

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Twenty-two Ramahniks at the University of Michigan responded to the survey. These students have attended one or more of the following Ramah camps and programs: Berkshires, California, Canada, New England, Wisconsin, Seminar, and Tichon Ramah Yerushalayim.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Some students said that having an active Jewish community was important to them because of their experiences at Ramah. One student wrote: “My Ramah experience helped strengthen the importance of Judaism in my life. Therefore, an important aspect of my college decision was to go to a University that had a large Jewish population. This was one of the numerous appeals of the University of Michigan.”

Other Schools Considered

George Washington University, Emory University, University of Southern California, UCLA, University of Pennsylvania, Brandeis University, Washington University in St. Louis, Cornell University, University of Maryland, Binghamton University, Yale University, Barnard College, Oberlin College, UC Berkeley

Attributes Looked for in a School

Many students noted that the proximity to home was an important factor in choosing to go to Michigan, but students also liked that Michigan’s size and good academic standing contributed to their interest in the school. Some students also said that the social aspects of the school, including football games and Greek life, were important.



Canada Ramahniks Jonathan Beitner, Mike Schwartz (visiting from Ohio State University), and David Kurzmann reunite for a football game at the University of Michigan. (The Buckeyes defeated the Wolverines 42-39.)

Best Aspects of the School

Students said that the best aspects of the University of Michigan include the diverse community and the wide range of options for getting involved on campus. One student wrote: “People are extremely nice and welcoming and always ready to have a good time. At the same time, however, everyone is conscience about getting their work done and doing well in school. Also, our football team is the best team in the nation- for sure.”

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Hillel offers a kosher dining plan, including free Shabbat dinners. The food service provider at AEPi can arrange to prepare kosher meals for students, as well. In addition to Hillel for Shabbat dinner, Chabad and the JRC (Jewish Resource Center) also offer free Shabbat dinners. While students were happy with the quality of the food at the Hillel, most wished that there were at least one kosher restaurant in Ann Arbor. They said that the Hillel is somewhat inconvenient, and they often just eat vegetarian options in the regular dining hall.

Worship/Services

Students reported that all types of services are offered at Michigan, including Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Chabad, and Reconstructionist. Many students attend Friday night services (students estimate between 200 and 300 students), and there are also services on Shabbat morning, although fewer students attend. Students’ opinions of services were mixed. One student appreciated the variety of options for services and the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat with such a strong community. Another student said that she wished that services were more like Ramah, because sometimes they are a bit dull and lacking in energy.

Jewish Studies

The University of Michigan offers a strong Jewish studies department, with a major and a minor. Students appreciated the wide variety of course offerings, including Hebrew language, Jewish history, and Middle Eastern studies. One student explained that because most of the students in these classes are Jewish, she has made a number of friends from class.

Jewish Social Life

Students overwhelmingly reported that most of their friends were Jewish; they met them through Hillel, Jewish Greek life, and previous connections. One student reported that there are four predominantly Jewish sororities and two predominantly Jewish fraternities, and much of the Jewish social life stems from them. One student did note that because many of the active Jewish students come from the Detroit area, there are some cliques.

Hillel Activities

The Hillel offers a variety of activities, including religious services, social programs, social action opportunities, Israel programming, and study opportunities. The recently renovated building houses “all kinds of events for the whole Jewish community...it’s a

great place to meet people.” One student described Hillel as “beautiful, welcoming, active, and cool.” One student wrote, “It provides almost everything a student on campus could need. There is a kosher kitchen, services, rooms to study, Judaic classes, social events, special programs for freshmen, etc.” Six of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey reported that they have held a leadership position in Hillel.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

The main source for Jewish social life outside of Hillel is Greek life; there are a number of predominantly Jewish fraternities and sororities, however many Jewish students are active in the general Greek system. Additionally, “there is a Chabad House down the street from Hillel which I have never been to although I hear they serve guacamole for Shabbat dinner, and a Jewish Resource Center backed by Aish.com that has various learning programs and meals on Shabbat. It’s a little too intense for me, but I have friends who like it.” There is also an organization called Jewish Awareness America (JAAM) which also offers some social activities for Jewish students.



Canada Ramahniks reunite: Nessa Geffen (visiting from CUNY Hunter, second from right) visits her camp friends (from left) Jennie Beitner, Laura Schwartz, Leah Soshnik, and Elyssa Guslits at the University of Michigan.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

Because of the large population and presence of Jewish students at Michigan, blatant acts of antisemitism are rare. However, many students reported a strong anti-Israel sentiment on campus, partly due to the large Arab population in Ann Arbor. One student explained, “Michigan is very liberal and every voice from one end to the spectrum to the other is heard at times.” Many students noted that the majority of anti-Israel sentiment can be seen through rallies and protests, however pro-Israel groups on campus (including one founded by Ramahniks) are also active and often hold counter-protests. One student wrote about a professor who “was very anti-Israel. She didn’t outright denounce Israel, but she presented the conflict in an obviously one sided way.”

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at the University of Michigan encourage prospective students to consider Michigan’s size and to think about what sort of academic atmosphere they’re looking for.

“Make the University as big or as small as you want--make it work for you...everyone can find his or her niche here.”

“Come visit for a weekend, tour the campus and get a feel for what it is like to be a student here.”

“See if you want a bigger school, because Michigan is huge in terms of its campus and number of students. Also, know that the students here are for the most part more culturally Jewish than religiously -- but there are exceptions. Academics-wise it is hard, but there are classes which are so easy it's painful.”

“Visit schools and ask random students on the street what they think. Michigan was the only school I visited where EVERY SINGLE student I asked couldn't stop raving.”

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