

State of the Network

Wexner Professional Leadership Programs Alumni Network

Monday, February 3, 2025 ~ 5 Sh'vat 5785

Hello, my name is Andy Koren WGF 1...

and I'm Melissa Werbow WGF 12.

[Andy] Together, we are co-chairs of WexCoCom. WexCoComm - which stands for Wexner Alumni Coordinating Committee, is composed of alumni from both the Wexner Graduate Fellowship/Davidson Scholars Program and the Wexner Field Fellowship. This committee was founded in 2013. WexCoComm members serve in an advisory capacity to staff, as well as working in partnership to develop and launch initiatives to support and strengthen the Professional Leadership Programs Alumni Network. We've been told that the alumni of the Professional Leadership Programs are the only Wexner program group who have self-organized in quite this way but, honestly what else would you expect to happen when you put a bunch of leaders in a room together?

We would like to ask for those currently serving on WexCoComm to please stand. You will notice that we have blue ribbons on our name tags. (Thanks, please be seated). We also would like to acknowledge those who have served on WexCoComm in the past and ask that you stand now. (Thanks, please be seated) If you are interested in learning more about WexCoComm or interested in serving our community this way, please be in touch with Melissa or me, or anyone on WexCoComm, at the Institute or via email.

[Melissa] It sometimes seems like 90% of our work on WexCoCom is fretting about Wexnet. Are the comments mean or honest? Is it a pile-up or just the minority/majority opinions made clear? Is this a healthy debate or a toxic shoutfest? Are we focusing too much on the balcony, should we stop having a conversation about how we have the conversation and just have the damn conversation? How do people find so much time to write when I can barely find time to read all this? Why are things so quiet (ha, ha we never say that!)

[Andy] I was a fellow in a time when it was possible to feel that you knew every fellow. The same was true a few years later when I briefly worked for the Wexner Foundation.

[Melissa] And even when I became an alum, the 100 people at the Alumni Institute represented half the alumni body.

Today we are 600 Professional Fellowship Alumni strong and in a few short years when the Wexner Davidson Fellows finish their fellowship time, we will again be growing by some 30 alumni a year. It is easy for long-time alumni to forget that we don't all know each other anymore, it can be hard for newer alumni to interpret the Alumni Institute culture they are stepping into. We are no longer just diverse in job type, religious practice, organizational affiliation (although a lot of us seem to work at Hartman and Hadar) and family structure. We now contain educational differences, generational differences and power differences as some of us find ourselves facing our bosses when we share a hot take in a session.

And yet, that diversity comes with many wonderful opportunities, even as it presents us with challenges. One of my favorite things about coming to Alumni Institute is hearing about the tremendous work my colleagues are doing. Whether you are leading a congregation or disrupting the congregational model, bringing new research to the forefront or bringing an academic curiosity outside the university, I have to believe that if anything will save the Jewish people, it is the things we do day by day, the way we live our lives as examples the way we lead with courage. In short, you are amazing and if you are anything like us, you might need to hear that because it has been a long 16 months, a long 5 years, a long millennia and it is never easy to be a leader in the Jewish community, just ask Moses.

[Andy] We stand at an incredible juncture in the lifetime of the Wexner Professional Programs Alumni community. We continue to have opportunities for cross-foundation collaborations through Wexner LEADs and Wexner Summits. This alumni community will soon represent graduates of three different programs supporting professionals at different stages in their careers. For the first time, there is a foundation professional focusing full-time on alumni needs and we feel blessed to work in partnership with Stef Zelkind who couldn't be here this week but for whom we send a strong intention for a *refuah shleima*.

So about this time...those of you who frequent the organizational "annual dinner" speech, might be wondering, what's their ask? There is always an ask. Our ask isn't simple, but it won't cost you a dime. We ask you come with openness, openness to listen to opinions you hate, openness to get to know the person behind the post, openness to collaborate with a fellow alum you might not know, an openness to sit next to someone you don't already know and start a conversation, not just about what they do but about what they are passionate about.

[Melissa] There was a recent side debate about whether the Wexner Alumni were a community, a network or something else altogether. I think the truth is that it is what we choose for it to be, if we make it a community it will be our community. And I am coming to realize that it doesn't have to be that for all of us, there will be alumni who end their affiliation with the end of their fellowship, those who

lurk on Wexnet and others who come to every Alumni Institute or host a regional gathering. And maybe that's okay as we grow from the size of a small Jewish Day School to the size of a small private college, we can be different things for different people but we challenge you to think about what you want this group of people to be for you. You'll get back what you put into it.

[Andy] On that note, the invitation issued earlier deserves reiteration. Consider being part of WexCoComm. We are truly grateful for all that you do. May we continue to build upon the nearly 40 years of this blessed Jewish experiment and may we continue to grow and to make a difference in our world.