

University of Maryland, College Park
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Eighteen Ramahniks from University of Maryland responded to the survey. These students have attended at least one of the following Ramah camps or programs: Berkshires, California, Canada, Darom, Nyack, Poconos, New England, Wisconsin, and Tichon Ramah Yerushalayim.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Most students felt that Ramah had a big impact on their decision to attend Maryland. Some students liked the fact that many Ramahniks attend Maryland, and they felt that this might lead to a camp like atmosphere. Other students chose University of Maryland not because other Ramahniks are there, but “because when I visited I heard from so many Ramahniks about how much they love it here.” One student wrote: “I decided what universities to apply to based on their Jewish communities and more specifically the strength of the conservative movement on campus. I was looking for a community similar to Ramah.”

Other Schools Considered

Boston University, University of Delaware, Barnard College, University of Central Florida, Rutgers University, Towson University, Muhlenberg College, List College, Pennsylvania State University, Indiana University, Brandeis University, University of Pittsburgh, Washington University in St. Louis, Binghamton University, McGill University, New York University, UCLA, American University, Tufts University

Attributes Looked for in a School

Many students noted Maryland’s reputation for strong academics; most students appreciated that Maryland offered courses in their areas of interest. A strong Jewish community and a general “Jewish atmosphere” were appealing to many students.

Best Aspects of the School

Most Ramahniks considered the strong Jewish community the best aspect of Maryland. Many students also noted Maryland size and location: “It is the perfect location, right in between Baltimore and DC. It is a large school so there are opportunities for anything that I wish to do, and there are certainly ways to make the school seem smaller.” Another student wrote, “Maryland is so large that you can be as involved or uninvolved as you want. You can take small classes or be in huge lectures, and it offers most majors that you can think of.”

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Hillel offers a kosher food plan, serving lunch and dinner daily. There is a full meal plan as well as a points plan, which allows students to eat in the regular dining halls as well as at Hillel. Students can also pay separately for meals. Besides Hillel, Chabad also serves food frequently, as well as Shabbat dinners. Students can purchase kosher food at the campus supermarket, and there is one kosher restaurant just off of the Maryland campus. Most Ramahniks are satisfied with the kosher options, but they said that the food can become repetitive, and many also eat vegetarian meals in the regular dining halls. Some students also noted that people planning to be on the kosher meal plan should live on South Campus because of its proximity to Hillel.

Worship/Services

Maryland offers a variety of prayer options: Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, Chabad, and Reconstructionist. Students estimate that between 300 and 500 students attend on Friday nights, and Saturday morning is slightly smaller 100 to 200 students. There are also daily services for Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv. One student had mixed feelings about service options: "The Orthodox community is very strong and is able to get nearly 400 people on a Friday night, 200 on a Saturday morning, and nearly 100 people for other services such as weekday Mincha. The Conservative community is not as strong and usually gets 90 on a Friday night, if it is lucky 20 on a Saturday morning. For Shabbos Mincha and Ma'ariv it always hard to get 10. KOACH never has regular services. There are also 5 different service options on some Friday nights, which is nice. There is traditional Orthodox, Carlebach Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and sometimes Reconstructionist. Since I prefer conservative I sometimes get frustrated with trying to make a minyan for Shabbos Mincha. It is also hard to always have to play a big role on a Saturday morning." Many students also noted that because of the large Jewish population, it is possible for all types of Jews to find a comfortable place to pray.

Jewish Studies

One student noted that the Jewish Studies program at Maryland is "top tier." Many students recommended History of the Jewish People, as well as Jewish literature classes. Many students also recommended the Hebrew courses.

Jewish Social Life

Students report that Jewish social life on campus is strong and vibrant, with "many opportunities to get involved both religiously and culturally." One student explained: "There is a large Jewish Student Union that provides social and cultural programming (dances, bar nights, Israel shuk). There are also numerous social action and Israel activist Jewish groups. Hillel is a great place to meet people and socialize, and JSU provides social activities during the week." Another student wrote: "In fact, a lot of my friends attended some sort of Ramah."

Hillel Activities

Hillel is bustling at the University of Maryland, offering prayer services, social action opportunities, study opportunities, Israel programming, and social programs. Students report that they have a great staff, great programming, and a “nice, cozy atmosphere.” One student explained, “It’s the center of my everyday. I go there at least twice a day, and it’s essentially the meeting point for all your friends.” Some students commented on the problem of pluralism at Hillel: “many people feel the Orthodox Jews have a larger presence and are benefiting the most. However, there are meetings and new initiatives to create more pluralistic programs and make Hillel feel welcoming to non-Orthodox Jews.” Three of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have served in leadership positions in Hillel, and two have served in leadership positions in KOACH. Nearly all of the respondents have attended KOACH programming at Maryland.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

The Jewish Student Union (JSU) offers programming for Jewish students at Maryland, such as bar nights, dances, and Israel programs. Many students also noted that the Chabad House and Jewish fraternities and sororities offer other options for Jewish social life.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

Most Ramahniks have not experienced antisemitism first-hand, however they recognize that it exists at Maryland. One student commented, “I’m sure if I looked I could find antisemitism, but I think that you could find that at any college, especially at a big university. Of course, a third of people on campus are Jewish, so it’s not like you are ever in a minority position.” Students note that anti-Israel activity exists, but is often “overshadowed by the pro-Israel activity.” One student wrote, “recently the socialist group on campus led a protest against the ‘Israeli occupation of Palestine.’ It was peaceful, and Jewish students showed up to talk with the group and try to explain ‘our side.’”

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at the University of Maryland are very happy, although the size of the campus can be overwhelming until students find their niche.

“Know that although Maryland is a big school and it might seem overwhelming, the school quickly feels smaller with the friends you meet. Also, a big school means lots of people and many opportunities.”

“It’s big and you have to deal with a lot of red tape, but the Jewish life is spectacular.”

“Consider all the options, and also don’t be worried if you don’t feel that ‘perfect fit’ feeling when you visit the school, I didn’t and now I love my school.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at the University of Maryland (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.