



Gratz Insider, Summer 2015 - Story Continuation

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A Big Win for Two Gratz College Students

Lisa Lebovitz and Alexis Miller are two people who took different paths to the same goal. Their paths converged back in March when they and nine other FEREP finalists spent a nail-biting day in a series of interviews with panels of Federation professionals and lay leaders. As FEREP winners, Lebovitz and Miller are now receiving up to \$40,000 each in scholarship money toward their graduate school studies. They have also each committed to work for a Federation for at least two years after graduation.

Lebovitz lives in Atlanta. While already a full-time Federation employee, she will be earning an MBA from the University of Georgia and a graduate certificate in Jewish Communal Service from Gratz College. Although she was raised in a Tennessee town with no synagogue and few Jews, her parents were committed to providing their children with a Jewish education. Therefore, they sent them to Hebrew School in Nashville - 30 minutes away, three times a week. The Lebovitz Family also managed to keep a kosher home in a place where kosher food was hard to come by.

After graduating from the University of South Carolina with a BS in Hospitality Management, Lebovitz was hired into a management training program at a top-rated country club in Charlottesville, Virginia. Eventually, however, she longed for the type of rich Jewish life that her parents had created for her in the family home. So, she said, "I made deliberate choices to bring Judaism back into my life."

Those choices were to move to Atlanta and to get a job at Federation, first as a PJ Library and engagement associate, and more recently, on staff in the Business & Professionals Division. Lebovitz had also been planning to pursue an MBA, which made applying for a FEREP grant a logical next step. However, since the MBA program at the University of Georgia did not include a Jewish component, as required by FEREP, Lebovitz enrolled in Gratz's online program in Jewish Communal Service, at the recommendation of Julia Malkin, who, among other things, oversees FEREP for The Jewish Federations of North America.

Alexis Miller's story is quite different. Miller grew up attending a Reform synagogue in her heavily Jewish-populated hometown of Highland Park, Illinois. Although her family celebrated the Jewish holidays and followed the traditions, she says, "I wasn't raised in a religiously Jewish household, but I was raised culturally Jewish."

As a college student at the University of Pittsburgh, Miller realized that her Jewish identity could serve as a bridge to connect her with her new city. First, she reached out to the Friendship Circle - a Jewish organization providing recreational programs to children with disabilities - and ended up interning there throughout her college years. During her junior year, she also had a formative experience as an intern at the Federation in Pittsburgh, followed by a two-month summer internship in Israel.

Miller majored in Applied Developmental Psychology and planned to pursue a master's in social work. However, her experience both at the Federation and in Israel confirmed for her that she wanted a

career within the Jewish community. While researching graduate schools, Miller discovered the joint program between Gratz College and the University of Pennsylvania. This program would enable her to earn both a master's in social work from Penn and a graduate certificate in Jewish Communal Service from Gratz.

Although there were a handful of other joint programs in social work and Jewish studies across the country, Miller said, "I kept coming back to the Penn-Gratz program. It was a way to combine my two passions, and the other programs just didn't line up with what I wanted."

Applying for the FEREP scholarship made sense for Miller too. Not only was the Penn-Gratz program already approved by FEREP, but the idea of returning to Federation for a minimum two-year job commitment was appealing to Miller. Just out of college, she became the youngest FEREP recipient to be selected this year.

Lebovitz and Miller are accomplished women who reflect the diversity that exists among FEREP candidates, as well as among Gratz College students. As FEREP coordinator Julia Malkin says, such diversity "just makes the conversation richer."