

## Hillel's Rabbi Will Berkovitz Receives Exemplar of Excellence Award

UW Hillel's **Rabbi Will Berkovitz** was not only surprised to receive the Richard M. Joel Exemplar of Excellence award at Hillel's international staff conference last month, he almost missed the announcement.

"It was late," he explained from his office recently. "The room was noisy and I was talking to a friend." Suddenly he heard the word "goat" and realized he was the subject. (Berkovitz once brought a live "scapegoat" to high holiday services.)

"This competitive award is Hillel's highest honor," says Hillel staffer Josh Miller.

Berkovitz (a recent subject of a JT Trendsetters profile in this paper) was chosen for his devotion to helping young

Jewish adults experience religion and spirituality in a way that is meaningful to them — such as petting a goat.

"We like to get students to challenge their assumptions...on how they see the world," says Will, who will be leading a group of students and JConnect members (up to age 32) to El Salvador in the spring as part of an American Jewish World Service-sponsored trip.

What is Jewish about helping poor villagers in El Salvador?

"If I make it a Jewish trip, it will impact how they understand their Judaism," clarifies Berkovitz. "I can contextualize the experience through a Jewish lens, so they view themselves not only as members of the university community but the broader Jewish and

global communities.

"Some students may never find meaning through celebrating Shabbat," he continues. "I use a broad sweep of what Torah is. I don't limit myself to classic modes, but look in corners of the tradition. We need to find methods to reach people where they are."

"What was touching," Berkovitz reflects about the award, "was that it was driven by the staff here and some of the people at the international center who wrote the recommendations for me to get this.

"This is an extraordinary team of people who make it very easy for me to do my job."