

Cornell University
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Nine Ramahniks from Cornell University responded to the survey. These students have attended at least one of the following Ramah camps or programs: Berkshires, California, Nyack, Wisconsin, and Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Many of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey indicated that they were looking for a Jewish community similar to what they had at Ramah. One student wrote: “Ramah taught me to value and seek out an active and welcoming Jewish community. When deciding where to attend college, an active Jewish community was a factor that I considered very carefully.”

Other Schools Considered

Tufts University, Barnard College, Johns Hopkins University, Brandeis University, Binghamton University, University of Rochester, University of Pennsylvania, Northwestern University, Washington University in St. Louis, Emory University, Brown University, University of Michigan, New York University, Dartmouth College

Attributes Looked for in a School

Students were looking for a strong and challenging academic program, a sizable Jewish population, and a Jewish community that offered a Jewish social life and kosher food.

Best Aspects of the School

A number of students noted that the academic program at Cornell University is one the best aspects of the school: “the academic program is extremely challenging, but supportive in that professors and TAs make themselves accessible to students and offer academic support.” Many Ramahniks also mentioned the great Jewish social life, beautiful campus, and diverse student population.

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

Cornell has a kosher dining hall open for lunch and dinner every day. Additionally, there is a kosher station in one of the main freshmen dining halls, as well as packaged kosher food available at many of the campus dining facilities. There is also kosher food at the Hillel and Chabad. The Ramahniks who responded to this survey were very satisfied with the kosher food options, saying that the food is good and accessible.

Worship/Services

Cornell offers a variety of prayer options: Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, and Chabad. The Ramahniks who responded to this survey were mostly familiar with Orthodox and Conservative services, noting that about 100 people attend Conservative services on Friday night and about 30 attend Conservative services on Shabbat morning. Students were generally satisfied with the services offered at Cornell. One student wrote: “Although no religious services can compare to a Ramah Shabbat, I have been very satisfied with the services that are offered at Cornell. Services are spirited and student-led and make Shabbat something that I really look forward to each week.” Another student wrote that she appreciated that “you are able to go when you want and you are never judged by your attendance.”

Jewish Studies

Most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have not yet had the opportunity to take Judaic Studies classes, but those that have recommended the Hebrew classes as well as classes about Jewish history and modern Israel.

Jewish Social Life

One student summarized her view of Jewish social life at Cornell: “Jewish social life is very active at Cornell...there are at least 20 student-run Jewish organizations on campus ranging from a Jewish book club to a Jewish scuba diving club. I have found the community to be welcoming and inviting, and I feel as if I have my place at Cornell through Jewish social life.

Hillel Activities

Hillel at Cornell offers a wide variety of activities, including religious services, social programs, and Israel programming. While the Hillel does not have an actual building on campus, there is a Center for Jewish Living which houses the kosher dining hall as well as a residence hall. The CJL provides a central hang out spot after Friday night dinners. One of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey has held a leadership position in Hillel, and about half have participated in KOACH programming.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

Most of the students who responded to this survey indicated that Chabad is another option for Jewish social life at Cornell, although few of them have attended Chabad programs. A few students wrote that Hillel is enough of a resource for Jewish social life. Additionally, some students wrote that there are Jewish fraternities and sororities on campus.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

None of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey have personally experienced antisemitism on campus. A few students wrote about Shimon Peres’ visit to campus, during which some students protested outside. However, the protests were peaceful and minimal. One student wrote: “overall, despite some anti-Israel activity on campus, there are definitely many advocates for Israel at Cornell.”

Ramahniks' Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at Cornell University encourage prospective students to come to Cornell if they're looking for a great Jewish community and a challenging academic environment.

“A prospective student from the Ramah system should definitely stay overnight (or even for a Shabbat) with a member of the Jewish community at Cornell. This gives the student a real feel for Jewish life on campus, as well as the secular, social, and academic life.”

“It is an amazing place. There is definitely room to find your niche Jewishly and socially. It is extremely difficult and demanding from an academic perspective.”

“Spend the weekend at school and hang with someone who really takes advantage of what the school has to offer. Go to Friday night dinner, go to the fraternities, go to the parties, walk around campus, see how beautiful it is up here, and maybe even come up early and go to some classes...but I think that the Cornell academics reputation precedes itself.”

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