THE PURPOSE of a college education is to find your passion, said President Mitchell B. Reiss in an extensive interview published in the fall 2013 issue of Reform Judaism magazine.

“I believe a liberal arts institution can do this better than any other model on the planet,” he said.

Reiss advised students to “take a cue from the French, who have the expression, ‘The appetite comes with the eating.’ In other words, in higher education you can sometimes find your passion by taking a variety of courses.” The liberal arts model, as practiced at Washington College, allows students to explore, to fall in love with subjects they had no idea they might even like.

“A liberal arts education is also the best possible preparation for an ever-changing job market,” he said. “About a third of young people are getting jobs in industries that didn’t exist 10 years ago. How do you educate students for jobs that don’t yet exist? You teach them transcendent skill sets, the most important of which is how to think critically, dissect and analyze situations.”

Washington College emphasizes communication skills, especially writing, but Reiss said WC students also learn the importance of developing character and integrity. “We hope that our graduates will go out into the world with the discernment to make judgments for themselves and the moral courage to act on them by speaking up even when it’s unpopular to do so.”

Washington College goes to great lengths to shepherd students into satisfying post-college careers. “We’ve put more resources into career counseling and services, helping students map out their years with externships and summer internships, and connecting them with devoted alumni, so they become highly competitive on the job market,” Reiss said. “It’s paying off: More than 90% of the students in our last two graduating classes who were seeking work have found jobs.”

To read the interview with President Reiss in its entirety, please visit http://www.reformjudaism.org/begin-passion.
OW IN THE SECOND full school year with our beautiful Hillel House, we strive to make the house a comfortable space for students of all backgrounds to come experience Jewish culture with the members of Hillel. We continue to make our presence on campus well known with events open to the entire Washington College community.

This fall, Hillel got off to a quick start with the High Holidays in early September. We hosted a Rosh Hashanah dinner prepared by the members in the Hillel House, and then joined the Chestertown Havurah for services downtown. Sybil Wolin once again led a challah baking workshop for the Hillel members, and I believe we are improving every year! In November, we welcomed Rabbi YY Wenglin, who gave an inspiring and thought-provoking talk about reality and seeking truth. We also made fleece blankets with members of the Havurah for the Linus Project, a national organization that provides blankets to children in need, and hosted a Shabbat dinner and service for the community. Now, we are preparing for a spring semester full of events and programs!

As the new president of Hillel this year, I am very happy with the direction Hillel is moving. The community and the administration have been exceedingly supportive of all we do, and it is with their help that we are able to provide exciting and meaningful events, speakers and programs to the Jewish students and the entire Washington College community. I look forward to continuing to see Hillel grow with new members and diverse programming that enhances the Jewish community here at Washington College.

Shalom,

Rebecca DeSantis ’16, Hillel President

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

He is, officially, community liaison to the Washington College Hillel chapter. But, unofficially, Charles Lerner is simply “amazing,” according to the Hillel students who know him and have come to rely on his support and advice.

“He is so engaged, so interested, and he has incredible ideas,” says Cortnee Doll ’13, who has served as both the chapter’s president and its first program coordinator.

A New York attorney with a second home in Chestertown who is an active member of the local Havurah, Lerner felt immediately drawn to Washington College—and its Hillel chapter—when his son Jared ’04, daughter Katie ’05 and daughter-in-law Leslie Meredith ’06 were undergraduates. He loves the deep connection between the College and the Chestertown community, between the students and the faculty.

“I feel a closer connection to Washington College than I do to my own college,” says Lerner, who was an undergraduate at Cornell and who earned his J.D. at Brooklyn Law School. “I’ve been to Hillel functions and board meetings and these students participate, they get things done, they take ideas and run with them. They’re really spectacular.”

Lerner has a home and business, Fiduciary Compliance Associates, in New York. He worked for years in Washington, first for the Securities and Exchange Commission, then for the Department of Labor, and now helps financial institutions comply with complex federal regulations—he has edited a series of books on the subject. But he prefers, these days, to spend most of his time in Chestertown.

His goal for Hillel is to broaden its involvement—on campus, in Kent County and in the world beyond Maryland’s Eastern Shore. “Here’s my favorite political expression—it’s a Tip O’Neill expression: ‘Think globally and act locally,’” Lerner says. “If you want to have kids who are committed Jews, kids who are involved in the world in a constructive way, you need to start where they are, and where they are is here at Washington College. I love spending time with them, and I lob a lot of emails with suggestions.”
If it hadn’t been for Hurricane Katrina, Mason Sheen ’17 might not have discovered—as early as he did—his deep love for sailing.

“Two things happened in my life as a result of Katrina,” says Sheen. “The first is that I used to live in New Orleans and ended up moving to Mandeville, on the North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain. The second is that I learned to sail.”

Lake Pontchartrain, with its 24-mile causeway—the longest bridge over water in the world—is a 630-square mile estuary connected to the Gulf of Mexico. Sheen calls it his “playground.”

At Christ Episcopal School in Covington, LA, where his entire high school graduating class consisted of six students, Sheen actually started the sailing program, later serving as team captain and skipper. He was a member of the National Honor Society, as well as the sailing team’s three-time Most Valuable Sailor.

Sheen chose Washington College for its location and its sailing program, which is one of the best in the country. “The Chester River can be quite challenging,” he says. “I’m not used to sailing in a lot of current and there’s a ton of current, and sometimes some very shifty winds.” And he concedes that it’s a wee bit chilly in Chestertown, after life in Louisiana. “I had my very first Chester River frostbite experience the other day.”

Though sailing and his studies are all-consuming, Sheen discovered Hillel House early on, and likes the inclusiveness of the WC chapter. “I consider myself pretty ecumenical,” he says. Though he is Jewish, he has spent most of his life attending an Episcopal school.

“My passion is sailing,” he says simply. “It’s pretty much where all of my focus goes, working out an hour a day, four days a week, and having sailing practice during the season three to four hours a day.”

Sheen is a freshman, but he has already set some heady goals—to major in business, go to law school and “become involved with the America’s Cup, somehow.” He’d like to become a lawyer for one of the bigger teams, or for a yacht club, or—his ultimate dream—for the America’s Cup organization itself.

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WC’s Jewish Storyteller Is Featured In Holiday Special

A NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO special, Hanukkah Lights: Stories of the Season, featured a charming short story by acclaimed poet and biographer Daniel Mark Epstein, who is living in Chestertown this year as the C.V. Starr Center’s Patrick Henry Writing Fellow at Washington College.

Epstein’s story, “The Two Menorahs,” is the tale of a lively and deeply significant argument between two elderly neighbors who have long made a habit of arguing on the first night of Hanukkah. The story was one of several read on the program this past holiday season by NPR’s Susan Stamberg and Murray Horwitz, who have hosted Hanukkah Lights for more than 15 years.

Hanukkah Lights aired on radio stations throughout the country, and Stamberg and Horwitz performed the reading live at The Hill Center in Washington, D.C., on December 2.


His work-in-progress is Patriots and Renegades: The War in Ben Franklin’s House.

A native of Washington, D.C., and a graduate of Kenyon College, Epstein has received numerous accolades, including a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, a Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim Fellowship and an Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
A  S  ONE  OF  ITS  MITZVAHS  this year, Hillel hosted an afternoon of making blankets for children who are critically ill, homeless or otherwise traumatized and who might find comfort in the gift of something not only cozy, but lovingly handmade.

The blanket-making session was inspired by the Linus Project, a nonprofit based in Bloomington, Illinois, with chapters all over the country that distribute blankets to children in shelters and hospitals.

“It was a project I used to do at my home congregation of Shaarai Shomayim in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and I thought I’d bring it here,” said Hillel President Rebecca DeSantis ’16, an international studies major whose campus activities also include dance club, saxophone ensemble, jazz ensemble and Model United Nations. DeSantis is also a student ambassador for the College’s Office of Admissions.

“There are many ways you can make the blankets, but the easiest is a no-sew fleece blanket where you cut strips of fabric and tie them together to form a fringe,” said DeSantis, who drove an hour to Jo-Anne Fabrics in Easton to buy yards and yards of colorful fleece. Eight students and several members of the Chestertown Havurah spent an afternoon crafting six fringed coverlets, some with polka dots, some floral and some a simple and demure navy blue.

The event was held the Sunday before Thanksgiving and the start of Hanukkah; DeSantis took the blankets home with her over the holidays and delivered them to the Linus Project chapter in Lancaster.

**Hillel Donates Blankets To Linus Project**

**ORTNEE DOLL ’13** has moved to Tel Aviv and is working as Director of North American Operations for UStudy, a firm that recruits Israeli students for colleges and universities all over the world.

An international studies major, Doll served as Hillel president and worked last year as the Hillel program coordinator. Now, she is helping her new employers set up the 2014 Israel-America Recruiting Fair, which this year will not only bring American college recruiters to Tel Aviv, but also to Amman, Jordan, and to Ramallah in the West Bank.

“We’re definitely expanding,” she says. “We already have partnerships with schools in the UK, Italy and Australia. And we’d love to one day work with schools in Israel to help them bring more students from the U.S. and other countries to study here.”

Doll has wanted to return to Israel since she spent her junior year studying at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. “I love it here,” she says. “I made aliya, so I am a citizen now, and there are lots of benefits.” Israel provides free university tuition to Jews who make aliya; for instance, and Doll hopes to eventually go to graduate school to study security and diplomacy.

But living in Israel also has its challenges. There is the problem, for instance, of negotiating even the most mundane transactions in Hebrew, a language she continues to study with great pleasure, but in which she isn’t yet quite as fluent as she hopes to become. “Most young people speak English, but Israelis can be hard, until you get to know them, and, often, when I approach people on the street asking for directions in English, they’ll reply in Hebrew,” she laughs. “Luckily, my boyfriend is Israeli and that helps a lot. I do miss my friends and family. But while just about everything here is incredibly expensive, cell phones are cheap—I can call the U.S. anytime for free!”

**WC Graduate Setstle In Israel**

Washington College offers a welcoming community for students of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds. Close faculty mentoring helps students sort through an array of special classes, fellowships, internships and study abroad opportunities.

- Roy Ans Fellowship in Jewish-American Studies
- Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture (washcoll.edu/departments/irpc/)
- Study Abroad In Israel
- Washington College Hillel (washcoll.edu/clubs/hillel/) and on Facebook
- Chestertown Havurah (chestertownhavurah.org)
- Temple B’nai Israel in Easton, MD (bnaiisraeleaston.org)

For more information, e-mail wc_admissions@washcoll.edu
Dr. Gary Schiff, a distinguished scholar who is adjunct professor of history at Washington College and cantor to the Chestertown Havurah, has been tracing the lives of Jews in Europe for more than seven years.

At a campus event in November, he delivered his sixth public lecture on the subject, this time about the 2,200-year history of Jews in Italy, home of one of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe.

“In Search of Italia: Tracing Jewish Roots in Italy” was the culmination of Schiff’s intensive research and travel to more than 15 cities and towns across Italy. He has explored Jewish history in Spain, England, France, Germany and Poland. He made Poland, home of his own ancestors, the subject of a recent book, In Search of Poland: Chasing Jewish Ghosts in Today’s Poland, published under a Washington College imprint by Peter Lang Publishing.

Schiff pores over records and books, visits historic sites and takes many pictures. During his “In Search of Italia” lecture, he showed 150 of the more than 600 slides he’d taken of Italian synagogues, ghettos, graveyards and other traces of Jewish life he’d discovered.

“I love to travel and I always look for evidence of a Jewish presence,” he says. “So it seemed natural to spend a few weeks in each country intensively studying their Jewish history.”

He also conducts a lot of interviews. In a chance conversation on a “slow train to Siena,” Schiff heard stories of Italian villagers who had saved Jews from the Nazis, including one community that saved itself and its single Jewish refugee from a German search party by hiding the man in an empty coffin, covering the coffin with flowers and candles, and placing it in the Catholic church before the altar. It was the only place in town the Nazis never dared to look.

On November 7, Hillel hosted a popular speaker, Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Wenglin, who bills himself as the “Harvard Chassid” and who is part spiritual teacher, part performance artist.

Wenglin has the irreverent, fast-paced, confrontational style of a standup comic, which has made him a much sought-after lecturer on the Hillel circuit. And he has an unusual perspective: From a secular upbringing in America—culminating in a cum laude degree in history and English literature from Harvard, a law degree from UCLA and a job in a large Manhattan law firm—he emigrated to Israel to study Torah and eventually became a Hasidic rabbi.

“Ashley [Carol-Fingerhut ’14, former Hillel president] met him while she was studying in Israel last year,” says Rebecca DeSantis ’16, this year’s Hillel president. “His speech was really powerful. He was very engaging and he made us think about the nature of truth and reality, especially the difference between reality and what we think is reality. It was wonderful, too, to have that connection with Israel, to have someone who lives there and knows it so well come to speak here on campus.”

Wenglin’s lecture was titled “Don’t Judge a Book by its Cover.” He has said that his purpose in life, “whether serving as an attorney at a big New York City law firm or working as a rabbi teaching and counseling, is to help people achieve their goals.”
Campaign For Hillel Continues

T’S A PLEASURE to be here at Washington College as Vice President for College Advancement. In my first three months, I have learned so much about what makes this such a special place. Seeing what you have accomplished in getting Hillel House started and enhancing resources for our Jewish community has been particularly impressive and exciting.

Gifts and pledges total $246,039 towards our goal of $350,000 for construction and the $200,000 endowment. Hillel House has already served as host to a number of events since its doors have opened, including an open house over Fall Family Weekend, Rosh Hashanah dinner, Shabbat dinner when prayers were recited in both Hebrew and English, Passover Seder celebrated with friends and members of Hillel, and a challah baking lesson instructed by Havurah member Sybil Wolin. Your continued financial support to help build the endowment will provide, in perpetuity, not only for these events but monthly Nosh & Learn brunches, a speaker series and Jewish cultural trips to DC, Baltimore or New York. Hillel leadership also hopes to send students to the summer Hillel Institute for leadership training.

The passion for Hillel House is evident here on campus and in our community.

In the coming months, I hope I will see you at one of our many programs and learn more directly about your personal passions and aspirations for Hillel House.

Thank you in advance for making a difference. Enclosed is an envelope for your convenience.

Gary Grant
Vice President for College Advancement ✡