

**Brandeis University**  
Ramah College Network  
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Thirty-six Ramahniks at Brandeis University 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, Poconos, Wisconsin, Seminar, and Tichon Ramah Yerushalayim.

**The Search Process**

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Most students felt that Ramah played a role in their decision-making process. Mostly, students were looking for a similar Jewish community to those that they experienced at Ramah. One student said, "Ramah has been a foundation of Jewish growth in my life, and my Judaism is extremely important to me. In choosing a college, my religion was central to my decision making; for that reason, among many others, I chose Brandeis." Students also chose Brandeis because they had the potential to meet new Ramahniks and form friendships based on their similar values.

Other Schools Considered

Cornell University, Tufts University, Binghamton University, University of Rochester, Vassar College, Muhlenberg College, Boston University, University of Maryland, University of Virginia, Emory University, University of Delaware, Wellsley College, Tulane University, University of Michigan, Wesleyan University, Washington University in St. Louis, University of Pennsylvania, New York University, List College, University of Wisconsin

Attributes Looked for in a School

Many students commented that they were looking for a medium-sized school near a city, with a large, active Jewish community. One student wrote, "1) The ease of forming groups and clubs that may not have existed, and the support system in place for that. 2) Professors who care deeply about undergraduates, and who are extremely knowledgeable in their fields. 3) Academic flexibility when it comes to majors, general requirements, etc. 4) A tradition of activism and social justice. 5) A community atmosphere not necessarily based on school spirit. 6) Geography--either urban or suburban, and the closeness to other colleges."

Best Aspects of the School

A number of students commented on the academic aspect of Brandeis: "Professors know your name and are always happy to help you. Classes are interesting." Another student noted, "The classes are small and professors know you by name. The school offers good academic opportunities." Many students also felt that the student body at Brandeis was generally warm and welcoming: "it is a very caring place; people are really welcoming and helpful." "The people are friendly and down to earth."

## **Jewish Life on Campus**

### Kosher Dining Options

Of the two main dining halls at Brandeis, one offers a full kosher meal plan, serving three meals each day, alternating meat and dairy days. The dining hall also houses a small, kosher convenience store. This kosher option “is in the same dining hall as one of the non-kosher options which makes it easy to socialize with those who don’t keep kosher.” The other dining hall offers selected kosher items (including pre-made sandwiches and salads), as do the coffee shops and convenience store. Many students noted that keeping kosher is incredibly easy at Brandeis; most campus-wide events featuring food offer a kosher alternative. In addition to the dining halls, Hillel serves a Shabbat dinner (which can be part of the meal plan or paid for separately), as does Chabad (which is free). Most students agreed that Brandeis offers one of the best kosher dining plans of any university: food is easily available and good, if repetitive at times.

### Worship/Services

Students reported that a number of service options were available every Friday night, including Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Chabad. Additionally, at least every couple of weeks there are additional options, such as Reconstructionist, Shira Chadasha, Chavura, Ruach (Carlebach), and Neshama (Pluralistic with a three-way mechitza). Students estimate that between 300 and 400 students attend Friday night services, and around 200 attend Shabbat day services (Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma’ariv for Conservative and Orthodox, as well as Havdallah for Reform). Daily Orthodox minyanim take place, and Conservative holds services on Mondays and Thursdays. Students appreciated the wide variety of service options, noting that “the services are varied-there is something for everyone, and the atmosphere is welcoming and pluralistic.” One Ramahnik loved services because “there is a lot of Ruach; it is like camp!”

### Jewish Studies

Brandeis offers both a Near Eastern and Judaic Studies department as well as a separate Hebrew department. Students highly recommend the Hebrew classes, as well as classes offered by Reuven Kimelman, Marc Brettler, and Jonathan Sarna.



*Near Eastern and Judaic Studies majors (and Ramahniks!) graduate from Brandeis University.*

*From left: Shana Zionts (Canada), Shayna Weiss (New England, staff at Camp Yofi, Yael Buechler (Berkshires), and Avi Killip (New England, Darom, Kollolel at Wisconsin)*

### Jewish Social Life

Hillel holds many social events, but many students commented that these events are usually attended by the same groups of people. Also, the different groups of Jews (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox) tend to hold separate social events. However, as one student noted, “Judaism sort of permeates the campus. Things like tisches and onegs take place just about every Friday night, and other Jewish programming takes place during the week.” Brandeis offers Jewish social events that try to appeal to both observant and non-observant Jews. Students described Jewish social life as “very active,” “plentiful,” “thriving,” “ever-present,” and “dominating.”

### Hillel Activities

Hillel offers services, social programs, Israel programming, social action opportunities, and study opportunities. One student explains: “Hillel is a huge umbrella organization at Brandeis. Everyone on campus (Jews and non-Jews) can vote in Hillel elections. Hillel oversees most other Jewish related clubs and activities,” including over 20 groups. While the Hillel is physically housed in a small lounge, its programming takes place all over campus: “Hillel is intense, there is an event almost every day.” Of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey, five held leadership positions in Hillel. One student has held a leadership position in KOACH, and handful of students said they have attended KOACH programs.

### Other Options for Jewish Social Life

While some students said that the social life at Hillel is more than enough, many students commented that they sometimes went to other schools’ Hillel events, including Harvard, Boston University, MIT, and Tufts (all in close proximity). Chabad at Brandeis is also an active club, holding frequent social and religious events.

### Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

None of the students had experienced antisemitism on campus; one student explained that “there will always be people who don't understand Judaism, but I have never seen Judaism being outright attacked in an antisemitic way.” Due to the large Jewish population at Brandeis, discussions about Israel are constant. One student said that there have been “a lot of pro-Palestinian and pro-peace lectures and propaganda,” and another student said that there are often lectures and forums that are “scholarly and respectful.”

### **Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students**

Ramahniks at Brandeis University appreciate the active Jewish life and strong academics, and encourage prospective students to visit for a Shabbat to get a feel for the school.

“In terms of Jewish life, stay over for Shabbat at some point. Brandeis Jewish life is great for some people, but not for others--even if you are an active Ramahnik or USYer.”

“Visit for yourself, and research for yourself. Don't listen to rumors or what other people think and say, check it out for yourself.”

“Brandeis is a great school, especially for Ramahniks. It's good to spend a weekend and see what things are like, and also to attend a class or two.”

“Academically speaking, Brandeis is extremely rigorous--straight-up A's are relatively rare, and really have to be earned. There are, however, some fantastic support systems in place, and everything is entirely manageable if you budget your time.”

“I think there is something at Brandeis for everyone; it is important that you visit in order to get a sense of the campus and its students.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at Brandeis (or another college on the Ramah College Network), please email Shana Zionts at [ramahdesk@jtsa.edu](mailto:ramahdesk@jtsa.edu). Please include your name, your Ramah affiliation, and the college(s) for which you would like contact information.