

Educators hone techniques for teaching about Shoa



Rutgers program draws on resources of Spielberg archive

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With their students out for the summer, 28 middle and high school teachers gathered at Rutgers University to advance their own education about the Holocaust.

The educators, all but one from New Jersey, spent five days in New Brunswick studying and learning how to use a new program being rolled out by the Shoah Foundation Institute Visual History Archive at the University of Southern California.

The archive, begun by film director Steven Spielberg, houses testimony of 52,000 survivors and other witnesses to the Holocaust filmed in 56 countries.

Through its Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers is one of only 36 institutions in 10 countries to be linked to the archives.

The June 25-29 Rutgers Master Teacher Institute course was offered through its Herbert and Leonard Littman Families Holocaust Resource Center. It provided advanced training to develop expert teachers in Holocaust studies.

“These teachers are here taking this very intensive course in Holocaust history to increase their knowledge and to be better teachers,” said Bildner associate director Karen Small. “This is not easy and they are here on their own time. They are not being compensated.”

This latest master teacher course featured an introduction to IWitness, a collection of 1,000 video testimonies from survivors and other witnesses designed to engage educators and their students ages 13-18.

Unlike the full archive, which can only be fully accessed from a computer at USC or a linked institution, the IWitness program can be accessed by students and teachers in a classroom setting.

Included in the five-day programming was a segment on “ethical editing,” in which educators were guided in the responsible use of survivor testimony.

“That was a big concern of the foundation when they were deciding about making these testimonies public,” said Small. “We all know what can happen with editing and photoshopping if they fell into the wrong hands.”



East Orange teacher Rita King, left, is assisted by Karen Small of Rutgers University's Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life in learning how to use the new IWitness program to study the Holocaust.

Photos by Debra Rubin

Gene Woods, a Bayonne High School history teacher, said he has become more immersed in the Holocaust in recent years and has included the Shoa in both his world and American history courses.

This coming year he will begin teaching a course in Holocaust and behavior.

“I want to study why the type of behavior that led to the Holocaust has continued in Rwanda and other places,” said Woods. “How do we stop the violence? People need to stand up against intolerance in school and elsewhere and not be bystanders.”

Special education teacher Shari Solomon and Spanish teacher Rosita Santiago Peters, both at Hamilton High West in Mercer County, plan to teach a joint course next year incorporating Holocaust studies.

Peters said she was interested in learning more about the Holocaust since a survivor and liberator came to speak to the Girl Scout troop she led.

“I didn’t realize all the planning and calculation that went into it,” she said.

Solomon said she has found her students can relate the Holocaust to the enslavement of African-Americans. As educators she and Peters were always looking for new tools to reach students.

“We two are a unique duo,” she added, “who dare to go where no one else has gone.”

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