

JEWISH NEEDS OF STUDENTS

A Case Study of One University

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Hillel Foundations in many American universities are the means by which organized Jewish communities maintain and support a Jewish way of life on college campuses. Although there are many Hillels across the country, little is known regarding their ability to match services to the current needs and interests of Jewish students. A task force in one major urban university was commissioned to systematically study these needs. As part of that effort, in the Spring 1989 semester, a questionnaire was distributed, to which 219 students responded. Results of that survey, which shed light on the actual needs and perceptions of Jewish students, are reported here.

Roughly 400,000 Jewish students currently attend colleges and universities throughout the United States. Jewish community institutions spend some \$20 million to provide a wide array of programs and services to sustain, nurture, and strengthen the Jewish identity and commitment of these students (Joel, 1989). Further, the college campus is a portal through which the vast majority of Jewish young men and women pass. It has been estimated that 80 to 90% of Jewish youth of college age attend universities of higher education. "The percentage is so high that the future of the American Jewish community may depend on the effects which the college experience has on Jewish identity" (Lavender, 1977 p. 37). Given the size of this segment of the overall community and the resources currently devoted to serving them, it is astonishing how little is actually known about Jewish college students. There are almost no empirical data on who these students are, where they come from, how they were educated, and what interests them.

Lack of accurate information about Jewish college students and the impact of their college experience has both national and local implications. Campus professionals

develop patterns of service delivery based on assumptions that may not be accurate or valid. It seems, for instance, to be a generally accepted paradigm that college students are, for the most part, between the ages of 18 to 23. Yet, increasing numbers of older people now attend college. Often they enroll part-time, only attend a class or two each week, and because of complicated schedules, are unable to participate fully in campus life (Carnegie Foundation, 1990). The average age of students on a particular campus has significant ramifications for methods of program delivery. Activities geared for 18-year-old students may be of little interest or value to those in their mid-twenties, who may work full-time or have responsibilities to parents and children.

Although it is clear that the college experience has a major impact on the evolution of the Jewish identity of young people, significant differences of opinion exist on the nature of that impact. Greenberg (1968, p. 260) commented that "by and large, college is a disaster area for Judaism, Jewish loyalty, and Jewish identity." Astin (1983, p. 96) found a greater than average decline in religiousness among Jewish students. Relevant to this study of

students at the University of Pennsylvania, it is interesting to note that Astin found numerous environmental elements that had a negative effect on religiousness, including dormitory living, the prestige of a given institution, the large size of the institution, the status of the college as private and nonsectarian, and geographical location in the northeastern United States. On a more positive note, Mansoor (1973, p. 11), in commenting on students at the University of Wisconsin, noted that "hundreds . . . who have come to college without prior commitment to Judaism or Jewish identity have become committed through the courses in Hebrew and Jewish culture on our campus."

Monson (1984) has pointed out that a student's participation in religious life on campus must be seen as a reflection of that individual's past Judaic experiences. Her study found a "positive correlation between the degree of exposure to a variety of Jewish experiences before coming to college and the intensity of participation in Jewish life on campus" (Monson, 1984, p. 36).

In her 1984 study on the attitudes of Jewish college students to dating, marriage, and raising a family, Monson also measured seven possible types of campus Jewish activity. The most common form of participation was attendance at services, particularly High Holiday Services, in which 79% of the student respondents participated. Over half the respondents said they read Jewish books and periodicals, and nearly half had enrolled in Jewish studies courses and had participated in Hillel. It is important to note that, in this study, questionnaires were distributed at 14 campuses across the country through the cooperation of Hillel directors and staff. One could question whether her sample is, in fact, representative of the campus Jewish community at large or of any specific campus.

In a recent study of commuter students in the Philadelphia area, only 18.6% and

20% of students reported that they were involved in any organized Jewish group or Hillel, respectively (Raphael, 1988). In a similar study of students at small residential campuses in the Philadelphia area, 43% of respondents answered that they participated in organized Jewish activities on campus (Alpert, 1988). Again, both of these studies were carried out by Hillel staff and may not involve sample groups that are representative of the Jewish student population at large.

What is perhaps most clear about Jewish college students is that we know very little about them. Whether it is one's position that the campus has a major impact on young adults or no impact at all, the reality remains that a large majority of Jewish young men and women will pass through the college classroom on their way to adulthood. Upon leaving, they may become active members of the community or disappear into the oblivion of assimilation and alienation. The college years must be viewed as a "window of opportunity" that offers the Jewish community a unique chance to reach out to individuals at a time in their lives when they are open to new ideas and willing to explore new ways of looking at the world and at themselves. However, we can reach out to them, work with them, and help them grow only if we know who they are, what they want, what they need, and how they perceive us.

The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations is a major vehicle by which the organized Jewish community in the United States provides programs and services to Jewish students in these critical years. Since the first Hillel unit was established at the University of Illinois in 1923, the Hillel system has grown to approximately 400 foundations and affiliates in the United States, Australia, Canada, England, Europe, Israel, and South America (Cernea, 1988). Although the methods utilized in Hillel's service to the Jewish student community are generally understood, frequently little is known

about the effectiveness of this service. Further, there are almost no empirical data about the perceived needs and interests of many Jewish students. Accordingly, an assessment of the congruence between the programs made available through Hillel and the expressed preferences of students is timely.

BACKGROUND

Hillel of Greater Philadelphia (formerly "The Jewish Campus Activities Board"), a constituent agency of the Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia and an affiliate of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations, operates a range of programs and services for Jewish students at colleges and universities throughout the Philadelphia area. The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at the University of Pennsylvania is one unit of Hillel of Greater Philadelphia. From a large three-story building on the university campus, Hillel provides a wide range of services, activities, and programs, including kosher meals, Shabbat and holiday religious services, student-led interest groups, and cultural, social, and recreational programs.

During the fall of 1988, as part of a study of the agency's student clientele and an evaluation of existing services, the Task Force on Service to Students at the University of Pennsylvania was established. Its goal was to assess the needs and interests of Jewish students at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Although Hillel at Penn has had an active and diverse program and has served large numbers of Jewish students for many years, professional and lay leadership felt the need to learn more about the student community, especially about those students who were not affiliated or involved. One part of this inquiry was a survey questionnaire developed by the professionals and lay leaders of Hillel of Greater Philadelphia in conjunction with the authors. Although several methods

were important in generating important data about the match between programs and needs of the target population (see the discrepancy model of needs assessment in Kauffman and English, 1979), this article focuses on the survey, the primary means to systematically shed some light on Jewish needs and characteristics of students in our time.

METHOD

Client survey is one of the most recommended methods of needs assessment (McKillip, 1987). The problem with client surveys, however, is that they are usually directed to current or past clients and often ignore many potential clients who avoid using services for various reasons. Schwab (1983) contended that citizen surveys—that is, surveys that attempt to include a whole or a probabilistic sample of the potential target population—have the greatest scientific merit of all techniques of needs assessment. The citizen survey approach was opted for in this study.

A questionnaire was developed and pre-tested with a small group of Jewish students to determine its clarity, relevance, and ease of completion. The questionnaire consisted of 116 questions divided into six categories: demographic data, status at the university, participation in university non-academic life, Jewish identity, participation in Jewish life on campus, and perceptions of Hillel.

One thousand questionnaires were mailed to a randomly chosen sample from a list of 3,000 students who had completed religious preference cards. Questionnaires were also distributed at a table on campus and at Hillel. Two hundred and nineteen questionnaires were returned. Over 200 of them were returned by mail, and only a small number were solicited individually. This rate of return is lower than optimal and does raise some doubts as to the generalizability of the results. However, as the

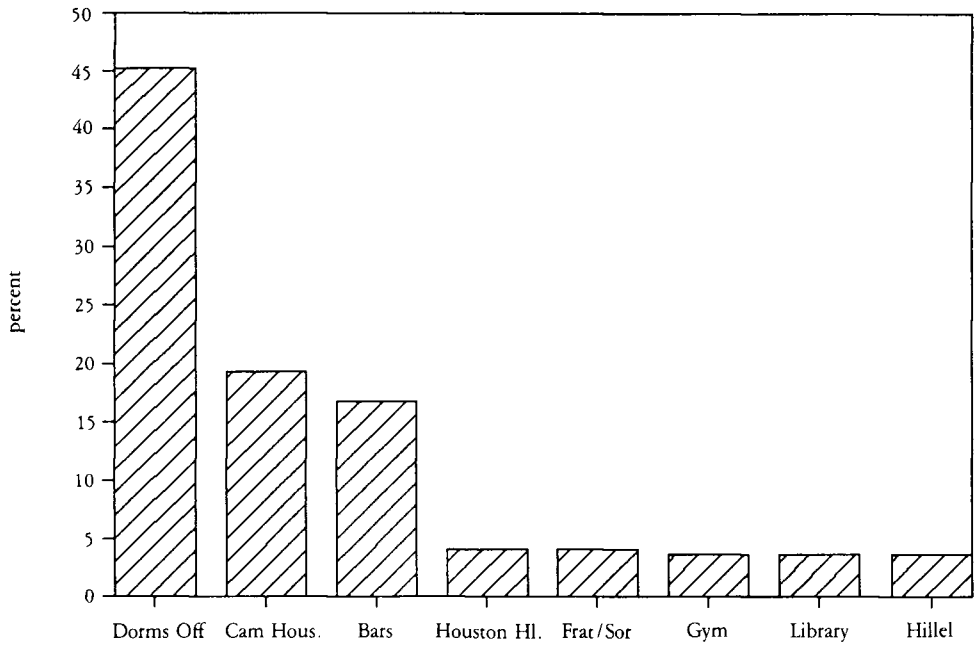


Figure 1. Primary location of Jewish students' social activity.

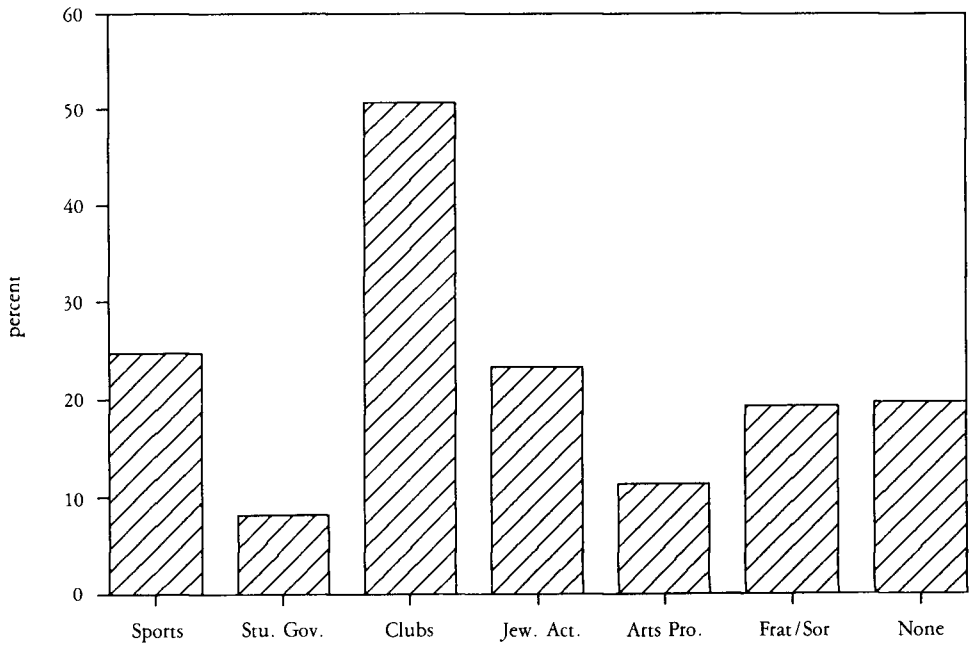


Figure 2. Participation in extracurricular activities.

data later indicate, a significant number of students who returned their questionnaires were not actual consumers of the Hillel services (51.1%). Thus, we can report on the users and nonusers alike.

SURVEY RESULTS

The data from this study are presented according to the six areas of the questionnaire. Because of the low rate of return, most of the analysis is descriptive, and only a few inferences were able to be made.

Demographic Data

This sample of Jewish students contained 54% males and 46% females, which is consistent with the male-to-female ratio at Penn. Close to 90% of the students were between 18 and 26 years old. The youngest group (17-18) comprised 12.3% of the respondents, those 19-20 comprised 30.0%, those 21-22 comprised 32.4%, and those 23-26 comprised 15.6%.

The respondents came from throughout the United States, as well as a number of foreign countries. Over three-quarters (77%) were from the East Coast, and over half (57.7%) came from the Mid-Atlantic States.

Status in the University

There was close to an even breakdown between undergraduate students (freshman, 16.4%; junior, 16.0%; sophomore, 19.6%; and senior, 16.9%), and nearly a third (31.1%) of the sample were graduate students. Approximately half (48.6%) of the respondents were students in the College of Arts and Sciences, 19.3% studied at Wharton School of Business, 5.5% were in the School of Engineering, and 0.9% were at the School of Nursing. All together, the respondents reported 55 different areas of study, indicating that no one department was overrepresented in the sample.

Eighty-six percent of the students live either on campus or near campus. Slightly

under half of the respondents live in the dormitories and 4.6% in fraternity/sorority housing. A quarter of the students live in the nearby West Philadelphia area.

Participation in University Non-Academic Life

Over 45% of the respondents stated that their primary area of activity ("hanging out") is in the dorms. An additional 19% listed off-campus housing as their favorite activity location. The only other location of note listed was local bars, which 16.8% of the respondents frequent. As seen in Figure 1, Hillel received little recognition as a place for "hanging out," with less than 4% of the students listing it in as a primary area. Students were just as likely to frequent Houston Hall (the student activities center), the gym, or the library. Other places of activity listed were parties, academic departments, and restaurants.

There was a significant difference between a student's year in school and his or her preferred location for leisure activity. Freshmen and sophomores are more likely to seek activity and companionship in the dormitories, whereas upper-classmen and graduates are more apt to locate in off-campus housing and at bars.

As seen in Figure 2, over one-half of the students responded that they participate in student clubs, and a quarter participate in organized sports. Twenty-three percent responded that they participate in Jewish activities. Close to 20% indicated their participation in fraternities or sororities.

Students were most apt to participate in organized campus activities in order to pursue special interests (61.9%), to meet others (60.1%), and as an opportunity to take on leadership roles (33.8%). Only 18.3% of the respondents listed "meeting Jewish needs" as a reason to participate in organized campus activities. This figure is especially telling, given that "meeting Jewish needs" was provided as one of the choices on the questionnaire and therefore, as a response, required recognition only and

Table 1.
PARTICIPATION IN JEWISH RITUALS BY LOCATION

	At School %	At Home %	Both %	Neither %
Shabbat services	11.9	20.0	13.7	53.9
High Holiday services	16.4	33.3	40.2	10.0
Passover seder	9.6	60.7	23.3	6.4
Chanukah candles	27.4	21.9	39.3	11.4

not recall. This is a clear indication that meeting Jewish needs is a weak explanation for participation in campus activities. This has particular implications as Hillel seeks to identify and to reach out to Jewishly uninvolved students.

Finally, we asked students to report on the use of university-based personal services. The most utilized university service at Penn was student health, with close to three-quarters of the respondents having utilized this service. Slightly over half of the students had utilized career counseling, and 15% had utilized the university counseling center.

Jewish Identity

Half of the respondents categorized their Judaic affiliation as Conservative. Close to 30% identified themselves as Reform, whereas 5.6% saw themselves as Orthodox. These percentages deviate only slightly from those of the general Jewish population in the United States (Himmelfarb & Singer, 1985).

When viewing Judaism from another perspective, 15% of the respondents said that they were Zionists, close to 14% stated that they were "ethnic," and over 20% said that they were cultural Jews.

The majority of students (71.2%) received their formal Jewish education by attending Hebrew school. Fifteen percent attended day school, and only 4% attended a yeshiva. Over half of the students had visited Israel, and participated in Jewish youth groups, and 46.6% had attended Jewish camps.

As seen in Table 1, close to 93.6% of the students attend a Passover Seder, 90%

participate in High Holiday Services, and 88.6% light Chanukah candles.

When asked which current topic in the Jewish community was of special concern, about two-thirds of the students responded that the issue of anti-Semitism was "extremely" important. Ninety-five percent felt that anti-Semitism was an issue that was either "extremely important" or "important." Half of the students responded that "Israel-Palestinian relations" was an extremely important topic, and 85% felt it was either "extremely important" or "important." Israel's political problems, maintaining Jewish identity, and the plight of Soviet Jews were all perceived to be important topics. Students were relatively unconcerned with Jewish-gay issues, the relative roles of Jewish men and women, Jewish feminist questions, and the "Who is a Jew" controversy.

Participation in Jewish Life on Campus

Close to 60% of the students responded that half or more of their friends were Jewish. Only one in ten responded that less than 25% of their friends were Jewish. Approximately half responded that they never used the Hillel facility. One student in six (17%) uses the Hillel building either often or regularly.

Seventy-five percent of the students who said that their religious affiliation was Orthodox used the building either often or regularly in comparison with 22% of Conservative students. Less than 7% of the Reform students reported that they use the building often, and none reported regular use.

Hillel was cited most frequently (41.1%)

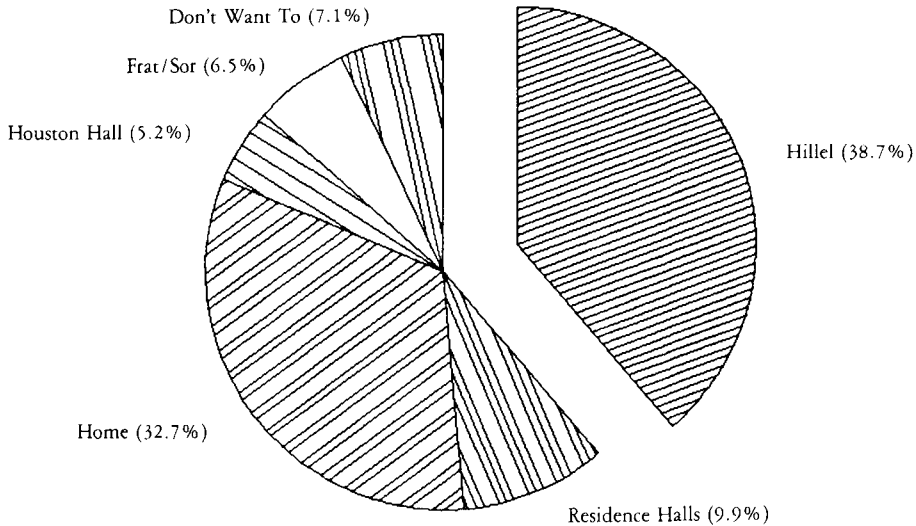


Figure 3. Location of choice for participation in Jewish activities.

as the place where students would prefer to participate in Jewish activities. Home (34.7%) was a close second. Ten percent of the students responded that they would prefer to participate in Jewish programs in the dorms, whereas 15% stated that they preferred the Philadelphia community. Less than 8% did not want to participate in Jewish activities at all (Figure 3).

The organized Jewish activity in which students participated most was Friday night services (37%). Twenty-two percent had attended a lecture (it should be noted that Elie Wiesel had spoken at Penn approximately 1 month before the questionnaire was distributed), and one in five students participated in the United Jewish Appeal campaign. Social events were relatively well attended (22.4%), as were Shabbat meals (21.5%) and political demonstrations and rallies (18.3%). Close to one student in ten participated in the kosher meal plan. Thirty-one percent of the students responded that they had not participated in any Jewish activities in the past year.

It is most interesting to compare the list of general activities in which students participated and the availability of Hillel programs. As evident in Table 2, there is a

high level of congruence between the two, indicating that Hillel in fact meets many Jewish needs, a good number of which are not directly credited to Hillel.

To determine the proportions of students who were moderately to very active, we counted the total number of organized Jewish activities in which students participated. Using this approach, close to 40% of the respondents did not participate in Jewish activities at all. An additional 19.5% participated in only one activity, 16.7% participated in two to three activities, 16.3% participated in four to six activities, and 8.4% participated in more than seven activities.

Also of considerable interest is the roster of Jewish activities in which students actually participated and the sponsorship role of Hillel for them. As seen in Table 2, the activities in which students participated most frequently are those that are either provided directly through Hillel or with Hillel support. Thus, it can be assumed that Hillel is indeed the major organization providing Jewish students with opportunities to be engaged in Jewishly related activities.

When asked to list what additional

Table 2.
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN JEWISH ACTIVITIES

Activity	Percentage of participants	Hillel Activity
Friday night services	37.0	Yes
Lectures	22.8	In-part
Social events	22.4	Yes
Shabbat meals	21.5	Yes
UJA campaign	19.6	Yes
Political demonstrations	18.3	In-part
Soviet Jewry activities	11.4	Yes
Concerts or plays	10.0	In-part
Kosher meals	9.1	Yes
Discussion groups	9.1	In-part
Jewish classes for credit	7.3	No
Films	6.8	In-part
Informal Jewish classes	3.7	Yes
Social action	9.1	In-part
Zionist activities	5.9	In-part
None	31.1	

Yes denotes an activity offered only by Hillel. *In-part* denotes an activity offered by Hillel and by other organizations. *No* denotes an activity not offered by Hillel.

Jewish activities students would like to see made available, the majority did not add any item (82.4%). Those who did make suggestions asked for more social programs (6.8%), more lectures (3.2%), and more activities for graduate students (2.3%).

The high rate of those who did not suggest additional service, on the one hand, and the diversity of ideas, on the other hand, indicates that the potential users of Hillel do not criticize it for neglecting an important area of activity.

How Students Perceive Hillel

Although questions regarding how students perceive Hillel at Penn were open-ended, the initial clues about those perceptions can be found in their answers to the questions asking where is their primary location of hanging out and where they would go if they had a personal problem. Only about 3% responded that they frequently hang out at Hillel and that they would go to speak to a Hillel professional if they had a problem. What makes the statistic regarding counseling especially noteworthy is that close to one-quarter of the students responded that, in a counseling situation, they would prefer the helping person to be Jewish. Therefore, although it is im-

portant to a reasonable number of respondents that the person they share their problems with be Jewish, they do not, for the most part, identify Hillel as the place to find that person.

This 3% response in regard to location of hanging out and counseling can be compared to the 41% of students who responded that they would prefer to participate in Jewish activities at Hillel. It can be argued, then, that Hillel is perceived as the place for Jewish cultural and religious functions, such as religious observances, kosher meals, and cultural programs. However, the social or counseling aspects of Hillel's role on campus are not recognized by students. This perception, especially on a campus like Penn where Hillel does provide such services, is most likely a challenge for image building and marketing, rather than of availability of services.

Approximately 60% of the students who answered the question—"What is your impression of Penn Hillel?"—responded favorably. Comments included "a terrific place to meet new people," "very strong, very supportive," "well equipped, very accessible, tries to meet the needs of all students," and "great!" Ten percent of those who responded felt that its social

groups were too closed (too cliquish), and 6.5% felt that it was "too Jewish." This relatively high rate of favorable comments regarding Hillel may be biased by the low rate of return of questionnaires.

Nine out of ten of the students responded that it was easy to affirm one's Jewish identity on the Penn campus. Of those who responded, three-quarters said that the size of the Jewish student community at Penn made it easy to do so.

Slightly over half of the respondents stated that their most positive Jewish experience was participating in a religious observance, whereas 27% said their most positive experience was at a Hillel activity. The majority of negative Jewish experiences reported were related to anti-Semitism (24.6%) and racism (21.3%). Fifteen percent of those who responded stated that their most negative Jewish experience was of a general social nature, i.e., being confronted with Jewish cliques.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The student population at the University of Pennsylvania is representative of that found at a residential campus of a prestigious university. Students are, by and large, of "traditional" college age and live on or near campus. Thus, these findings can, with a certain amount of caution, be generalized to similar institutions of higher education, but are less valid for commuter colleges or nonresearch universities.

There are numerous indications that many Jewish students at Penn have strong Jewish identities and are interested in preserving them. Jewish students at Penn have an exceptionally high level of formal and informal Jewish education. Approximately half of the students had visited Israel, participated in Jewish youth groups, or attended Jewish camps. In addition, Jewish students at Penn have an exceptionally high percentage of participation in Jewish ritual observances. Finally, they have a high proportion of Jewish friends. This profile of a highly literate and religiously

active Jewish student population calls for the provision of programs and Jewish services of a high caliber and challenges professional staff to provide students with opportunities to play leadership roles in the development of such programs. Jewish students at the University of Pennsylvania are in a position to be educated consumers, as well as to be teachers, leaders of discussions, and program planners.

Pursuing special interests, meeting others, and opportunities for leadership were cited as the primary reasons for becoming involved in organized campus activities.

Meeting Jewish needs was identified as a weak explanation for participation in campus. This finding speaks to the importance of offering a range of interest groups within the structure of Hillel. The campus UJA campaign, Zionist groups, interfaith discussion groups, and other groups currently offered within the structure of Hillel provide important outlets for leadership and socialization. One could argue that Hillel could expand its cadre of involved students by offering a wider range of groups. Intramural sports, theater, music, social action, politics, and journalism could all find an appropriate place within the structure of Hillel and would offer students greater opportunities for involvement in the campus Jewish community.

These findings also have significant implications in the development of outreach strategies. Students should be approached in the locations where they spend time, which vary according to school year. Due to the nature of the university, most students hang out where they live, either in dormitories or off-campus apartments.

Freshmen and sophomore students hang out in the dorms more than upper classmen and graduate students, who are more likely to be found socializing in off-campus apartments or bars. These findings are especially significant given the importance of reaching out to freshmen. By making a connection with a first-year student, Hillel has the opportunity, over a 4-year period, to have a significant impact on that indi-

vidual's Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish community. Outreach strategies in the dorms should be developed that respond to the students' desire to gather informally with their friends. Possible programs might include Hillel-sponsored study breaks or late night snacks. A dormitory Seudah Shlishit (afternoon Shabbat meal) would address students' interest in socializing (and food) in a Judaic context. Hillel might consider having one of its professional staff members expend considerable outreach efforts in the dorms, especially early in the year.

The issues with which these students are most concerned are anti-Semitism, the political situation in Israel and Israel-Palestinian relations. Although approximately 85% of the students responded that Israel-Palestinian relations was either a "very important" or "important" issue and 75% thought that the Israel political situation was either "very important" or "important," only 15% said that they were Zionists and only 6% said that they were involved in Zionist groups on campus. This may reflect some feelings of ambivalence about Israel because of the current political situation. These issues that attract Penn students should serve as the focus for future Hillel activities and public relation campaigns.

Hillel is well utilized by the Jewish student community at Penn. Yet, although students perceived Hillel to be the place to go for Jewish cultural and religious events, they did not recognize it as a place to socialize in or to receive counseling. Consequently, these aspects of Hillel's program may be under-utilized relative to need.

Given the importance of socializing to college students, Hillel of Greater Philadelphia might consider conducting further market analysis to determine why Hillel is not perceived as a place to hang out and to explore whether the Hillel facility could be recast as such a place. The reality may be that students hang out in the dorms because it is convenient. Alternatively, students may not hang out at Hillel because

they feel that the facilities are inadequate for this purpose. Purchasing new furniture or a ping pong table might provide sufficient incentive for students to spend more time at Hillel. Publicity that focuses on the social and counseling functions of Hillel might be considered to alter the students' perceptions.

Students generally have a favorable impression of Hillel. It is seen as an active organization where students feel welcome. A number of students, however, found the Jewish community and Hillel "cliquish." One could speculate that this is a result of the active and visible involvement of religiously traditional students in the Hillel building and activities. These individuals are involved in activities that, to the outside observer, might appear exclusive. It is interesting to note that, although Orthodox students were viewed as overusers, they claimed that their needs are not well met and the suggested provision of an Orthodox rabbi was highly desirable for them. In addition, some students were misled by a historical image of Hillel as a place to pray in and thus view Hillel as too religious a place where only Orthodox or Shabbat observers can function.

Finally, students find it easy to affirm their Jewish identity at the University of Pennsylvania, primarily because of the high percentage of Jewish students in attendance. They were concerned with issues of anti-Semitism and discrimination, but in a limited way.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study, along with a report written by the task force, were submitted to the board of Hillel of Greater Philadelphia. The task force recommendations included adding a staff person for outreach, conducting a professional study of the logistical and space needs of the physical location, adding funds for such specific programs as scholars-in-residence, and increasing Hillel's counseling capacity by linking it with other local agencies. After two lengthy discussions of the board,

all recommendations were approved unanimously. Currently, the director of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at the University of Pennsylvania is engaged in incorporating these additions into the budget.

A number of fundamental policy issues facing many Hillels were identified in this study. First, the Penn Hillel must determine whether it should "go with its strength"; that is, focus on religious programs and observances, activities that receive high recognition among students, or strive to re-create its image as a place of general social activity or counseling for Jewish students. Second, Hillel must consider whether it can be satisfied with those students who do use its services or whether marketing campaigns should take place to expand both the number and type of students it serves. Third, although the focus of Jewish activity is the Hillel building, more emphasis should be placed on satellite programs in the dorms or where students congregate most often. Outreach in the dormitories, especially toward freshmen, and extending the array of interest groups available are two possible methods of involving greater numbers of students.

This study provides a picture of one campus at one point of time. It must be replicated on other campuses, at different times, and with different age groups. Only then will the needs of Jewish students in the United States be assessed with some confidence to determine what can best be done to assist them in preserving their Jewish identity. It is hoped that this study will serve as a catalyst for extensive inquiry in this field.

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