

Barnard College
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Ten Ramahniks at Barnard College responded to the survey. The students have attended one or more of the following Ramah camps or programs: Berkshires, California, Canada, Nyack, Poconos, Wisconsin, and Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

A number of the Ramahniks who responded to the survey indicated that because their former counselors attended Barnard, they were inspired to apply. One Ramahnik wrote: "Some of my favorite people at Ramah – roshes, counselors, and friends – attended Barnard, so I knew I had found a great place!" Some also indicated that the Jewish community at Barnard is similar to the Ramah community. One student wrote: "Through Ramah, I recognized the importance of having a strong Jewish community to cultivate strong friendships. Therefore, I chose a college with a strong Jewish community." Having the additional option of also enrolling in the joint program between Barnard and the Jewish Theological Seminary also is an intriguing aspect of Barnard for many Ramahniks, as it provides them with the opportunity to continue their formal Jewish learning in a university setting.

Other Schools Considered

Columbia University, Brandeis University, Washington University in St. Louis, New York University, University of Maryland, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, Binghamton University, Rutgers University, Northwestern University, Tufts University, Boston University

Attributes Looked for in a School

The Ramahniks who responded to this survey were looking for a city school with a large Jewish community. Many wanted a rigorous, liberal arts education, as well as an active social life both on and off campus.

Best Aspects of the School

Students love that Barnard is a small school that is part of a larger community. One student wrote: "Barnard really cares about its students, which makes the transition into college and the experience there easy, comfortable, and fun." Many Ramahniks also commented on the large Jewish population, as well as the great opportunities that New York has to offer. One student wrote: "Not only do you get to live in the greatest, most exciting city in the world, but Barnard and Columbia take every opportunity to utilize the city and make it accessible."

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Barnard has its own kosher meal plan, with a full kosher section in the main dining hall. One student explained: “Hewitt, the Barnard dining hall, has an extensive kosher section right next to the normal food so eating kosher never means being separated from the rest of the student population.” Students also have access to pre-prepared kosher wraps, sandwiches and salads provided by FreshKo and sold in Barnard’s Diana Center and the John Jay Dining hall at Columbia. In addition, nearly all of the pastries and drinks provided by Barnard’s on-campus café, Liz’s Place, are kosher. Hillel also has a kosher restaurant that is open for dinner every night. Additionally, there are many kosher restaurants throughout the city which provide both eat-in and delivery options. The Ramahniks who responded to this survey are generally happy with the kosher food availability, commenting that not only is the food good but it is also easily accessible.

Worship/Services

A variety of service options are available at Barnard, including Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Chabad. Students estimate that around 200 students attend Friday night services at Hillel, and around 100 students attend Shabbat morning services. In addition to Hillel, students attend a variety of local synagogues. The Ramahniks who responded to this survey appreciate that there is a large Conservative community at Barnard, although, as one student wrote: “many of the Conservative students who are also pursuing a degree with JTS tend to resort to JTS for religious affiliation, leaving KOACH at Hillel more inactive for strictly Barnard/Columbia Conservative students.” Recently, many students, including many Ramahniks, have also opted to attend Lalekhet services at Hillel on Friday nights, which follows a “Shira Chadasha” model, allowing women to lead Kabbalat Shabbat and men to lead Mincha and Ma’ariv with the presence of a mechitza. In contrast to some of the other available services, Lalekhet provides a spirited Friday night service full of singing and dancing which Ramahniks frequently miss during their time outside of camp.

Jewish Studies

Ramahniks recommended taking American Jewish Literature, History of Messianic Movements, Judaism 101, Hebrew, Yiddish, Talmud, and several Bible courses. One student noted that in addition to the credited courses in the Jewish Studies department, there are also opportunities to take non-credited classes at Hillel.

Jewish Social Life

Because Barnard (and the general Columbia community) has such a large Jewish community, there is a strong sense of Jewish social life on campus. A number of Ramahniks who responded to this survey noted that there is a divide between denominations not only in terms of services but also socially: “there is a sub-social group consisting of Orthodox Jews who did a year in Israel at yeshiva/seminary before college who seem to be a bit more exclusive...but overall, there is a great Jewish network.”

Hillel Activities

Hillel offers a wide range of activities, including religious services, social programs, Israel programming, study opportunities, and social action (tzedek) opportunities. One student wrote: “We have a beautiful building at 115th and Broadway. There is always something going on at Hillel, whether it be religious, social, cultural, Israel-related, interfaith, or social justice.” Students noted that it is very easy to get involved in Hillel life because there are so many options for programming.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

Because of Barnard’s location in New York City, there are a number of options for Jewish social life outside of Hillel. One student wrote: “Chabad and Aish both exist ‘on campus’ but are by no means as popular as Hillel. The Jewish Theological Seminary is also a presence on campus because of the dual-degree students, and a fair amount of Columbia/Barnard students spend time in JTS dorms with friends or for an occasional event. Another main place where ‘Jewish’ happens besides Hillel is specific dorms on Shabbat.” Additionally, there are local synagogues and Jewish fraternities and sororities.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

Most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have not experienced antisemitism and or anti-Israel sentiment directly, however most also noted that in the past there have been incidents related to professors speaking out against Israel. Although there are some demonstrations by anti-Israel groups, students note that they are generally peaceful.

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at Barnard College encourage prospective students to consider Barnard if they are looking for a school with excellent academics, a great location, and a strong Jewish community.

“Barnard is not the typical college. But that is why I love it! We get to take advantage of the city but also live in a gated, protected and comfortable smaller community.”

“Barnard is an excellent academic college, and also comes with a rigorous workload. However, even with the work, there are incredible social opportunities, as well as the New York City area to explore.”

“If you are an independent person who loves New York City, Barnard is a great place for you.”

“If you want a city school with a supportive community, strong classes, and a strong Jewish community, then seriously look into this school.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at Barnard College (or another college on the Ramah College Network), please email Alana Tilman at ramahdesk@campramah.org. Please include your name, your Ramah affiliation, and the college(s) for which you would like contact information.