 31 interns from a pool of more than 50 applicants



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**Intern Marisa Breall takes a phone call at the ADL office.**

and placed them in 19 Jewish agencies throughout the Bay Area.

Matching interns with agencies is a difficult process, because a good fit is vital. "My goal is for all the interns to have a phenomenal experience that will translate for them to being part of the Jewish community at large and the work force," says Beres.

Some interns are very specific about their placements. Kohn intern Rebekah Holtz of Fremont, for example, knew exactly where she wanted to be this summer: "When I interviewed for Kohn and filled out the application, I specified that I wanted to work with

Midrasha," said Holtz, an alumnus of the Jewish education program for high school students.

Holtz, an incoming sophomore at Tufts University in Massachusetts, is currently working on organizing a Midrasha alumni network and a reunion for them. It is a huge task to locate and contact graduates, she said, especially those that have been out of the program since 1985. "One of the biggest things I've learned here is project management," she said.

Like many of the Kohn interns, Elliot Krigel, an incoming junior at U.C. Santa Barbara, is still figuring out what he wants to do in the future, and experiences such as his internship in the marketing department at the S.F.-based federation add new insight.

Krigel who spends his days working on the federation's Web site, said he has "learned a lot. The marketing department at JCF is awesome — everyone is very supportive and has an open door policy."

Mateo Aveces is doing his internship at BlueStarPR, a San Francisco agency that began during the second intifada to help improve perceptions of Israel. Aveces, a sophomore-to-be at Brandeis University, is interested in business, banking and law — but while he doesn't plan to go into public relations, he notes that he is gaining skills that will be applicable to what he does in the future, whatever that may be.

As outreach director, Aveces' main project is to promote BlueStar's "Write on for Israel," a two-year journalism and advocacy program for teens that is scheduled

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**Kohn interns Nadia Gardner (left), Chayva Lehrman and Julian Clark have a discussion during one of the program's Friday seminars.**

to begin this fall.

"The skill of making contacts and completing tasks transcends job categories," he said.

For Oksana Prodon, an incoming junior at UCLA, the Kohn program and her internship at the Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation have been about expanding her knowledge of the Jewish community. "I'm doing something for me," she said, "and not just for my future career."

As an intern, Prodon has had the opportunity to attend teacher educational workshops put on by the JPEF that help teachers create a curriculum for lessons about Jewish partisans, the 20,000 to 30,000 Jews that fought back against the Nazis.

Prodon hopes to spread information about the Jewish partisans even after her internship ends. "Most people don't really know about the Jewish partisans," she says. "It's not taught in most schools and isn't in most textbooks."

At the Anti-Defamation League, Kohn intern Marisa Breall spends her days compiling a database of Jewish organizations on college campuses in the

Northern California area. She is also in the process of creating a PowerPoint presentation for the other Kohn interns about anti-Semitism on college campuses.

Breall has found that her experience this summer will serve her well when she starts her junior year at Cornell University in the fall.

"This will give me a new lens through which I can perceive the events that are going on on campus," Breall says. "I better understand the line between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism."

Breall added that she hopes the advocacy work she has done will help her start a revival of the Students for a Democratic Society club on her college campus.

In addition to their individual internships, Kohn program participants meet every Friday at the federation offices in San Francisco for seminars that deal with everything from Jewish identity to résumé writing.

For example, one Friday, San Francisco State Jewish Studies professor Marc Dollinger spoke to Kohn interns about the history of Bay Area Jews. Another Friday, Abigail Emerson of JVS led a workshop on résumé writing and networking.

At the seminars, Kohn interns also are given the opportunity to discuss problems they face at their internships. Group discussions allow the interns to form a community and support system.

"I like that it's a combination of work experience and meeting people that are interested in the same things I am," Holtz said. "I have the chance to make some friends and meet some great community leaders." ■

### Meet the interns

**This summer the Kohn intern program has matched 31 students with 19 local Jewish agencies.**

Mateo Aveces (BlueStarPR); Marisa Breall (Anti-Defamation League); Mara Burger (Jewish Vocational Service); Austin Burke (Jewish Coalition for Literacy); Julian Clark (Jewish Community Federation of the East Bay); Sarah Cohn (JCC of San Francisco); Benji Davidow (Peninsula JCC); Ana Forman (j. the Jewish news weekly of Northern California); Ariana Friedman (S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children's Services, Palo Alto office); Nadia Gardner (Holocaust Center of Northern California); Alexandra Greenfield (Jewish Community Endowment Fund); Rebekah Holtz (Midrasha of the Greater East Bay); Laurel Hunt (Jewish Community Relations Council); Elliot Krigel (S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation, Palo Alto office); Chayva Lehrman (Israel Center); Elana Levin (Judah L. Magnes Museum); Anna Mirzayan (Shalom Bayit); Alexander Nourafshan (S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation); Oksana Prodon (Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation); Ellis Raskin (Osher Marin JCC); Ariel Rosen (j. the Jewish news weekly of Northern California); Rachel Roston (S.F.-based Jewish Community Federation); Ada Ruzer (Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay); Allyson Storm (Jewish Vocational Service); Aaron Szeinbaum (Kehillah Jewish High School); Jaclyn Tandler (AIPAC); Jordan Tietze (JCC of San Francisco); Elana Weil (S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children's Services, San Francisco office); Jessica Willis (Jewish Community Relations Council); Jack Wolfe (Albert L. Schultz JCC); Maia Wollins (Bureau of Jewish Education). ■