

Northwestern University
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Six Ramahniks at Northwestern University responded to the survey. The students have attended one of the following Ramah camps: California, Canada, Nyack, Poconos, and Wisconsin. Some students attended Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

A number of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey wrote that although they decided to go to Northwestern before working at Camp Ramah, their experiences at camp affected their college experience: “My Ramah experience started after I had already decided where I would be attending college. However, because of my friends who went to Ramah as campers and continued to work there as staff, I got a chance to become very close friends with two fellow staff members who attend the same university as myself. Had I not worked at Ramah this past summer I would not have had the opportunity to become such great friends with these people.” Another Ramahnik wrote that her experiences at Ramah inspired her to find a Jewish community in which she could take an active leadership role.

Other Schools Considered

University of Michigan, Boston University, New York University, McGill University, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, Georgetown University, Stanford University, SUNY Buffalo, Rutgers University, University of Wisconsin, Vanderbilt University, Harvard University, Washington University in St. Louis

Attributes Looked for in a School

The Ramahniks who responded to this survey were looking for a school with a high standard of academics that offered a wide variety of academic opportunities. Students also wanted a school that was in close proximity to a city but with a nice campus. An active Jewish community was also a priority.

Best Aspects of the School

One student described academic and extra-curricular life at Northwestern: “Northwestern University provides not only a stellar education, but creates an atmosphere in which students can learn 24/7. The professors are some of the leading researchers in their fields, and they enjoy sharing their current projects with students. In addition, there are hundreds of different groups on campus that will suit the needs of anyone and everyone.” Many students also noted that Northwestern’s proximity to Chicago is one of its best aspects.

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Allison Hall offers kosher lunches and dinners on Monday through Thursday: “The nice thing is that there is no separate kosher meal plan, and that the kosher food is just one of the stations in the dining hall. The food is served on plastic plates with plasticware.”

Kosher prepared salads and sandwiches are also available at various locations around campus. Shabbat and holiday meals are offered at Hillel, Chabad, and the Meor rabbi’s home. Students at Northwestern are generally satisfied with the kosher dining options; they appreciate the availability of convenient, good kosher meals.

Worship/Services

There are a number of religious service options at Northwestern: Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, and Chabad. Students estimate that around 60 students attend services on Friday night, and about 30 students attend on Shabbat morning, when there are services at Chabad and Orthodox services at Hillel. Students have mixed feelings about services at Northwestern. One student wrote, “I love the services on campus because they are all run by students and make you feel like you aren't just praying but are having fun. It's nice being able to pray every week with your friends who you don't get to see during the week.” Some students expressed they would be more satisfied with services if there was a higher attendance level and more ruach.

Jewish Studies

The Jewish Studies program offers a large variety of courses and offers both a major in Jewish Studies and minors in Jewish Studies and Hebrew Studies. Highly recommended professors include Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Phyllis Lassner, Peter Hayes, Barry Wimpfheimer, Mira Balberg and others.

Jewish Social Life

One student explained: “The campus is nearly 20 percent Jewish, so it's not hard to find Jews on campus, and many are very friendly and sociable.” Another student wrote that “Jewish social life is amazing” and “there's always something to do if you're Jewish.”

Hillel Activities

Hillel sponsors a wide variety of activities, including religious services, social programs, Israel programming, and social action (tzedek) opportunities. With a new building and great facilities, the Hillel at Northwestern “is a great place to conduct programming or just to grab a quick bite and say hi to friends.” According to one Ramahnik, there truly is something for everyone: “The Hillel has so many groups that it sponsors, that anyone who says that Hillel is not for them has not given it a fair shot. From music groups to learning to completely non-religious programming, the Northwestern Hillel staff is incredibly well tuned to the needs of the student body.”

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

In addition to Hillel, Chabad and the Meor program both sponsor Jewish social programs. AEPi, the Jewish fraternity, is also very active in the Jewish community.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

Most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey commented on a situation with one of the university's professors: "There is a professor at my school in the engineering department who denies the Holocaust existed. He mostly stays quiet, but every few years he is quoted in a journal or magazine and the issue becomes prominent on campus. It is unfortunate that he is affiliated with our University but the student, staff and supporters are poised and ready to stand against him." Regarding anti-Israel activity, students commented that the Muslim student group has brought in controversial speakers, but the debates remain academic and non-threatening.

Ramahniks' Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at Northwestern University are very happy with the balance between academic and extracurricular opportunities. They encourage prospective students to visit and get a feel for the campus.

"I think that this school is really great. It is a very hardworking student body, but because of the large amounts of art/music majors there is great campus life and just a large diversity of interests here. I think that as far as Jewish life goes here, it is completely what you make of it (as I am sure is the case with most other schools too)."

"Come visit! There's no other way to know if you like the school and it fits you than to be here."

"It is a really great school with so many opportunities. Being near a big city is a huge advantage, and there are a variety of programs in various departments that are all highly ranked. It is a fun school that attracts great students and staff."

"Make sure you visit, and get a feel for the other students—if they are like you and if you could see yourself fitting in here."

"For a school its size, Northwestern has a lot of different things going on that someone all seem to work together."

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at Northwestern University (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.

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