

McGill University
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

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

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Ramah positively impacted the college decision of most of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey. One student wrote: “My years at Nyack fostered my love for my religion, and I certainly didn't want to lose that when I attended university. At McGill, I have been able to continue my Jewish learning at my own pace.” Another student wrote about how his experiences at Ramah taught him a lot about life, which in turn impacted his decision to attend McGill: “Attending Ramah has taught me more about the importance of compassion than any other life experience. In comparison to my experiences at another camp for 11 years, I can honestly say that my short tenure at Camp Ramah has taught me more about who I am and who I want to be more than any other summer experience.”

Other Schools Considered

Queen's University, University of Western Ontario, University of Toronto, Dalhousie University, University of Pittsburgh, Indiana University, University of Wisconsin, Vanderbilt University

Attributes Looked for in a School

Students looked for an academic environment that would be attentive to undergraduates and offered a wide variety of courses. They were also interested in large schools that could offer cultural diversity and a thriving, active Jewish community.

Best Aspects of the School

Nearly all of the Ramahniks who responded to this survey wrote that McGill's location in Montreal is the best aspect of their school: “Montreal is fantastic and full of activities everyday that are cultural, artistic, and political.” Some students also referred to the active Jewish population: “McGill has a vibrant Jewish community including a student-run shul with weekly Shabbat dinners and various events throughout the week.”

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

One student explained the kosher food system at McGill: “Students can eat at the several kosher restaurants off campus. There is also the Hillel house, which runs a kosher meat restaurant that can be used on a meal card or paid separately. In addition, some residences

offer kosher options for meals.” Additionally, the Ghetto Shul has weekly Shabbat dinners. Because the Hillel house is off campus, many students find it inconvenient to go there for kosher food, and end up only eating meat on Shabbat. Students appreciate that kosher food is offered, but wish that it were more readily available.

Worship/Services

Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and Chabad religious services are available to McGill University students. Ramahniks who responded to this survey estimated that 100-150 students attend Friday night services and 30-40 students attend Shabbat morning services. Some students expressed that they wished that the Conservative minyan had a larger following, as many students attend the Ghetto Shul for an Orthodox minyan. One Ramahnik who attends the Ghetto Shul wrote: “The Ghetto Shul, located right in the middle of the student ghetto, is a very nice atmosphere in which to pray. It is warm and welcoming and there is always a Shabbat dinner after services on Friday nights.”

Jewish Studies

McGill offers a wide range of Jewish Studies courses. Students recommend Teaching and Understanding Jewish Life, Denominations of North American Jewry, and Religion of Ancient Israel, as well as all Hebrew language classes and any class taught by Eric Caplan.

Jewish Social Life

There is a large Jewish population at McGill, so students say that it is very easy to find Jewish social activities on campus. Both Hillel and the Ghetto shul sponsor a number of events every week. One Ramahnik commented that although there is a large Jewish community at McGill, there is “less inclusiveness and strong sense of community than I expected.”

Hillel Activities

Hillel at McGill offers a wide range of activities, including religious services, Israel programming, study opportunities, and social action (tzedek) opportunities. One student wrote, “the Hillel house itself is used as a lounge and a residence. It has a kosher meat restaurant, couches, and TVs.” Despite McGill’s large Jewish population and so many programs at Hillel, according to some student it is difficult to get students to attend Hillel programming.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

One student explained: “The Hillel and the shul are two separate entities at McGill University. The Hillel is a more non-denominational organization, leaning towards Conservative, which offers classes, activities, and fundraisers. The shul, known as 'Ghetto Shul', is an Orthodox synagogue that also offers classes, activities, and fundraisers. Both are equally interesting and worthwhile to attend.” Additionally, there are campus clubs in support of Israel, and one student holds bagel brunches for Jewish students every week at his house.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

The Ramahniks who responded to this survey indicated that they have never personally experienced antisemitism at McGill. Because of the diverse student population at McGill, opinions on Israel are varied, however one student wrote, “it is mostly Jews who bring in anti-Israel speakers and write anti-Israel articles in the school papers,” and there have not been many rallies or demonstrations.

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at McGill University recommend that prospective students come for a visit to experience Shabbat in a great Jewish community, to explore the city of Montreal, and to get a taste of McGill’s great academics.

“McGill University is an exceptional school with so much to offer. They have fantastic classes, great Jewish life, and plenty of diversity to meet all kinds of students from all over the world. The city of Montreal is wonderful, and the culture here is vast and interesting. If you want to expand Jewishly, McGill has so many options to feed that craving. The ability to learn new things here is always at hand. In addition, not to sound pretentious, but McGill University is also an internationally recognized school, as it was just ranked #21 IN THE WORLD out of all universities.”

“Attend a few classes at the school to see what it's like. Attend a Shabbat dinner at the Ghetto Shul and spend a weekend in Montreal. Talk to students currently taking the program you are interested in.”

“McGill is a great all around school, with options and choices for a variety of programs, both academic and extracurricular.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at McGill University (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.