Particularism in the University: Realities and Opportunities for Jewish Life on Campus

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Brandeis University

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College is a pivotal life experience. During college, young people explore and clarify their life options. The choices they make during this period affect not only their career trajectories but also their adult ethnic and religious identification. To understand the Jewish experience on campus and the forces that support or undermine Jewish choices, we conducted a study at 20 American colleges. The study included interviews with over 700 informants as well as a survey of more than 2,000 Jewish students.

Our assessment of the status of Jewish life on campus is complex, a mélange of positives and negatives, challenges and promises. On some campuses, we encountered a proliferation of Jewish social, educational, and cultural programming, new attempts to engage the unengaged, and evidence of strong Jewish student leadership. On other campuses, we found the Jewish enterprise struggling to gain a toehold. At the individual level, our data are replete with stories of students who found a place for themselves in the Jewish community on campus and, as a result, strengthened their Jewish identities, grew in their Jewish practices, and developed as individuals. At the same time, the majority of Jewish college students we encountered are untouched by formal Jewish organizations and activities. Interview data reveal students who are repelled by their perception of Hillel and/or who feel no need to involve themselves in Jewish activities while at school. Although one might have hoped for more from Jewish campus organizations, they seem to be doing no worse than the general Jewish community in terms of attracting and involving Jews.

Survey data make clear that involvement in Jewish campus organizations is implicated in Jewish identity and Jewish practices. The more engaged students are, the prouder they are to be Jewish, the more importance they place on Jewish values, and the more likely they are to increase their level of observance while at college. For example, two-thirds of the engaged students say that remembering the Holocaust is very important to them, but only half of the unengaged students say so. About one in five of the engaged students say that observing the Sabbath is very important to them, but virtually none of the unengaged students say so.

The nonsectarian universities we studied value science, technology, empiricism and rationality. These schools understand that they are instrumental in students’ maturation into adulthood and they take seriously their responsibility for students’ intellectual, social, physical, and civic development. Yet they pay scant attention to students’ religious and spiritual development, leaving it in the hands of the ministries, outside agencies that exist on the margins of the campus. The impact of this climate is reflected in our findings. With only four exceptions, the zeitgeist on the campuses we studied was one of low religious involvement. The Jewish students fall in line, with the plurality of them becoming less observant while at school. In the soup of the college experience, Jewish students are making religious choices and these are often decisions to do less, not more.
Overall, survey data show Jewish students’ observance to be consistent with that of American Jews in general. In the past year, over 80% participated in lighting Hanukah candles and attended a seder, but fewer than 10% regularly lit candles or refrained from spending money on Shabbat. Over 80% attended services at least once during the year, but only 25% went to services on a regular basis.

The political issues concerning Israel exacerbate difficulties in responding to contemporary Jewish college students. Jewish students are predominantly liberal in their attitudes and opinions and show substantial sympathy for the Palestinians. Their views, however, are not well grounded. Indeed, 43% of Jewish undergraduates admit that they are ignorant about the history of modern Israel. Many students come to college ill-prepared to hold their own in debates about Israel, and relevant departments at the university are generally not equipped to teach about Israel. Moreover, some of Israel’s most outspoken critics are Jewish faculty members. The confrontational nature of debate about Israel is both a stimulus and a retardant to student involvement in Jewish life. Hillel, the central Jewish address on campus, tries to incorporate different political viewpoints and levels of engagement. Although some students want a more politically active Hillel, others want it to be a safe place that enables them to socialize with other Jews. Israel often serves to divide, rather than unify Jewish students.

According to survey findings, Jewish students fall into three groups as regards their connection to Israel: 43% feel minimally connected to Israel; 23% feel moderately connected; and 34% feel strongly connected. These differences are related to educational background, denominational identity, and to social networks. For example, 56% of students who attended a Jewish day school feel very connected to Israel versus 30% of those who attended a supplemental school and only 18% of those who had no formal Jewish education. Across categories, the strongest predictor of an emotional tie to Israel is having spent time there.

Of all of the aspects of Jewish life considered in the present research, Jewish studies programs are the most closely integrated into the university and most consistent with its academic purposes. Jewish studies, as a field, is concerned with knowledge building, critical thinking and analysis. It applies the tools of scholarship to the understanding of the principles of Judaism and Jewish history. Because of its place in the university, it attracts students who might otherwise have no connection to Judaism or Jewish life during these years. Indeed, one-fourth of those who were raised in non-Jewish or interfaith households, of those who had minimal Jewish education growing up, and of those who consider themselves secular Jews find their way into these courses. At the same time, Jewish studies, as an academic discipline, is essentially unconcerned with the Jewish journey of the individual student.

Each arena of Jewish activity—Jewish campus organizations, religious observance, Israel activism, and Jewish studies—holds both challenges and promise. As well, each arena is strongly affected by the peculiarities of the college setting. Recommendations emanating from the research suggest ways in which the Jewish community can expand and intensify Jewish life on campus. These include supporting programmatic experimentation, developing Jewish and Israel studies, and supporting professional and student development.
Introduction

For undergraduates, most of whom are in their late teens or early twenties, the college years are a time of intellectual, social, and personal exploration. They are a time in which options concerning career, life partner, and worldview are explored and clarified. Developmentally, these years are the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The university campus is an apt setting for such exploration and development. Their “ivory tower” atmosphere supports the life of the mind and their concentrated youth populations create an intense young adult culture. Universities are open systems that intentionally seek a diverse student body and promote a vast array of experiences. The college years are inevitably filled with encounters with new people, new ideas, and new experiences.

From a particularistic perspective, the importance of the college experience is its influence on the construction of religious and ethnic identities. This issue is of critical concern to the American Jewish community. The social acceptance of Jews and the ease of assimilation have created the possibility that the American melting pot will dissolve Jewish identity. Socio-demographic data make clear that substantial numbers of Jewish children receive little or no Jewish education, that most families are unaffiliated with synagogues, and that many young Jews eschew traditional forms of engagement with the community (cf. Kadushin et al., 2005). It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of young Jews do not marry other Jews and that, among those who marry non-Jews, most are choosing not to raise their children as Jews (Fishman, 2004).

Contemporary young Jews have the power to make their own decisions about distinctiveness. They can go through college evincing no signs of their Jewish identity or they can begin to take on their responsibilities as emerging adults in the Jewish community. The choices they make during their undergraduate careers can influence the place of Jewishness in their adult self-definitions and the extent to which they will incorporate Judaism into their lives and be part of a Jewish community. How students approach these choices portends the future strength of American Jewry and says much about contemporary religious and ethnic identity.

In terms of Jewish communal concerns, the college setting is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the great majority of young Jews attend college and they tend to cluster on a relatively small number of campuses. It is thus possible to identify and contact them more readily than will be the case once they graduate and disperse into society. As well, with the undergraduate propensity toward new experiences, it is possible that some might be drawn toward Jewish exploration. On the other hand, in the rich admixture of the college experience, Judaism is just one of a myriad of options for Jewish students to pursue. The competition for their attention is stiff and is not made any easier by the fact that colleges are decidedly nonsectarian institutions devoted to empiricism and critical thought. Religion, to the extent it exists, is peripheral to campus life.
Given the importance of religious and ethnic identity and the specific concerns of the Jewish community, it is surprising how little systematic information exists about Jewish college students. Much of the extant data were gathered in the 1960s and early 1970s and lack contemporary relevance (Sternberg et al., 2002). More data on Jewish college students come from the American Council on Education’s annual surveys of entering college freshmen (Drew, 1970; Drew, King, & Richardson, 1980; Rosenfield, 1981, 1984; Sax, 2002). Although valuable, these data help us understand neither the impact of college on young adults nor the role of religion on campus.

The present study was designed to address this gap in our understanding. The research examined dimensions of campus climate, the current status of the Jewish enterprise on campus, and how and why students embrace or eschew Jewish opportunities during the college years. This report summarizes the research findings and offers recommendations for enhancing and expanding Jewish life on campus.

METHOD

The study is based on data collected at 20 campuses that were selected to represent the diversity of schools that serve as “Jewish destinations.” We focused on colleges that have either a large number or percentage (at least 10%) of Jewish students. Our sample covered the full spectrum of institutions of higher learning—large and small, public and private, residential and commuter, and elite and second-tier colleges. Although the sample was weighted toward the Northeast (the center of the American Jewish population, including college attendees), it included schools elsewhere in the East, as well as schools in the South, Midwest and West. In addition, we intentionally selected some schools with significant Orthodox populations, some with strong Greek systems, and some with large numbers of Jewish immigrant students.

The study entailed site visits at each of these campuses and a survey of Jewish and non-Jewish students at these schools (see Appendix II). At each site visit, we conducted focus groups and individual and group interviews with a broad range of members of the college community. Interviewees included staff and student leaders at Jewish campus organizations, members of the college administration, Jewish studies faculty, students from across the spectrum of Jewish involvement, and campus chaplains from various faith communities. They were selected to represent distinctive perspectives on the quality of Jewish life on campus. Across campuses, data were gathered from over 700 informants.

The survey, conducted with samples of Jewish and non-Jewish undergraduates on the 20 campuses, was completed by 2,070 Jewish undergraduates. The primary goals of the survey were to assess religious/ethnic identity and to provide data on students’ involvement in Jewish life. The survey assessed Jewish identity and background, religious practices and values, activities on campus, and perceptions of the campus climate. In addition, the survey asked questions pertaining to views of Judaism in particular and religion in general.

The present report melds interview and survey data. In general, qualitative data add texture, meaning, and depth to quantitative data, while survey findings provide a sense of prevailing trends. Access to two sources of information is particularly important in the present study because survey results often showed no predominant trend. Perhaps our most important finding is that the diversity of Jewish experiences among college students and across campuses is substantial.

For additional details on methodology or a copy of survey or interview instruments, see www.brandeis.edu/cmjs.
**Contextual Realities**

To understand the nature of Jewish life on campus, it is important first to understand the context in which it occurs, in particular, the educational mission of institutions of higher learning. Most colleges and universities have relatively little concern with religious beliefs and practices or with spiritual development. Jewish students, for their part, come to college to be students, not to be Jews. Like other students, they are at school to learn, to earn a degree, and to enjoy their college experience. The Jewish communal effort to inject Judaism into the college experience must operate within this context and adjust to four realities: emerging adulthood, identity in the post-modern era, college social life, and campus climate.

**Emerging Adulthood**

The ages of 18 to 25 are not a straight line march toward adulthood, but a distinct period of post-adolescent development. Psychologists refer to this period as “emerging adulthood.” It is a time marked by exploration and experimentation in all spheres—work, relationships, and worldview (Arnett, 2000; 2004). As an example, consider work. By the time they are seniors in high school, typical Jewish adolescents are engaged in some type of part-time paid work (Kadushin et al., 2000). They may babysit, work in a restaurant, or do odd jobs—work unrelated to their life goals. Adults are employed in their chosen career. Although they may change jobs or move on to second careers, they no longer have the options they did when younger. In contrast to both of these age groups, emerging adults seek a series of internships in fields in which they might want to make their careers. They are in a stage between the unconcern of high school and the lifelong commitment of adulthood.

Colleges, largely populated by 18-25 year olds (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), enable enactment of the tasks of emerging adulthood. They offer opportunities to try out different academic courses and majors (Arnett, 2004). With their large pool of unattached peers, they provide dynamic arenas for relationship exploration. They also offer the opportunity to experiment with different worldviews. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the diversity of religious traditions represented in the student body and in campus ministries (Eck, 2001). Like showrooms of cultural and religious ideas, colleges offer the material with which emerging adults can construct their view of the world and their place in it.

**Identity in the Post-modern Era**

Identity formation is one of the critical tasks of emerging adulthood. Although the task is, perhaps, no different for present-day students than for earlier generations, the now ubiquitous personal computer suggests a new metaphor for identity (Turkle, 1995). A computer user may have several windows open at once even though the user is attentive to only one of the windows on the screen at any given moment. Similarly, identity for today’s emerging adults is multiple and distributed, not unitary and fixed, although at any given moment a particular aspect of identity may predominate.
The metaphor readily extends to Jewish students. Jewish identification is just one of their many self-definations, and not the central or umbrella one that it may have been for previous generations. Unlike what we find in an adult population (Fishman, 2000), emerging adults have Jewish identity as but one of a myriad of identity “windows” that do not necessarily interconnect or even exert influence on each other. And, like a computer window, at any one point in time, Jewish identity may be in the foreground or background, open or closed. For many, a statement such as “I am a hetero, eco-feminist, vegan, Jewish, history major” has replaced “I am an American Jew.”

**COLLEGE SOCIAL LIFE**

Peer social networks are the fabric of campus life. Small groups of peers, like “urban tribes” (Watters, 2003), form an essential, family-like support group for many undergraduates. These groups are generally comprised of students who share similar socio-demographic backgrounds and, indeed, Levine and Cureton (1998) conclude that much of American higher education today is “voluntarily segregated.” This pattern certainly holds for Jewish students. A majority of those we surveyed report that at least half of their closest friends at school share their ethnic or religious background (Table 1). Only 8% said they have no close Jewish friends. What we learned in focus groups is that much of this connection is driven by the comfort that Jewish students feel with other Jews and the sense of understanding and connection that exists among Jews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Similarity</th>
<th>At Least Half of Closest Friends are Similar to Self</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial Background</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social or Economic Background</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic or Religious Background</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political or Social Views</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geographic Background</td>
<td>27%</td>
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Traditional dating has been proclaimed “dead” (Levine & Cureton, 1998), replaced by the un-partnered “urban tribes” or by a variety of transitory connections. Asked about dating practices, however, only 20% of the Jewish students in our study said that they do not date (a number slightly lower than the 25% who did not date in high school).

Of those who date, 37% date mostly or only Jews, 43% date mostly or only non-Jews, and 20% date Jews and non-Jews equally. For many young people, the pattern appears to be set in high school.

Of those who primarily dated Jews in high school:
- 60% maintain their high school pattern, dating mostly or only Jews in college.
- 28% have shifted to date more non-Jews than they did in high school.
- 12% are not dating in college.

Of those who primarily dated non-Jews in high school:
- 60% maintain their high school pattern, dating mostly or only non-Jews in college.
- 27% have shifted to date more Jews than they did in high school.
- 13% are not dating in college.

Table 1: Similarity of Closest Friends to Self

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Studies of Jewish high school students consistently show a gap between attitudes toward interfaith dating and attitudes toward intermarriage. The gap persists into the college years. On average, the students in our survey place significantly more importance on marrying a Jewish person than on dating one. Focus groups and interviews make clear that many fail to see a connection between the two. Across respondents, we found a widespread preference for a Jewish life partner, but an openness to other possibilities and a belief that if their partner is not Jewish, they will “work it out.”

The importance of peer networks is made clear by our data. For Jewish students, friendship and dating patterns are linked to participation in formal Jewish life on campus. Dense Jewish social networks are strongly related to students’ engagement in formal Jewish life on campus and involvement as Jewish leaders. These involvements, in turn, are related to higher levels of Jewish values, behaviors, and sentiments. Causality is bidirectional: Having Jewish friends is both a cause and a result of involvement in Jewish activities.

**Campus Climate**

There is great variation among schools as regards their campus climate. Schools differ not only in terms of our selection criteria but also along dimensions that affect the quality of Jewish life on campus. There were dramatic differences among them as regards the size, strength, vibrancy, and reputations of the Jewish campus organizations; the role of Jewish studies; the relationship of campus ministries to the university administration; the level of political discourse and the effectiveness of pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel groups; and the near history of anti-Jewish incidents. These differences highlight the important effect of the specific campus climate on the creation of Jewish life at each institution. They also point to the need for caution in generalizing about Jewish life on campus.

Jewish life during college takes place within the wider context of the college experience. On the individual level, emerging adulthood and contemporary identity formation influence how undergraduates think about themselves and their life choices. At the group level, the realities of social life—with its friendships, dating patterns, and social networks—influence many aspects of student behavior. And at the institutional level, the campus climate creates the larger environment in which behaviors, attitudes, and sentiments are enacted. In the aggregate, these four realities contribute to the complexity of understanding college life and the difficulty of arriving at interventions that might influence how Jewish students traverse these critical years of their development.
A Hillel Story

Elite University is a world-renowned institution located outside the Northeast corridor. Its students were the crème de la crème of their high school classes and many come from affluent families. The University is a rich institution with extensive property, a lavish faculty club, and a modern student center. Near the center of campus is an impressive chapel. Although officially nondenominational, the chapel is ornamented with Christian symbols. Historically, relatively few Jews attended Elite University. The centrality of the chapel symbolized, perhaps, that Jews were not welcome. As with all of the top-tier institutions, Jews now comprise a substantial percentage of the student body. The Jews that come here, however, often choose not to involve themselves in Jewish life on campus. Many are from secular, assimilated, or weakly-identified Jewish families. Without a strong Jewish presence on campus and no formal kosher dining facilities, the school attracts only a handful of observant students.

Hillel is trying to build Jewish life at Elite University. It is slowly developing its student leadership, moving toward elections with multiple candidates and an elaborated committee structure. It has had a Jewish outreach staffer for the past few years who has worked hard to identify leaders and to involve more students. Hillel is housed in a cramped space, which, by the standards of this campus, appears decrepit. There are dreams and plans for a new building that will include kosher dining facilities and lounge, study, and meeting spaces.

Hillel officially relates to the university through the Office of Religious Life, but it sees itself as more analogous to the other ethnic groups on campus. Although it used to have a powerful rabbinic presence, the organization is now led by an executive director whose strength is in fundraising. There is no leader who can articulate a strong Jewish vision for the organization.

Hillel has worked hard to spawn student groups and to develop them so they could affiliate with the Student Union and receive University funding. The groups’ independence, however, threatens their relationship with Hillel. Groups that stay affiliated with Hillel will be required to co-brand, putting the Hillel name on their communications and programs. In exchange, they will be part of the Hillel allocations process, receiving funding from Hillel each semester.

Hillel has no connection with the traditional community. There is a student-run kosher dining club which is moving toward complete independence from Hillel. There is a new Chabad presence in town which, from Hillel’s perspective, has been “poaching” students. There have been incidents in which the Orthodox have proclaimed Hillel items or events to be treif (non-kosher). Hillel, however, needs Orthodox students in order to legitimate their programs, especially if they are to be the Jewish voice on campus.
Jewish Realities

Jewish life on campus is found in both the private and public spheres. The public sphere is described below in terms of formal Jewish clubs and organizations, settings for religious observance, Jewish studies courses, and outlets for Israel activism. The private realm, evidenced in home-grown holiday practices, is described below under religious observance. In analyzing these loci for Jewish life, our goal was to understand the motivations and rewards for participation, and the opportunities and challenges for expanding involvement.

Jewish Organizational Life on Campus
Our analysis begins with the formal organizations and their efforts to increase levels of engagement and to build larger and stronger Jewish communities on campus. We then describe the students—those who become leaders and those who have little or no connection to the formal organizations.

Formal Organizations
Founded at the University of Illinois in 1923, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life is the largest Jewish campus organization, with hundreds of affiliates. Hillel is the central address for the Jewish community on all 20 campuses in our study. It is characterized by its professional staff and its expansive programming. Programming is primarily social but also includes religious, educational, cultural, political, and social action activities. Chabad-Lubavitch, which can be found at nearly 100 schools in the United States, was also a presence on 16 of the campuses we studied. Chabad is a worldwide organization dedicated to reaching out to Jewish people and helping them realize “a living Jewish experience.” Lubavitch rabbis who choose campus work as their mission set up house near campus, raise their own funds, and reach out to students primarily through education and spiritual services. On a small number of campuses, other Jewish religious organizations, such as Aish HaTorah, also provide programming.

The story of Elite University highlights the interplay among a number of elements that affect the work of these organizations. These include the:

• general nature of the school (quality, size, location, etc.);
• history of Jews and Jewish life at the school;
• relationship of campus ministries to the university administration;
• capacity to attract a sizeable Orthodox or traditional population;
• stage of Hillel’s evolution (regarding facilities, staff, student leadership, student groups); and
• presence and success of other Jewish organizations on campus and their relationship with Hillel.

The 20 schools that were part of the present study vary along these dimensions, resulting in a unique profile for each. The profile is important as it is the primary determinant of the nature and quality of the Jewish community that can be built at the school.

Organization Structure
The story of Elite University demonstrates the high level of activity occurring on campuses around the country. New buildings are being designed,
Some Hillel professionals come slowly to the recognition that leadership and groups describe the nature of growth, but once they do, they then gauge their success by how far they have moved along these two dimensions. It was not uncommon for a Jewish campus professional to exclaim with great pride, “We have 20 student groups!” Websites are replete with information about the various groups that have formed under the Hillel umbrella. They include groups for Israel, gays and lesbians, women, social action, freshmen, a cappella, pre-law students, and more. One school has “Jews for Jazz” and another has a group called “Scuba Jews.” These groups are a direct reflection of the multiple, niche identities so characteristic of today’s emerging adults.

The dynamism of organizational charts and websites likely exaggerates the actual situation. Not all of the groups exist or are fully operative. We met with the chairs of an Israel group that had three members, a Conservative group that had two co-chairs and three members at its last organizational meeting, and a “successful” women’s group at which “six people come 85% of the time.” At one university, there are officially nine committees but not all are active, not all have chairs, and the average membership is between five and ten people. Nonetheless, these groups define the structure and programming of the organization.

The proliferation of niche groups is not a Jewish phenomenon. Levine and Cureton (1998), referring to it as the “mitosis of groups,” found that such proliferation has created greater diversity of on-campus activities than ever before, but with each activity appealing to smaller pockets of students. The result they report is a reduction in the proportion of students who are defined as being “like me” and a commensurate increase in the proportion perceived as being “different from me.”

The number of groups is the source of Hillel’s core challenge: how to balance the tension between the creation of a “big tent” organization (based on the concepts of community and k’lat Yisrael (the Jewish people)) and the development of niche interest groups (based on individualism and personalism and appealing to distinctive aspects of the self). Hillel struggles with big-tent issues. It strives for an inclusive definition of “who is a Jew.” It looks for a statement on Israel that does not offend. It tries to create minyanim (prayer groups) and programs that will be acceptable to the full range of Jewish students in its purview. In the best of cases, the core commonality holds and the proliferation of groups are its ornaments and its operational arms. In the worst of cases, as in Elite University, the core is not all-inclusive and the various differentiated groups begin to divide from one another and to break away from the center.

Engagement Programs
In the 1990s, Hillel actively redefined its relationship with its primary constituency. Previously, it had focused on those Jewish college students who were already interested in Judaism and it paid scant attention to those who were not. The new mission statement represented a decisive shift in orientation: “Maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews” (cf. Rosen, 2005). Previously, the organization was viewed as the synagogue on campus. In recent years, it has fought that image, becoming a primarily social and cultural organization.
Programs have emerged that target the large number of unengaged Jewish students on campus (e.g., Jewish Campus Service Corps). These programs pursue a number of strategies. They attempt to draw in students either by casting a wide net, by working through existing groups like fraternities and sororities, and/or by engaging in one-on-one encounters. It is not clear if one method is more effective (or cost-effective) than another. Interviews with professionals and student leaders suggest that, regardless of approach, it is difficult to organize on campus. As seen in the case of Elite University, these efforts must overcome the essential secularism of the university, the reluctance of many students to be a part of formal Jewish life, the divisions that emerge within the Jewish community, and the shortage of visionary professional leadership.

Professionalism

Hillel depends heavily on professional staff. This reliance was made clear through our interviews with other campus ministries. One reason for the Jewish reliance on professionals may be the relative complexity of the Jewish task which is at once religious, cultural, social, and political. With few exceptions, the professionals set the tone and the agenda at Hillel, and they take on disproportionate responsibility for building community. For example, one Hillel professional described what happened when the members of the student board acknowledged at a meeting that they were “too cliquey.” The director asked them what they wanted to do about it. She suggested, for example, having greeters at the door or designating people to sit with newcomers at Shabbat dinner. The students did not want any of it. “So,” her story concluded, “the onus falls on staff to be welcoming to new people.” There was a familiarity to this pattern, one that suggests that the mold for lay-professional relations in the Jewish community may be set during the college years.

Figure 1: Values Held by Level of Engagement

<table>
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<th>Value</th>
<th>Unengaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading a Moral/Ethical Life</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the World a Better Place</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering the Holocaust</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countering Anti-Semitism</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring About Israel</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Jewish Organizations</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for the Poor</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing the Sabbath</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage Choosing “Very Important”

1 The Hillel Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps is a paid, one- to two-year fellowship that enables recent college graduates to work on campuses across North America helping students explore and celebrate their Jewishness.
Campus Relationships
Hillel, Chabad, and other Jewish organizations exist on campus as independent entities. Nonetheless, while they serve their own Jewish purposes, they can also serve the college's interests with regard to student life, administration, and academics. Interviews with both Hillel and university administrators generally found that Hillel's formal relationships with the university administration, academic departments, other campus ministries, and the local Jewish community were underdeveloped. Administrators appreciate the role that groups such as Hillel can play in serving student needs. By and large, however, Jewish campus organizations have not effectively partnered with the university to deal with a broad range of issues affecting the health and strength of the college community.

On the 20 campuses in our study, relations between Jewish campus organizations and Jewish studies programs range from cordial to contentious. As an academic entity, Jewish studies programs often refuse to sponsor anything that can be considered a religious event or anything that specifically targets Jews. Their willingness to collaborate with Hillel only on intellectual matters forms a point of tension between faculty and Hillel staff. Moreover, faculty in some universities have low regard for Hillel. They are critical of its perceived politics and practices and of the caliber of its professionals. For their part, some Hillel directors complain of free-thinking academics, some of whom they regard as “anti-Zionists” or “self-hating Jews.”

Student Involvement
Based on survey responses to questions about public Jewish activities, we grouped students into three categories: the unengaged, the engaged, and leaders. The majority (55%) of the Jewish students surveyed spend no time at Hillel or other Jewish-affiliated clubs or organizations; another 33% are engaged, even if for only one or two hours a week; and 12% hold leadership positions in a Jewish club or organization.1 These numbers, it should be noted, are not very different from those of national surveys of adults (cf. Kadushin et al., 2005). Today’s college students are probably quite similar to their parents in this regard.

Students in these three categories differ from each other in important ways and have significantly different experiences during their college years as a result of their choices for Jewish involvement. Although it is not possible to specify the direction of causality, it is clear that the more engaged students are, the more important Judaism is in their lives and the prouder they are to be Jewish. As well, the more engaged they are, the more important Jewish values are to them (Figure 1 on page 11), the greater their level of Jewish practice and Jewish knowledge, and the greater the likelihood that they will become more observant while at college.

Finally, the more engaged they are, the narrower their social networks are, a fact that helps explain the greater intensity of their Jewish commitments. Jewish leaders are three times as likely as the unengaged to have surrounded themselves with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Choices by Level of Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Unengaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of Closest Friends are Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Mostly or Only Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Jews Very Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrying a Jewish Person Very Important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The survey asked students to list their leadership positions. Responses were coded into three categories: Jewish, Greek (fraternity or sorority), and general campus. When more than one type of position was indicated, priority was given to the Jewish position.
Jewish friends. They are also significantly more likely to date only Jews (Table 2 on page 12).

Leadership
Some students come into Jewish leadership with strong Jewish backgrounds and commitments. One-third of the leaders and the engaged attended a Jewish day school at some point during elementary or secondary school, as compared with only 17% of the unengaged. Leadership on campus is disproportionately drawn from amongst Orthodox, traditional, and Conservative students. Some 61% of the Jewish leaders so identify, as compared with 53% of the engaged and 29% of the unengaged.

Reform Jews are surprisingly under-represented amongst the leadership of Jewish organizations. It is not that they do not rise to leadership positions. Rather, they are significantly more likely to take on general leadership positions on campus than to assume Jewish positions. Only 18% of the leaders of Jewish organizations identify with Reform Judaism, while 30% of those with general leadership positions so identify.

These data notwithstanding, no factors emerged that enable one to predict who will and who will not become involved in Jewish organizations or rise to Jewish leadership. Jewish leaders are drawn from those who served on their youth group board in high school and from those who had minimal Jewish involvement in their home communities. They include students who arrived at college familiar with Hillel and fully intending to become involved, as well as those who were initially hesitant to be a part of Hillel or were generally disinterested in Jewish life. From these various starting points, students are drawn into leadership roles through various push and pull mechanisms: the urging of a friend or campus professional, a desire for community, and/or a motivation to “make a difference” on campus. Often the rise to leadership resulted from a series of serendipitous events. There are dozens of stories in the data in which “a series of being in the right place at the right time” led a student from un-engagement into top leadership.

Un-engagement
In interviews and focus groups, minimally-engaged students were asked why they did not involve themselves more fully in Jewish activities on campus. Their decisions are sometimes reflections of the wider campus climate. Where apathy reigns, Jewish organizations suffer along with other campus groups. Where the Jewish population is so large that students feel surrounded by other Jews, there is less felt need for specifically Jewish associations. Beyond these contextual factors, however, students spoke of the social climate at Hillel. Their comments are filled with references to cliques, stereotypes, and fears of not fitting in for being seen as a “lesser” Jew. Finally, college students, away from their families and home communities, are not obliged to do anything Jewish. For many, Jewish activities simply fall further down on their list of priorities.

Figure 2: Religious Background and Current Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Orthodox</th>
<th>Secular/cultural</th>
<th>Reform</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Not Jewish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unengaged</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unengaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular/cultural</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Jewish</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Story of Religion on Campus

Although not an Ivy League school, Eastern University has the trappings of an elite college—a suburban campus with classical ivy-covered buildings, talented students, and rich campus life. Like many American universities, Eastern was founded as a Protestant institution. It originally offered seminary training and its first presidents were ministers.

When a non-minister was eventually chosen to be president of the school, a chaplaincy was established, with the chaplain reporting to the president. Over the years, different religious groups have formed on campus and the chaplain's office now oversees four associate chaplains (Catholic, Protestant, Moslem, and Jewish). Although Eastern University has evolved into a fully secular institution, the administration, which includes Jews in key leadership positions, believes that the school's purpose “is not simply to turn out cogs for the global economic machine.” It is supportive of the religious life of Eastern's students and values how the chaplaincy speaks to the moral, ethical, and spiritual issues of students and faculty.

When the current president took office, he began a review of the administrative structure of the college, including the purpose of a chaplaincy and its place in the organization chart. Then came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As the president worked with the chaplain to design a response to that event, he realized the importance of having a religious voice on campus. From that time forward, he has worked closely with the chaplain on a number of difficult issues facing the university.

The Jewish campus ministry is part of this chaplaincy. The Hillel building sits near the center of campus and the Hillel rabbi is an active member of the campus community. In fact, Hillel played a major role in organizing the communal response to the September 11th attacks. Eastern's Hillel center is one of the largest student organizations on campus and it offers extensive programming. It is a resource for the entire university community, serving, for example, as the main locus for social justice projects on campus.

Over 20 percent of the undergraduate students at Eastern University are Jewish, although they do not represent the full spectrum of American Jewry. Few, if any, Orthodox or traditional students attend the school, primarily because there is no kosher food plan. The issue is a chicken-and-egg problem: Hillel says that without kosher food, the school cannot attract observant Jewish students to campus. The college says that without observant students, a kosher food plan would be too costly.

There are no plans to draw observant students to the school and, indeed, there is tacit admission that the relative homogeneity of the Jewish population simplifies Hillel's task and makes it easier to build a unified Jewish community. Differences here are limited to those between Conservative and Reform students and these differences have been resolved relatively easily. Nonetheless, there are crosscutting perceptions among students. As the Hillel rabbi whimsically explains: The traditional Conservative students think the rabbi is Reform. The Reform students think the rabbi is Orthodox. And the secular Jewish students think everyone involved with Hillel is a “super Jew.”
It is also the case that it is difficult to engage many of these students because many of their values and behaviors are rooted in their backgrounds. Thus, for example, the great majority of students who were raised without Judaism or with Judaism and another religion have no involvement in Jewish campus organizations. As well, over half of those who were raised in Reform Jewish households or in families with no denominational identity remain outside of Jewish organizations in college (Figure 2 on page 13). According to our survey results, religion means little to these students and their view of religion tends toward the critical. These are not patterns that can be altered easily.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The history of religion at Eastern University mirrors the mainstream shift in higher education in America—from Protestant-founded to secular institutions, from schools suffused with religious values and practices to those in which religion is contained in religion departments and campus ministries (Marsden, 1994). Eastern’s story is unusual, perhaps, in the strong and positive relationship that it portrays between the university and the campus ministries. In terms of Jewish life, the story of Eastern University shows how the Jewish campus organization, despite the compartmentalization of the ministries, has been able to represent Judaism to the larger college community. At the same time, it elucidates the difficulty—in evidence at every campus in our study—of building a “big tent” religious organization that effectively includes Jewish students of all backgrounds and interests.

Campus Religious Climate

Despite respect for religion at Eastern University and other campuses, the environment of the schools in our study is decidedly secular. The head of the Religious Council at one public institution believes that the school’s commitment to academic excellence, the reactionary nature of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, and students’ attraction to the counterculture all contribute to “discomfort” with the idea of religion in the academic setting.

Nonetheless, campus ministries are most often located on or near campus and they have close contact with the students who seek them out. The school relies on the ministries to take care of spiritual matters and to be another layer of support for students. As well, the ministries work with the school to resolve difficulties that might arise as a result of religious practices. One school, for example, makes no allowance for religious holidays, a policy that creates special problems for Jewish students. Each professor is allowed to decide whether or not to hold classes on Yom Kippur, whether or not to give an exam and, if an exam is given, whether or not to allow students to take a make-up. In one case, a student who was not allowed to make up an exam complained of discrimination. The professor argued that this was not discrimination because no student, regardless of faith, was permitted a make-up. Although the university ultimately agreed with the professor, it worked with the Hillel director to avoid future problems. The colleges and universities we studied walk a thin line. They appreciate what the ministries do but, at the same time, maintain clear separation. Most commonly we were told that the schools are “amenable” to the ministries and “give a friendly nod.”

The role of religion in college life varies by campus. At four of the schools studied, the majority of Jewish students say that their campus is characterized by religious involvement; at the other 16 schools, they do not. Regardless of the pervasiveness of religious practice, campus environments are generally tolerant of religion and religious differences. The majority of Jewish students at every campus in our study, except one, say that their school is tolerant of different points of view and that there is little tension among religious or racial groups. The majority agree that it is easy to be a Jew on their campus. Most do not practice Judaism regularly but, according to their survey responses, it is not because the climate makes them feel uncomfortable doing so.
Table 3: Religious Observance at School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in Lighting Hanukah Candles</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a Seder</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted on Yom Kippur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part day: 11%</td>
<td>All day: 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep Kosher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly: 24%</td>
<td>Fully: 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Shabbat Candles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes: 14%</td>
<td>Usually/always: 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrain from Spending Money on Shabbat</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students and Religion

The study looked at four aspects of students’ religious involvement: religious practice, religious beliefs, denominational identities, and changes in religious observance during the college years.

Religious Practice

Other research suggests that contemporary college students are “spiritual seekers” rather than “religious dwellers.” They are less interested in joining institutionalized religions than they are in undertaking personal journeys of religious and spiritual exploration (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). As such, they look to themselves rather than to religious norms or clerical authority as they construct individual patterns of belief and observance (Cherry et al., 2001). According to Arnett (2004), personalization is so great for college-aged students that they effectively become “congregations of one.”

This general description may hold for Jewish students, as well. Many have no personal history with institutional affiliation. They grew up in families that were not formally affiliated and in which the primary arena for religious expression was the home and not the community. They share their parents’ belief in individualism and in the “sovereign self” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). In high school, their Judaism was about countering antisemitism, leading an ethical life, remembering the Holocaust, and making the world a better place. It was not about involvement in Jewish organizations and it was not about participation in synagogue life (Kadushin et al., 2000).

Our study found that Jewish students’ observance is consistent with that of American Jews in general (Table 3). Most celebrate Hanukah and Passover, the two most popular holidays for American Jewry, and few observe Shabbat. Given levels of engagement in public Jewish life reported above, it is clear that much of this holiday activity takes place in the private sphere (e.g., in apartments, residence halls, and homes).

Most of our respondents had attended services at least once in the past year (88%) although regular attendance (monthly or more) is confined to one-fourth of the Jewish undergraduate population (Figure 3). Commensurately, few say that religion (32%) or spirituality (36%) are very important in their lives, terms which, in their minds, likely refer to prayer and ritual.

Figure 3: Attendance at Services
The extent of Jewish religious practice cannot be determined by counting the number of students who attend worship services or holiday celebrations at Jewish campus organizations. Many students, we found, create their own Jewish experiences outside of the formal structures on campus. Their behavior mirrors the general trend in which collegiate social life, previously centered on campus, has increasingly moved to off-campus venues (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Jewish students hold their own Hanukah parties, they have Yom Kippur breakfast together, they hold a Passover seder in their apartments. Reasons for such home-grown practices vary. Some say that rituals, prayers, and liturgy at the campus organizations are not what they are accustomed to “so I might as well do the holiday by myself.” Or, they try a Hillel activity but make no social connections there. They thus conclude, “If you’re going to hang out with friends, you might as well do it at home.” These students say that if they had no Jewish life, they would miss it. Their rejection of the campus organizations may appear to be a communal failure, but it may also represent the successful maintenance of Jewish “home” practices.

Religious Beliefs
Over one-fourth of the Jewish students surveyed express strong agnostic or atheistic views and their religious beliefs tend not to change during college. Students appear more likely to grow and change with regard to their self-knowledge, choice of life partner, profession, and politics than with regard to their religious beliefs. For example, by the time they are ready to graduate from college, 67% of Jewish students say that the college experience has taught them about themselves but only 14% say that it has caused them to question their religious beliefs (Table 4).

Denominational Identity
The great majority of Jewish students surveyed identify with a denomination, and just over 70% of these maintain the same denominational identity that they had while growing up. Denominational affiliation results in tensions between religious and non-religious Jewish students. Three of the Hillels in our study have tried to create interdenominational dialogue groups to deal with these issues. And a few Hillels have, in fact, managed to create peaceable pluralism within the building. At the others, tensions continue unabated.

Given that college is a time of personal transitions, it should not be surprising that almost 30% of Jewish college students change their denominational identification while at college. The direction of movement varies. For example, one-quarter of the students who come to college as Orthodox Jews report that they have changed their denominational identity while at college. About half of these chose Conservative Judaism. Similarly complex patterns are seen in the other denominations as well.

Table 4: Effect of College Experience on Personal Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent to Which the College Experience...</th>
<th>% Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught You About Yourself</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught You to Relate to Different Kinds of People</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected Thoughts About Kind of Person You Want for Life’s Partner</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped You Decide on Life’s Career or Profession</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenced Your Political Views</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caused You to Question Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jewish Realities
Changes in Jewish Observance
In addition, two out of three Jewish college students change their level of Jewish observance during their college years. Notably, they are almost twice as likely to decrease their observance level as they are to increase it (Figure 4).

Observance is most likely to decline amongst those who feel uncomfortable practicing their religion at school and amongst those who say that their college experience has very much caused them to question their religious beliefs.

It is most likely to increase amongst those who feel strongly connected to the Jewish people, to Israel, and to a rabbi, and amongst those whose social networks are primarily Jewish. Although these factors seem to increase the likelihood that a student will be led to increased observance during his or her college years, it is always a minority that move in this direction. The only exception is having a strong connection to Hillel and taking on a Jewish leadership role (Figure 5). Ironically, communal engagement perhaps has the greatest effect on religious observance.
A Tale of Jewish Studies

State University is a public institution in the Northeast. The students are goal-oriented, more interested in the jobs they will have after college than in the life of the mind. There is little intellectual or cultural life on campus, save for classes, and there is a weak sense of community. Even the nationally prominent speakers who come to campus generate little excitement and manage to attract only small audiences. For many students, attendance at State University is a four-year party.

Faculty remember better days at State University, a time when one-third of the student body was Jewish and the school’s academics were on a par with the top private schools in the region. However, Jewish enrollments dropped in the 1980s, partially as a result of racial and ethnic clashes that made the environment less hospitable to Jewish students. Informants, including non-Jewish administrators, report that the decline in the Jewish population at State University was matched by a decline in the SAT scores of the classes that followed.

Ironically, the same dynamics that led to the loss of the best and brightest Jewish students also led to the creation of the Jewish studies program at State University. In the 1970s, when minority students began to push for ethnic studies programs, Jewish students called for recognition, as well. A proposal was made to the University to create a Jewish studies program—a set of courses offered by existing faculty from within their current academic departments. Such a program, which involved little additional University funding, was soon arranged.

As ethnic studies took hold, the University created a number of small “identity” departments in Afro-American, Latin American and Jewish studies. The University’s subsequent attempts to save money by merging Jewish studies back into the disciplinary departments were blocked by influential members of the outside community who wanted to assure the integrity of the department. Jewish studies thus managed to survive, albeit with minimal support from the University, few majors, and uneven academic quality.

In recent years, a new chairperson has taken charge of the department. Along with strengthening the department’s academic structure, he has built an advisory board that includes both academics and individuals with ties to the Jewish community. The board has increased the department’s access to resources. The program has garnered substantial funding, developed innovative programs, recruited new faculty, and raised the academic level. Course registrations are on the increase. A course on the Holocaust, for example, has more than doubled in size, growing from 75 to 200 students.

The University has become an enthusiastic partner. The Development Office has worked with the department chair and the President’s Office has been a consistent supporter. University administrators appreciate the legitimate role of Jewish studies in a well-rounded arts and sciences education. They also welcome the access to the Jewish community that the department affords the University.
The story of Jewish studies at State University captures the dynamics of the past few decades that led to a burgeoning of Jewish studies on campuses around the country (Greenspahn, 2000). In recounting the remarkable development of Jewish studies, Leon Jick (2003) noted that “the entry of Jews into American universities as students was early, massive and determined. The entry of Jewish subject matter was late, fragmentary and timid.” While Jews saw the secular university as a means to economic and social success in America, they saw Jewish learning as the province of seminaries, yeshivot (religious schools), and Hebrew teachers colleges. As recently as 1960, there were only a dozen fulltime professorships in Jewish studies in American colleges and universities (Band, 1966).

Today, Jewish studies programs abound. Boosted by the push for ethnic studies in the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish studies programs have taken root and grown on campuses across the country. Schools are happy to have these programs which, in distinction from Jewish clubs and organizations, directly serve the university’s academic goals. Jewish studies programs round out the university’s course offerings; they serve large numbers of students; and they help students fulfill their course requirements. On many campuses, Jewish studies programs offer dozens of courses a year that serve hundreds of students. Although Hillel organizations and clubs are recognizable from a generation ago, the growth in Jewish studies represents a stunning change on campus.

**Student Enrollment**
Jewish studies courses are not limited to Jewish students. As one program director noted, “You cannot make a living just teaching Jews.” “The whole point of the success of Jewish studies,” another professor explained, “is to mainstream it, not to make it the exclusive domain of the Jews.” Estimates vary from campus to campus and from course to course, but at the campuses we studied, it appears that one-third to one-half of the students taking Jewish studies courses are non-Jews.

**Table 5: Background of Jewish Students in Jewish Studies Courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>% Taking Jewish Studies Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Married</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfaith</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Jewish</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denomination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Jewish/Secular</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Education Growing Up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Day School</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary School</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Schooling</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The other students are Jews and, indeed, significant numbers of Jewish students take one or more Jewish studies courses during their undergraduate careers. Almost half of the Jewish students we surveyed had taken at least one Jewish studies course by the time they were seniors. Jewish studies courses manage to reach students who are otherwise untouched by formal Jewish life on campus. Survey data show that the stronger a student’s Jewish upbringing, the more likely s/he is to take a Jewish studies course. Nonetheless, a fourth of those who were raised in non-Jewish or mixed households, of those who had minimal Jewish education growing up, and of those who consider themselves secular Jews find their way into these courses (Table 5 on page 20).

**Motivation**

Qualitative data suggest that the principal motivation for taking a Jewish studies course is pragmatic—to fulfill course requirements. Students are typically required to take at least one course concerned with women, minority groups, or non-Western cultures. Jewish studies courses, even for Jewish students, fulfill this requirement. Moreover, Jewish studies programs are, by nature, interdisciplinary, encompassing history, foreign language, art, philosophy, politics, and sociology. Credits from a Jewish studies course, therefore, may count toward other undergraduate requirements. Enrollments are particularly high in courses that not only fulfill requirements but also have a campus-wide reputation for their exciting content and teaching.

Pragmatic concerns are often accompanied by social, emotional, and intellectual motivations as well. Among Jewish students, there are clearly those who use Jewish studies classes as a way to feed their curiosity, as a corrective to their childhood Jewish education (or lack thereof), or as a safe space for self-exploration.

**Academic Reality**

According to survey results, those who take Jewish studies courses have significantly higher levels of Judaic knowledge than do their peers who do not take such courses. Jewish values—from leading a moral life to observing Shabbat—are more important to them and they report a significantly greater connection to the Jewish people, greater pride in being Jewish, and greater importance of Judaism in their lives. Although the relationship is clear, it is difficult to know the extent to which Jewish knowledge, values, and sentiments are attributable to college coursework and the extent to which they derive from other experiences during or prior to college.

One might assume that a solution to the Jewish identity challenge could be found within Jewish studies. However, the main purpose of Jewish studies courses is academic. Many of the faculty interviewed made clear that Jewish studies courses must be, and are, serious academic endeavors—“not fluff.” Courses are offered because of their intellectual value and their contribution to the university’s mission. Faculty are selected for their scholarly excellence—not for their own Jewish practices or their ability to be role models to students on a Jewish journey. As a key faculty member at an elite institution told us, “Our function is as critical scholars or teachers. We’re not massaging anyone’s identity...We’re not trying to make the kids feel good.”
Western State University is the flagship of the state’s higher education system. It has 30,000 students and a large campus that dominates the local community. The university has nationally ranked sports teams, a faculty that includes world-renowned scholars, and a student body drawn from around the country. The campus recently experienced a number of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish episodes, including a display of swastikas and hate rhetoric. These incidents have received extensive media coverage. A small, but active group of Jewish students has organized itself into an Israel advocacy organization. The top leadership of the group has received training from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

The result is an organizational split in the formal Jewish community on campus, with one arm (Hillel) devoted to Jewish culture and education and the other arm dedicated to politics and advocacy. The split allows each to pursue its aims without compromising the other. Members of the Israel advocacy group complain that Hillel has not been forceful in its response to anti-Jewish and anti-Israel challenges. Interestingly, the Arab students have similarly divided into two organizations, one strictly political and the other not. The website of the Arab student political group has a link to the site of a Palestinian terrorist group, thus providing additional fuel for the political flames on campus.

The main strategies of the student advocacy group are to sponsor speakers and to conduct petition drives. Their stated goal is “to change the sentiment on campus with regards to Israel so that it will look like the rest of the nation with 70% in support of Israel.” Students know that they have a difficult task. The challenge is not so much from Arab students or pro-Palestinian activists. Indeed, a Jewish-Arab dialogue group was recently formed and it has already touched its participants emotionally and engendered substantial enthusiasm. The challenge also does not come from anti-Israel faculty members, a phenomenon apparent on some other campuses but absent at Western State. Rather, the group faces a wall of ignorance and apathy about Israel on campus. They note that the political climate at Western State is strongly liberal, with a general perception that it is “trendy” to be anti-Israel and to support the pro-Palestinian movement.
Israel Activism

The story of Western State University typifies important elements of Israel advocacy and activism on campus. In the past few years, there has been widespread dismay among Israeli and American Jews about antisemitic, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israel actions on campuses (Bard, 2004; Seidler-Feller, 2003; Steinberg, 2003). These actions can be injurious, but they also serve to galvanize the attention and energy of Jewish students and they stimulate Jewish leadership.

Common wisdom is that political activism can overwhelm cultural programming, and we thus see the attempt at Western State to separate the two. In any event, there is a division of students and groups with regard to Israel. Even on the smallest campus in our study, multiple Israel-related groups have formed with competing agendas. Despite this activity, the majority of Jewish college students feel ill-informed and relatively distant from Israel.

Campus Political Climate

General attitudes toward religion, tolerance, and Israel vary significantly from school to school. Our survey asked Jewish students to rate the extent to which different orientations (e.g., pro-Israel, pro-Palestinian, inter-group tensions, political protest and activism) characterize their schools. Results show that there are politically active schools where the general climate is perceived to be pro-Israel and other politically active schools where it is seen as pro-Palestinian. Still others are politically active (or not) but appear relatively unconcerned about the situation in Israel and the Middle East. And there is one school that is seen as pro-Israel and not politically active. Of the two pro-Palestinian campuses in our study, one is characterized by high tensions between groups; the other is not. Of the five campuses seen as pro-Israel, four are characterized by high religious involvement; one is not. Suffice it to say there is great variation in campus climates.

Within the Jewish community on campus, Israel is most often a divisive issue. The confrontational nature of the debate is both a stimulus and a deterrent to student involvement. On the one hand, Israel-related activism provides an important opportunity for some students to develop as leaders. There are a multitude of student organizations, ranging from far right to far left, through which these students are able to exercise their activism and leadership. On the other hand, the complexity of the issues and the passion with which student leaders hold their views cause other students to feel intimidated by Israel advocacy, afraid of being publicly criticized for saying unpopular things, or unsure of themselves and inadequately prepared to take part in the public dialogue on campus.

Our survey found that 43% of Jewish undergraduates are ignorant about the history of modern Israel (23% feel somewhat knowledgeable, and 35% feel very knowledgeable). Some faculty link this finding to students’ lack of general knowledge and their inability to read critically and debate intelligently. This observation was particularly acute at the commuter schools. Some campus professionals believe that the current cohort of Jewish students is less interested in Israel than were their predecessors. Lack of knowledge about Israel is seen as one cause. Other causes cited are general political apathy on campus, Israel’s status as an established state, the current political situation in Israel, and/or the tendency of liberal thinkers on campus to support the Palestinian cause.

Academic courses are not, by themselves, a solution to the problem. High quality, even-handed programs that treat the complexity of Israel’s history and culture are difficult to find. Jewish studies and Middle Eastern studies programs offer few opportunities to learn about contemporary Israel outside of the conflict. Nine of the schools in the present study offer courses that deal with modern Israel in a context other than the Middle East conflict. The other eleven schools do not.
According to survey findings, Jewish students fall into three groups as regards their connection to Israel. As seen in Figure 6, some feel very much connected to Israel while others do not.

Attachment to Israel is correlated with several social characteristics:

• Attachment to Israel is associated with a student's Jewish educational background. 56% of students who attended a Jewish day school feel very connected to Israel versus 30% of those who attended a supplemental school and only 18% of those who had no Jewish education. Similarly, those who have taken Jewish studies courses while in college are significantly more likely to have a connection to Israel than those who have not (46% versus 27%).

• Connection to Israel is linear by Jewish social network—the denser the network, the greater the attachment to Israel.

• As has long been the case, Jewish college students are skewed toward the liberal end of the political spectrum. Two-thirds of the Jewish students in our survey consider themselves politically liberal. Some 20% are “middle of the road,” and only 13% are politically conservative. Notably, political orientation is unrelated to feelings about Israel. Liberals, moderates, and conservatives display similar attitudes on questions concerning their connection to Israel.

• There are, however, significant differences by denomination. Students who identify as Orthodox or Conservative are more likely than Reform or secular Jewish students to be strongly connected to Israel. As with other Jewish identity measures, the responses of Reform Jewish students are closest to those of their secular Jewish counterparts.

The strongest predictor of an emotional tie to Israel is having spent time there. About one-third of the Jewish students surveyed have traveled to Israel. Of these, 17% were participants in birthright israel, a program that has brought more than 80,000 U.S. college students to Israel since 2000 (Saxe et al., 2004a, 2004b). Students who have been to Israel are twice as likely to hold positive sentiments about Israel as compared with those who have not (57% versus 21%). They are also likely to place greater personal importance on the Jewish values assessed by the survey (Figure 7). Interviews with students suggest that an Israel experience exerts a pervasive influence on their Jewish lives.
The focus of this report is on the realities and opportunities facing the Jewish enterprise on campus. Although these are particularistic concerns, they need to be understood within the context of higher education and of the developmental stage of the undergraduate population. Overall, the Jewish reality is marked by a number of countervailing trends. On some campuses, Jewish life is creative and vibrant; on others, it struggles for survival. For some students, the college years are a time in which the seeds of their Judaism take hold and blossom. For other students, the college years are a time devoid of Jewish life and community.

The Jewish communal task is to expand, enhance, and intensify opportunities for Jewish experiences for college students. Each arena of Jewish activity—Jewish campus organizations, religious observance, Jewish studies, Israel activism—holds both challenges and promise. As well, each arena is strongly affected by the nature of university settings. The recommendations below are inspired by the research findings. Any action steps taken will need to be evaluated carefully in order to understand the conditions under which they are able to produce the greatest outcomes for Jewish campus life.

**Caveats**

Three caveats constrain recommendations for building Jewish life on campus. First, no single solution to the engagement problem is possible. The data make clear that each school has its distinctive climate and this climate affects possibilities for Jewish life. Moreover, students will speak of their “identities” as opposed to a singular identity. They are vegans, ecologists, artists, Zionists, Conservative Jews, lesbians, and so on. They are attracted to niche groups that express one or more of their identities. As a result, no single universal program could attract today’s students and hold them long enough to affect their Judaism. Rather, any efforts to stimulate Jewish life on college campuses must be flexible, adaptable to vastly different college settings and different types of Jewish students.

Second, solutions must fit within the university paradigm. Those concerned with the future of American Jewry are accustomed to effecting change within the parameters of the Jewish community, where the common focus is Judaism and Jewish life. Colleges and universities, however, do not share these
concerns and the Jewish students, themselves, enter college for reasons that are not necessarily related to their Judaism. In effecting change amongst the college-age population, the common foundation must be the well-being and development of students, the creation of supportive sub-communities that give students a sense of belonging, and the enhancement of the educational experience. Most Jewish students do not want to self-segregate into a Jewish community. College is a broadening experience and, as evidenced by their social and activity patterns, Jewish students are integrated fully into the wider campus community. Interventions to increase or intensify their Jewish time need to be consonant with the college experience.

We began with a description of four contextual realities of Jewish life on college campuses: emerging adulthood, Jewish identity in the post-modern era, social life at college, and campus climate. Jewish campus workers need to work in concert with these realities. They need to take the forces of the college experience—the rich academic environment, the concentration of students in college residences, the proclivity of emerging adults toward exploration and experimentation, and so on—and turn them to their own particularistic purposes. Judaism can thus be fit seamlessly into the broader college experience to the benefit of the Jewish community, Jewish students, and the campus community.

Finally, the search for solutions must begin with a clarification of purpose. The evaluation of the current status of Jewish life on campus and the development of new policies and programs depends on how one views desired outcomes. The thrust of recent activity on campus implies that the primary goal is to increase the number of students touched by Jewish life during their undergraduate careers. Alternatively, however, the goal might be:

• to increase levels of religious observance, or at least minimize declines;
• to establish a strong Jewish presence on campus that can provide for Jewish needs (e.g., kosher dining), advocate for Jewish interests, and educate the wider campus community about Judaism;
• to provide support to Jewish students, supplementing university services with services based on Jewish content and values;
• to prepare students to enter society with more Jewish knowledge, with a clearer sense of themselves as Jews, and with a greater sense of their responsibility to the community;
• to build Jewish social connections that will last into young adulthood and increase the likelihood of Jewish in-marriage;
• to develop leadership for the campus and for the communities in which students will reside after graduation.

Before evaluating opportunities for action, there must be discussion of communal purpose and a determination of priorities for the Jewish endeavor on campus. Reaching larger numbers may be important, but it may not be the *sine qua non* of success.

**Opportunities for Action**

Our recommendations involve four approaches:

1. Support experimentation.
2. Support the development of Jewish and Israel studies.
1. Support Experimentation

The research elucidates key challenges facing Jewish campus professionals. Forums are needed for examining these issues, designing creative responses to them, and learning from experiments in the field. The issues include, among others:

- how to build a Jewish community that is both differentiated and united around core ideas;
- how to counter the perceived and perhaps unavoidable sense of the Hillel “in-group” and to address questions of inclusiveness;
- how to create low-threshold but meaningful opportunities for Jewish exploration and experimentation;
- how to manage the burnout and frustration of student leadership;
- how to foster individual students’ connections to a rabbi, Hillel, Israel, or to the Jewish people—connections that are correlated with increased levels of religious observance while at school;
- how to reach peer social networks and support private Jewish behaviors.

Hillels need support to experiment with new programming models. For example, college life provides a special opportunity to acquire an appreciation for Jewish pluralism—campuses include Jews from all types of backgrounds and there is often a single setting where they come together. Yet, aside from the implicit value placed on pluralism that one sees in a shared Kiddush on Friday night, there is little explicit programming designed to deal with religious differences. Fresh ideas and additional programming support could be brought to campus Hillels willing to experiment with new forms of community.

Given the need for niche programming, Hillel professionals find themselves unable to work with every group that presents an opportunity. Grants might be offered to encourage Hillel, Chabad, or other established groups to scan current offerings on campus and the areas ripest for development, and to propose where they would apply additional professional time. In this way, support can be given where it is most needed, on a campus-by-campus basis. A grants program would not only strengthen current infrastructure but also, perhaps, lead to greater experimentation in programming and outreach on campus.

2. Support Development of Jewish and Israel Studies

Jewish studies courses and programs deserve attention because, of the aspects of Jewish life considered in the present research, they are the most closely integrated into the university. Jewish studies courses serve the entire campus community and educate a wide variety of students about Jewish history and Judaism’s contribution to Western thought and civilization. As well, large numbers of Jewish students enroll in these classes, which help expand their Judaic knowledge.

A number of campuses we studied, however, have few Jewish studies professors or courses. There are many opportunities to bring higher quality Jewish academics and more opportunities for the scholarly study of Judaism to these schools. As well, initiatives might be undertaken to encourage more enrollment in Jewish studies courses. These might include scholarships for students interested in majoring in Jewish studies or prizes and awards for student papers and research projects. The more excitement that can be focused on Jewish studies, the more likely it will be that students from a wide range of backgrounds will want to participate.
In addition, there is a need to improve the number and quality of academic courses concerned with Israel and the Middle East. Improvement in this area will require faculty training programs, the development of teaching standards, curricular materials, and increased exchange among those interested in the field.

3. Support Professional Development

Two of the key building blocks of Jewish campus life are Jewish campus professionals and Jewish faculty members.

**Jewish Campus Professionals.** The success of Hillel and Chabad relies largely on the talents of their professionals and, as such, professional development is a key area for consideration. For example, Jewish campus workers should receive training similar to that received by their secular counterparts in student activities and campus administration. This training would teach them how to track changes in student demographics and how to assess needs for new activities. By partaking of such training, Jewish campus professionals could both benefit from and contribute to the conversations that are taking place among campus professionals more broadly.

**Jewish Faculty.** Faculty are key influences in students’ development and there are a large number of Jewish faculty at America’s colleges and universities; in some places the estimate is as high as one-third. Most faculty see themselves in terms of their academic disciplines. They tend not to establish special relationships with their Jewish students nor to consider themselves as Jewish role models although, clearly, they are role models. One response might be to establish a grants program, across institutions and disciplines, for faculty to explore links between Judaism and their own particular work.

Faculty also influence students through the statements that they make about Israel. Initiatives, such as Brandeis University’s Summer Institute for Israel Studies, a three-week seminar for faculty teaching about Israel, are designed to prepare a cadre of faculty who can teach about Israel in an interdisciplinary way and can face the challenge of providing scholarly analyses of a charged set of issues (cf. Koren, 2004). Other efforts, such as programs that bring university faculty of all faiths to Israel, similarly have the potential to enhance knowledge and involvement with Israel. Efforts to educate Jewish faculty about Israel might also include regional workshops, grants for faculty to conduct research projects related to Israel, or to develop curricular materials about Israel, and programs to bring Israeli faculty to American campuses. Such initiatives can have a positive effect on the campus climate by supporting more educated, reasoned, and fact-based discussions of Israel.

4. Support Student Development

Ultimately, students are the source and the purpose of Jewish life and community on campus. Two areas of opportunity are Jewish leadership development and the engagement of larger numbers of students. In order to fully capitalize on these opportunities, Jewish campus organizations will need to become more fully integrated into the university and into the local community.

**Leadership.** Leadership opportunities are appealing to emerging adults who are trying to gain experience and build their resumes. Jewish student leaders clearly benefit from their organizational work. It teaches them programming and leadership skills and seems to move them along in their adult development. It also appears to amplify their Jewish observance and identity. Nonetheless, without adequate support and explicit leadership training, these lessons can come at a cost of disillusionment, frustration, and burnout.
A program that prepares trainers and empowers campus professionals to conduct leadership training would strengthen the cadre of leaders available to the Jewish community on campus. Student leaders need to learn the Jewish foundations of leadership and they need to grow in their own Jewish understanding and commitment. Support for student leaders might take the form of stipends for Jewish studies; summer and vacation internships that offer a chance for hands-on experience in the Jewish community; paid internships at Hillel, Chabad, and other organizations; and mentoring and connections to successful professionals and lay leaders in the community.

Engagement. Engaging the unengaged is a slow, labor-intensive process. Current efforts are not likely to make a significant difference in terms of numbers. Engagement cannot reside with one or two people per campus. Rather, the mindset and skills of community organizing need to be infused throughout campus work. Students marvel at how they became involved in Jewish life while friends, who seem so much like them, did not. The point of outreach is to reduce the measure of randomness and to create relationships that are most likely to lead to engagement. Every professional should see outreach as part of his or her job.

To the extent that un-engagement is a function of weak Jewish identities that predate college, campus workers need to focus on establishing the basic building blocks of Jewish identity and practice. Whether through mentoring programs, buddy learning programs, introductory classes, or other educational formats, campus organizations need to transmit the basic knowledge that will give students enough comfort with and enthusiasm for Judaism that they can continue to develop as Jews.

The Reform movement has a particular challenge in this regard. Their rates of un-engagement are the highest of any group, exceeding even those of secular Jews, cultural Jews, and Jews with no denominational identity. Reform students are also significantly less likely than Conservative or Orthodox students to assume leadership positions in Jewish organizations. Through its camps and youth groups, the Reform movement does much to create leadership. However, it appears that their progeny are significantly more likely to bring their leadership skills to non-Jewish organizations and causes than to the Jewish community. The Reform movement needs to make a special effort to prepare its students and to engage them as Jews during their college years (Saxe, 2005).

In terms of students’ understanding of Israel, the most important intervention is one that gives them the opportunity to spend time in Israel. The largest and most important of current programs is birthright israel, which intends to bring 20,000 or more American university students to Israel in each of the next five years. “Masa” (journey), a new initiative of the Jewish Agency for Israel, hopes to bring students for year-long programs. Participation in such programs needs to be encouraged and supported as it is clear that they can change a student’s Jewish trajectory (Saxe et al., 2004a, 2004b).

Organization Integration. Hillel has an important role to play in cultivating student leadership and providing a supportive community for undergraduates. Its efforts in this regard could be greatly strengthened were it to develop its relationships with the college administration, Jewish studies programs, and the local Jewish community—all of which we found to be highly underdeveloped.

Hillel's lack of connection to student services is not peculiar to Jewish organizations. There is generally little cooperation between campus-based clergy and student affairs practitioners although such relationships are possible and needed (Butler, 1989; Tempkin & Evans, 1998). Suggestions have been proffered for ways to build the relationship,
including promoting awareness among student services professionals, of the importance of spiritual development encouraging the inclusion of religion in student affairs programming on diversity, inculcating an appreciation for religious traditions amongst residence life staff, coordinating with admissions officers, and so on (Temkin & Evans, 1998).

On the academic side, cooperation between Hillel, with its informal Jewish educational approach, and Jewish studies programs, with their formal academic approach, could help raise the level of Jewish literacy among students and potentially affect both the hearts and minds of these students. Needed is open discussion of the boundaries between Hillel and Jewish studies and possibilities for strengthening connections.

Finally, stronger connections between Jewish campus organizations and the local Jewish community could bring more resources to these organizations while also creating venues through which students’ energy and talent could enrich the local community. Creating a bridge between Hillel and the local community requires readiness and goodwill by both parties. Nonetheless, programs and approaches could be developed that would work through existing institutions (in particular, synagogues, day schools, federations, human service agencies), through personal connections between students and members of the community, through alumni mentoring programs, and—perhaps most directly addressing the needs of emerging adults—through summer internship programs in the Jewish world.

CONCLUSION

Our study of Jewish life on the college campus was intended to stimulate both thought and action. From an intellectual perspective, it reveals the tensions that exist on campuses between religious and secular values, between the affirmation of extant identities and experimentation with new ones, between assimilation into general society and identification with a religious/ethnic sub-community. From a practical perspective, the research suggests that there are multiple ways for the Jewish community to manage these tensions as it attempts to address its concerns with the quality of Jewish life on campus.

Our assessment of the status of Jewish life on campus is complex, a mélange of positives and negatives, challenges and promises. Being on a college campus, eating pizza and talking to students late at night in their dorms or apartments, we witnessed the crosscurrents in American Jewish emerging adulthood. Some moments, we were confronted with apathy, assimilation, and ignorance. Other moments, however, we saw leadership, commitment, and deep Jewish feelings, whether these were expressed through formal channels or through individual actions. It is clear that, in the open environment of a university, contemporary students face an unprecedented array of options for intellectual, religious, and spiritual exploration. The Jewish community, in turn, has opportunities to increase the likelihood that such exploration will focus on Judaism and that the pathway to adulthood will be paved with Jewish knowledge, practice, and sentiments.


In order to understand the general characteristics of Jewish students and to compare them to their non-Jewish peers, we administered a web-based survey on the 20 campuses selected for our study. The primary goals of the survey were to assess Jewish identity (or religious/ethnic identity more broadly) and to provide data on students’ involvement in both formal and informal Jewish social networks. On some campuses, the survey was administered to a sample of all students (universal sample). On other campuses, it was administered only to students who were believed to be Jewish (Hillel sample).

**Survey Instrument**

A common instrument and procedures were used across schools, although each school’s survey was fielded separately. The survey was a seven-section instrument that could be completed on-line in 20 to 30 minutes. Where possible, items were drawn from existing surveys of Jewish identity and religion including birthright israel, the General Social Survey, the National Jewish Population Survey, and Pew surveys on religion (cf. United Jewish Communities, 2003; Saxe et al., 2002; Kohut & Rogers, 2002; Davis et al., 2003). The first section of the survey consisted of general questions, such as enrollment status, area of concentration, and political orientation, along with three questions that assessed religious/ethnic identity. Respondents who indicated that they currently identify as Jewish, were raised Jewish, or were at least partly Jewish by ethnicity were branched to questions about religion and campus life that were specific to their Jewish identity. All other respondents were branched to a version of the questionnaire that consisted of similar questions, but worded in a general way. The remaining sections covered activities on campus, practicing religion on campus, the personal meaning of being Jewish/religious, campus climate, and background, upbringing and demographics. The survey was subjected to extensive pilot testing involving face-to-face cognitive and field tests.

**Survey Sample**

Two strategies were employed to ensure that a sufficient number of Jewish students would be included in the sample. The first was to contact the local Hillel office at each of the 20 schools. Every Hillel office has lists of students who have been identified by the university as Jewish, and/or have attended Hillel events, and/or have signed up to receive communications from Hillel. The lists typically include many students who do not participate, regularly or otherwise, in Hillel activities. Once a list was obtained, random samples of 250 names were drawn. In a few instances, where lists had fewer than 250 names, the full list was included.

Students who appear on Hillel lists are likely to differ from those who do not in terms of their Jewish identities and practices. This bias necessitated the use of a second strategy to obtain a random sample of students who had no connection with Hillel. This strategy required sampling a large number of undergraduates to ensure that a sufficient number of Jewish students would be included. This sampling was done by a survey sampling firm, Genesys Sampling:

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1 A copy of the survey instrument is available at www.cmjs.org.

2 Genesys Sampling used a database of student directories at each of the campuses and employed an Nth random selection process to select students, screening for schools in the sample. The student directories database consists of directory listings for campuses that agree to share their student listings. The quality of their lists is difficult to determine given the variability across campuses regarding policies for sharing student information.
which drew random samples of 1,000 names from the student directory on each campus. We invited 800 of the 1,000 per campus to participate in the survey. Given the additional costs of sampling from among all undergraduates, this second strategy was employed on only eight of the campuses.

**Survey Data Collection**

Email invitations were sent to all potential respondents. Respondents were offered a $10 Amazon.com gift certificate for their participation. Pilot-testing, as well as prior research with this population indicated that the incentive was important to insuring a high response rate. Approximately three days after the invitation, all students who had not yet completed the survey were sent a follow-up email, encouraging them to participate and to contact us if they had any questions or problems concerning the survey. Three such follow-up emails were sent. After the third follow-up, we called all students who had not yet completed their survey. Initial emails were sent between April and May 2003. Surveys were completed between April and June 2003.

**Survey Response Rate**

A total of 4,137 surveys were completed, including 2,070 Jewish students. Among those who identified as Jewish, 1,718 were students sampled from Hillel lists on 18 of the campuses and 352 were sampled from the general student population.

There are as yet no established and accepted guidelines for computing response rates in web surveys. To estimate response rates for this study, we modified the American Association for Public Opinion Research Response Rate Calculator (2002). The calculator is based on RDD telephone survey disposition codes, which categorize response and non-response to the survey. Non-Responses are broken down into Eligible Non-Response, Unknown Eligibility Non-Response, and Not Eligible Non-Response. The items within the main categories of the Response Rate Calculator were modified to take into account how the categories would pertain to web surveys. This method results in a conservative estimate of the response rate because of the difficulty of determining whether an email is functional. Definitions for the dispositions employed for the college survey are summarized in Table 6.

Based on these dispositions, response, cooperation and refusal rates were estimated (Table 7 on page 36). Completion rates were very high, and refusal rates were low. The overall response rate was approximately 50%, somewhat lower than

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**Table 6: Disposition Codes for Web Survey, Based on AAPOR Definitions of Dispositions in Mail and Telephone Surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible Non-Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refusal</td>
<td>Replied to any email requesting removal from mailing list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break-off</td>
<td>Did not complete first page of religion and ethnicity questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unknown Eligibility, Non-Response</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Response</td>
<td>All non-respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad address</td>
<td>All bounced back email addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Problems</td>
<td>Not yet known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 Funding for this aspect of the study was provided by the Steinhardt Foundation/Jewish Life Network.

7 The survey was not administered at one private Northeastern university as planned. The university’s IRB demanded that a different protocol than the one used on other campuses be implemented to insure that no students under the age of 18 were included. Having two different protocols would have made data difficult to compare.
anticipated, but there was much variability in response rates across campuses and lists (Hillel/Universal).

Overall, however, the rates are much higher than any other comparable survey and much higher than what has now become the norm for RDD surveys (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2004). For example, in a comparison of survey methods among a sample of college students, Sax et al. (2003) report response rates of 17% to 24%. Crawford et al. (2001) obtained response rates of 34.5% in another college sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Response, Cooperation and Refusal Rates (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response Rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Hillel Samples</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Universal Samples</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a. Response rate includes partial interviews and estimated proportion of eligible cases among unknown eligibility cases. b. Cooperation rate is the proportion of respondents who completed the interview, once started. c. Refusal rate is proportion of eligible (and estimated eligible) respondents who refused to participate.

References


Appendix II

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