

# New York The Jewish Week

Thursday, May 29, 2008 / 24 Iyar 5768

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05/21/2008

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## 36 Under 36: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

Adam Gaynor, 33

**Equipping unaffiliated Jewish prep school students with the tools to forge their own Jewish identities**

Hebrew school was a miserable experience for Adam Gaynor. "I was never one of those kids who connected with the Jewish community in any meaningful way," he says. So when it came time to choose a college, Jewish life on campus was hardly a consideration.

Ironically enough, it was Gaynor's profound sense of isolation as one of the few Jews at Bates College in Maine that propelled him to explore his Jewish identity — largely in outrage against the pervasive anti-Semitism on campus. After college, he enlisted in the Israeli army before working in the Israeli Foreign Ministry and then returning to New York.

In his current role as deputy director of The Curriculum Initiative (TCI; [tcionline.org](http://tcionline.org)), Gaynor helps support Jewish life among close to 3,000 Jewish kids enrolled at 75 non-Jewish independent high schools in the United States. "I experienced a similar trajectory to that of most of my students," he says. "I understand where they're coming from."

Most of the prep school students he works with reside on the periphery of the Jewish community. They're Jews of color or Jews with only one Jewish parent. "They're embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about Judaism or being seen as 'not Jewish enough,'" he says.

Gaynor, a big believer in "open tent Judaism," works with teachers at prep schools to incorporate educational programming into the curriculum, and acts as a resource to support Jewish clubs. In addition to sponsoring a summer institute to train teachers in text-study techniques from the Jewish tradition, TCI also organizes an annual student retreat called Jewbilee, where students spend Shabbat at a New England boarding school, meeting one another and exploring their Jewish identities.

Side job while in college: Gaynor worked as a wilderness guide for YMCA (and would frequently go ice climbing). Musically inclined? Gaynor has tried his hand at playing the oud, a Middle Eastern pear-shaped instrument.

—Tamar Snyder



## Kids with cancer

