

University of Pennsylvania
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Thirteen Ramahniks at the University of Pennsylvania responded to the survey. The students have attended one or more of the following Ramah camps or programs: Berkshires, California, Canada, Darom, New England, Nyack, Wisconsin, and Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Nearly all of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey wrote that their experiences at Ramah strongly influenced their decision to attend Penn. One student wrote: “My Ramah experience, along with my experiences growing up in an active Conservative Jewish home and community, led me to look for colleges with strong, thriving Jewish communities where I could have a voice. At Penn, I was able to find this: lots of Ramahniks from all over the country, an extremely active and fun Hillel, and a community that truly reminded me of the community that I was so fortunate to find at Ramah in California.”

Other Schools Considered

Washington University in St. Louis, Brown University, University of Michigan, Northwestern University, Cornell University, Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University

Attributes Looked for in a School

Academics were a high priority for the Ramahniks who responded to this survey. Additionally, many students echoed this Ramahnik: “I looked for active student bodies, extracurricular opportunities, and strong Hillels and active Jewish communities.”

Best Aspects of the School

Ramahniks at Penn had a lot to say about their school’s best aspects. One Ramahnik wrote: “I think that the best aspects of Penn are the activism and passion of the students, the involvement in all forms of life on campus, the active and very present Jewish population on campus, and the strong academic environment created by the university.” Another student commented on Penn’s academics: “Penn allows its students to study an incredible array of disciplines from any of its 12 schools—all located on the same campus.” Students also commented on Penn’s location: “Penn is in a city but it is not in the middle of it. Although in Philadelphia, the school is about a mile from downtown (called Center City), so it really feels like I live in a college environment while also having a city available to me”

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Hillel offers a kosher lunch and dinner every day except Sunday, alternating between meat and dairy days. Students can use the regular meal plan to pay for these meals. Other dining halls have pre-made kosher sandwiches. Students are very satisfied with the kosher options at Penn. “I am extremely satisfied with the kosher establishments at my school, and I could not think of a more welcoming and accepting place to practice my kashrut.” Some students wrote that the kosher food at Hillel is some of the best food on campus.

Worship/Services

The University of Pennsylvania has a number of religious service options, including Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Shira Chadasha Style, Sephardic, and Chabad. Once a year there is even a Ramah-style Shabbat where Ramahniks join to pray and eat together in the special Ramah way. Students estimate that 200-400 students attend Friday night services, and 100-200 students attend Shabbat morning services. Most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey wrote that services at Penn are great because there are many options, so everyone finds a place where they are comfortable. One student wrote: “A lot of kids go to services on the weekend so its really nice to feel like you have a community going with you rather than just a few people. It makes going to services more enjoyable and really fun.”

Jewish Studies

Students recommend taking classes with the following professors: Jeffrey Tigay, David Ruderman, and Barry Eichler. Recommended courses include: Introduction to the Bible, Holocaust through Literature and Film, Jewish Humor, Judaism in America, and Hebrew language classes.

Jewish Social Life

Because there is such a large Jewish population at the University of Pennsylvania, the Jewish social life is very active. One student wrote: “The social life is unlike anything I have ever encountered. It is very ‘Ramahesque’ and really welcoming. Everyone is social, nice, and accepting. It’s a lot of fun.” Some students mentioned denominational divides between the Orthodox students and students of other backgrounds affecting Jewish social life. However, as one Ramahnik wrote, “People love being Jewish and Jews love to hang out with each other.”

Hillel Activities

Hillel at Penn offers a wide variety of activities, including religious services, social programs, Israel programming, study opportunities, and social action (tzedek) opportunities. Hillel is very active at Penn, serving as an umbrella organization for about 30 groups. One student wrote: “Hillel is a social center for Jews on campus. People go there for meals, services, to hear speakers talk about Jewish issues and politics, do community service, study, have meetings. It’s a three story building with a number of large rooms for whatever purpose needed.” Most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have not attended a KOACH event, however four have held leadership positions in Hillel.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

In addition to Hillel, the Chabad House and the Maimonides Leadership Program also offer options for Jewish social life. There are also a number of Jewish fraternities and sororities.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

None of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have experienced any antisemitism or anti-Israel activity at Penn.

Ramahniks' Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at the University of Pennsylvania encourage prospective students to explore the academic, Jewish, and social opportunities that Penn has to offer.

“Come stay with a Jewish student for a Shabbat. Get to see what life is like here. Talk to as many people here as you can. Don't be afraid to talk and ask questions, everybody is really willing to answer. Get in touch with the Hillel staff (www.upennhillel.org) and they can definitely hook you up with a bunch of students.”

“I wouldn't go anywhere else. Penn offers a great combination of studies and social life.”

“Don't choose a school merely because you hear good things about its Jewish community; choose it because, while it may have a vibrant Jewish community, the schools academic programs, extra-curricular options, and environment will be perfect for your own personal and intellectual cultivation.”

“You need to visit to see if you feel like you could see yourself at Penn. If Judaism is important to you, go check out Hillel. Go to a Shabbat dinner. Go sit in on a class. Go stay with a student. Get a good feel for the school before you decide to go there. This goes for ANY school, not just Penn.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at the University of Pennsylvania (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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