

The George Washington University
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Nine Ramahniks at the George Washington University responded to the survey. The students have attended one or more of the following Ramah camps or programs: Berkshires, California, Darom, New England, Nyack, Poconos, and Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

A number of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey noted that Ramah had an impact on their decision to attend GW. One student wrote: “Ramah solidified my strong Jewish identity. Because of that, I wanted to go to a school with a strong Jewish community.” Another student wrote: “Ramah instilled Jewish and Israeli political activism in my life, which made me want to continue my education in a city where I can experience true politics.”

Other Schools Considered

University of Maryland, New York University, American University, Indiana University, University of Pennsylvania, Boston University, Duke University, University of Michigan, Emory University

Attributes Looked for in a School

Many students were looking for an urban environment that could provide them with work and social options outside of the university itself. These Ramahniks were also looking for a fairly large Jewish population, specific academic majors, and a diverse campus atmosphere.

Best Aspects of the School

Nearly all of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey noted that being in Washington, D.C is one of the best things about attending the George Washington University. One student explained: “DC is an amazing city, full of academic, social, and political opportunities.”

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

GW’s dining plan consists of “dining dollars” which can be used at certain restaurants, including one kosher restaurant. Additionally, Hillel serves Shabbat dinner every week. There is also kosher food available at local supermarkets. One student wrote: “I live on a kosher living and learning community floor (which means that everyone on my floor in my dorm keeps kosher).” Most students wrote that they are unsatisfied with the kosher dining options at GW. One Ramahnik wrote: “There could be more options considering the amount of people that do keep kosher.” However, another student commented that

“the Hillel is always working to find more affordable and more convenient Kosher options for students.”

Worship/Services

Students at GW have a wide variety of service options, including Conservative, Chabad, Orthodox, and Reform. The GW Hillel offers Friday night services, which students estimate about 100 students attend. For Shabbat morning, some students attend nearby synagogues. One student wrote: “I attend the conservative services and it reminds me of camp, especially when it is led by fellow Ramahniks!”

Jewish Studies

Ramahniks at the George Washington University recommend Hebrew language and literature courses as well as “Rabbinic Literature and Thought,” “Jewish Ethics,” and “Women in Judaism.” Many of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey are satisfied with the Jewish Studies course offerings. However, one student wrote: “I’ve taken the Old Testament and Judaism courses - I find both are hard to take after 15 years of Jewish education and it is difficult to take secular Judaic Studies courses.”

Jewish Social Life

Many students pointed out that “there are a lot of Jewish people, but most aren't practicing.” Most Jewish social life stems from Hillel programming: “some people branch beyond Hillel and join the Jewish Fraternity which tends to be involved in many Hillel events.” Some students also meet Jewish friends in their Judaic Studies courses.

Hillel Activities

Hillel offers religious services, social programs, Israel programming, study opportunities, and social action (tzedeck) opportunities. Students describe the Hillel very positively, using adjectives such as “warm,” “welcoming,” and “accessible.” One student wrote: “There are frequent programs and ways to get involved. Also there are many leadership opportunities within it.” The building itself is centrally located on campus, and many students noted that its director is very nice and interested in involving students. Of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey, four students have held leadership positions in Hillel. While none of the students have held leadership positions in KOACH, half of the respondents have attended KOACH programming.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

There is a large Jewish population in Washington, D.C, including Chabad and synagogues that have their own social programming. Greek organizations are another option for Jewish social life at GW. One student commented that “somehow you just tend to make friends through friends and travel in Jewish circles.”

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

None of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey indicated that they had ever experienced antisemitism on campus. Some students have seen some anti-Israel activity, but as one student explained, “I’ve only been minimally exposed to it.” One student

commented that “there was a pro-Israel program and many anti-Israel supporters protested in hurtful ways.”

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at the George Washington University encourage students who are looking for a great school in an urban setting to check out GW. Don’t expect an incredibly active Jewish population, but you can look forward to a warm, communal atmosphere.

“If you love being in the city, and have an interest in politics, then GW is an amazing school to attend.”

“Realize that it's much harder than you would expect it to be. Classes are extremely challenging and you must work to do well.”

“GW is very politically oriented but even if you don't care what happens in the next election its still exciting to watch it happen around you and go to the inaugural parade. GW has a strong and supportive faculty, and small classes are a plus because your will really get to know you.”

“This school has a lot of Jews, just not very active. You won't find an active Jewish community like Maryland or Penn, for example. But there's a small, warm community here that can fit your needs.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at the George Washington University (or another college on the Ramah College Network), please email Shana Zions at ramahdesk@jtsa.edu. Please include your name, your Ramah affiliation, and the college(s) for which you would like contact information.