

Touro in Israel?

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Seeing Israel an answer to assimilation among young Jews, Bernard Lander, the founder of Touro College, is moving ahead with plans to open a three-year English-speaking university in Israel that would issue a bachelor of arts degree.

"It would be a university that would reach out to alienated young men and women and bring them to Israel for three years of study," he said. "This would be a major bachelor of arts degree."

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Lander pointed out that there are "thousands of Jews who go to Israel on birthright Israel and the March of the Living and are very excited but then have no place to go (when they return home). Their memory of their Jewish identity fades very fast." Lander also dismissed year-abroad programs in which Jewish students study in English for a year in an Israeli school.

"They are basically tourists," he said of the students. "Serious (study) programs require a fluency in Hebrew. Our idea is to have an American college with an American degree and curriculum and a modest tuition."

Negotiations are now under way to buy a 15-acre site for the college in the northern Israeli city of Netanya.

"This would be a major accomplishment—a longtime dream," Lander said.

In a letter to the college, The Jewish Agency for Israel said it was interested in seeing Touro open a college in Israel that would be academically identical to Touro's college in New York but at half the tuition "to encourage young people to participate." The Jewish Agency said it would provide a "social and cultural umbrella" for the student.

"Studies indicate that young people who come to Israel for long-term program (more than one year) become more active in their Jewish communities, have higher rates of membership in synagogues or other Jewish organization, value their relationship with the State of Israel to a great extent, are far more likely to marry Jews and often make aliyah," the Jewish Agency wrote.

Preliminary studies by Touro indicate the school could attract as many as 1000 Jewish students per year, the agency added.

Stewart Ain