

Washington University in St. Louis
Ramah College Network
Summary of Survey Results

General Demographics

Ten Ramahniks at Washington University in St. Louis responded to the survey. These students have attended one or more of the following Ramah camps and programs: Berkshires, California, Darom, New England, Poconos, and Seminar.

The Search Process

The Impact of Ramah on the College Decision

Nearly all of the Ramahniks reported that Ramah played a role in their college decision. One student's experiences at camp directly impacted the decision to go to WashU: "when I was a camper, I saw how a lot of my counselors went out of state to college, and that was a positive model for me. Going to a good school became much more of a priority for me. Once I started working at camp, I knew of older staff members who went to the schools I was looking at. When it was time to visit schools, I went on a trip to WashU with some camp friends and stayed with camp friends once there. I came home and applied early decision." Many Ramahniks echoed this student's response: "Going to Ramah made me want to continue living a Jewish life and have Jewish friends at school."

Other Schools Considered

Brandeis University, Emory University, University of Maryland, Northwestern University, Barnard College, Indiana University, University of Pennsylvania, List College, Tulane University, Columbia University, Brown University, University of Michigan

Attributes Looked for in a School

Ramahniks who attend WashU looked for a smaller school in a medium-sized city, academic options with a flexible curriculum, and diverse campus. Many students were looking for a strong Jewish community, which included a good Hillel rabbi, availability of kosher food, and a Shabbat community.

Best Aspects of the School

Many Ramahniks noted the size of the school is one of its best aspects; it's small enough to find a community, but large enough to encourage diversity. Many students wrote about the academic aspect of WashU: "the faculty is really accommodating, and being a medium size school as a student you feel important, and not just another member of the herd." In regards to the Jewish community, one student wrote: "the school has many Jewish resources, but the community is not denominationally divided."

Jewish Life on Campus

Kosher Dining Options

There is kosher food available on WashU's campus, as one student explains: "There is a kosher meal plan that entitles you to a hot meal that is prepared under supervision, but the meal is not served in a segregated eating facility. The meal plan also gives a discount on Friday night dinners and on pre-packs. Pre-packs (pre-packaged foods) are available to all students, and include the leftovers of the previous night's hot dinner. The pre-packs are available at most of the 15 dining places on campus." Additionally, Hillel offers Shabbat dinner every week. Students were generally satisfied with the kosher options, noting that it is easily accessible. However, choices are limited: "People keeping kosher in the strictest sense may find their options just a bit limited." Students would prefer if there were more hot meals available.

Worship/Services

Students at WashU have the option of attending services at the Hillel House as well as at local synagogues. Service options include Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Chabad, and Reconstructionist. Students estimate that around 100 students attend services on Friday night, and on Saturday morning a number of students attend local synagogues, in addition to a new weekly Conservative morning minyan. Students are very satisfied with services, both at Hillel and at local synagogues. One student explained: "Good community between observant students means that you get to meet other denominations also." Another Ramahnik commented: "I am happy that we have a monthly Shabbat Mincha, Ma'ariv, and Seudah Sh'lishit." In addition to Shabbat services, Hillel offers a daily non-egalitarian, as well as a weekly weekday egalitarian minyan.

Jewish Studies

Ramahniks at WashU expressed satisfaction with the Jewish studies offerings. They recommended all Modern Hebrew courses, Jewish History courses, The Jews in Christian Europe, Jews in the Middle East, Intro to Jewish Civilization, and any course taught by Pamela Barmash.

Jewish Social Life

In addition to Hillel, there is a Jewish Student Union that sponsors programs. Students note that the Jewish community is very active, in part because there are "no barriers between Orthodox/Conservative/Reform" students. Additionally, many Jewish students are active in Greek life. As one student noted, "the nice thing about WashU is that so many people are Jewish that aren't necessarily involved in 'the Jewish community' that a lot of your friends will be Jewish anyway."

Hillel Activities

WashU's Hillel offers religious services, social programs, Israel programming, study opportunities, social action opportunities, holiday and Shabbat meals and programming, and concerts. Rabbi Avi Orlov "is very nice and welcomes new people. The general atmosphere is very warm." One student wrote: "Hillel is towards the edge of campus, which some consider too far away. It is not the most beautiful building, but it does the

job. The direction of the Hillel is great, though. The rabbi is great and all of the staff members are super involved.” Of those who responded to the survey, three Ramahniks have held leadership positions in Hillel, and one has held a leadership position in KOACH. Most of the respondents have never attended KOACH programming at WashU.

Other Options for Jewish Social Life

Chabad is one of the main sources of Jewish social life outside of Hillel. Many students also attend the local Modern Orthodox synagogue, which is close to campus; local synagogues are very welcoming to students.

Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Activity on Campus

None of the students reported seeing antisemitism on campus; one student wrote: “I’ve encountered confused people, but no antisemites.” There is little anti-Israel activity at WashU. One student explains, “The last anti-Israel activity happened 4 years ago, when the now-defunct pro-Palestinian group made a wall to protest the barrier. They had a few protesters and a lot of counter-protesters, and then a few weeks later they offered the wall to our Israel group (WSI - WashU Students for Israel) to use for Yom Ha’Atzmaut as part of the Kotel. That says a lot about WashU students.”

Ramahniks’ Advice to Prospective Students

Ramahniks at Washington University in St. Louis encourage prospective students to apply early and be persistent if you are placed on the waiting list. Take advantage of what WashU has to offer.

“I’d sum up the benefit of the WashU Jewish community by saying that we have the resources of nearly any school in the country, but almost none of the denominational divisiveness of many other schools.”

“It’s a fantastic school - definitely go here! But also consider that the classes are challenging and there are high academic expectations. There is great campus involvement, but if you’re looking for a city life, this isn’t it. Weather’s okay, beautiful campus, and people are happy here.”

“Apply early if you want to go here!”

“Make sure it feels right- not that it’s the best academically, socially, athletically etc. Make sure it feels right to you, because the only way to know if you’re going to enjoy it is how good you feel on the campus, doing the things you want to do.”

To receive contact information for Ramahniks at Washington University in St. Louis (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.