

# Muhlenberg College Hillel:

## Top 10 FAQ from Prospective Students and Families

### **What's the name of Muhlenberg's Jewish center on campus?**

We are fortunate to have a dedicated space that goes by the Leffell Center for Jewish Student Life, named for former alumni of the college. We are also known as Muhlenberg College Hillel, as we're an affiliated campus center. We're pluralistic so both names work!

### **How many Jewish students are on campus? What is the breakdown among secular, Humanistic, Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox students?**

Typically we'll have from 500 to more than 600 Jewish students enrolled in a given year. That amounts to anywhere between 25-30% of the entire undergraduate population, which is pretty remarkable for a small liberal arts college. While the identities of our students are hard to pin down and are fluid in these years of personal development, we generally have around 10-20 modern Orthodox students as well as larger groups of Conservative and Reform students. Among these communities, students organize Shabbat and holiday gatherings throughout the year to gather, pray, observe and celebrate.

### **Are there kosher food options available to students? If so, what are they?**

You bet! Kosher dining is an excellent feature of the Muhlenberg College experience. Unlike at other campuses, students don't have to make any special arrangements or purchase specific dining plans. Kosher dining is fully integrated into the regular dining experience. Located in Seeger's Union, the primary dining hall, Wood Dining Commons features Star-K supervised kosher dairy and meat stations, known as Noshery North and Noshery South, where you can pick up a variety of food options every day during each meal slot. Insider tip: the blondies are delicious!

### **Are there weekly Shabbat dinner/gathering opportunities?**

Each week students organize and lead one to two flavors of Shabbat services experience, including Conservative or traditional egalitarian, and Reform. Shabbat dinners are one of the highlights of the week and the Jewish experience at Muhlenberg. Over 100 students gather weekly at the Leffell Center for Jewish Student Life and enjoy a delicious kosher meal, surrounded by their friends and peers. Many students even stay after to schmooze and play board games. Additionally, in the past, we've hosted Shabbat afternoon meals and hangouts, called seudah shlishit or sha'al shidis, organized by our Shabbat observant students.

### **What is your most popular and well-attended program(s) on your campus each year?**

Along with Shabat Dinners, our bagel brunches are really popular. At Hillel, we treat bagels like Apple treats the iPhone. We welcome large crowds at our weekend brunches, providing bagels, schmears, slicers, lox, veggies, gluten-free options, and all the fixins. Along with our bagel brunches, our Jewish learning series are quite popular, and draw on a number of areas, including text learning, Israel education,

and the Jewish Learning Fellowship, which explores major Jewish themes and values through an adult lens.

**Are there Jewish studies majors/minors or Hebrew language course options available to students?**

Yes, we are fortunate to have both a Jewish studies major and minor program at Muhlenberg, as well as Hebrew language courses. As an alumnus myself, I minored in Jewish studies before the major existed, and I appreciated how inter-disciplinary it was. I was also able to qualify for credits when I studied abroad at Hebrew University. The college offers study abroad in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, so there are many options for students to explore Jewish learning academically.

**What is the political or social justice climate like around topics such as BDS, anti-Semitism, or Zionism?**

Generally, Muhlenberg is an excellent and safe environment to be Jewish as well as proudly Zionist. Our Israel fellow brings real-world experience and amazing stories and recipes, our Birthright trips create new communities of best friends each semester, one bus at a time, and we regularly observe major holidays on the Israeli calendar in creative and inclusive ways. We also have not had issues with antisemitism on campus. We know that these days, Israel is not just a polarizing issue in our public discourse, it's also extremely divisive among Jews. We therefore continue to support Jewish students collectively and individually through values of ensuring safety and wellbeing while encouraging thoughtful and respectful learning around the questions and issues sought by our students, so that they have the tools that they need as they continue into adulthood.

**What challenges, if any, might a Jewish student face on your campus?**

Consider the size of the student population. While we have a considerably large Jewish population for a campus our size, we are after all a small liberal arts college. There are a ton of benefits that come with this, but it's important that prospective students are considering that. As an alumnus, this environment turned out to be a great fit, but it's of course up to each student and what they're looking for.

**What is one interesting piece of information about Muhlenberg college that you want people to know?**

We're in an incredible location. Allentown is the third-largest city in Pennsylvania, after Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Our building is located across the street from a Reform Temple, about half a mile from an Orthodox Synagogue and JCC, and a short drive from the Conservative Synagogue. We're also walking distance from supermarkets with kosher food, as well as a mikveh. Students rarely get tired of campus life, but if they do, we're about an hour from Philadelphia and two hours from New York, and there's tons to explore in between.

**What do you love the most about leading the Jewish community at your university?**

Having seen so many of my peers graduate from Muhlenberg, I really appreciate the quality of the community and liberal arts education, and Jewish life one can experience at Muhlenberg. I know friends that, since graduating, are now working at other Hillels, Israel organizations, or even moved to Israel. I know Rabbis and Cantors of different denominations, and for the vast majority of alumni that don't fall in these categories, I continue to hear positive and nostalgic stories from their time at Muhlenberg. It's a place where students are really seen for who they are, both at Hillel and across the college, and I'm proud

to help students develop their own Jewish senses of self in these pivotal years of growth and independence.

*-Ira Blum '10, Director of the Leffell Center for Jewish Student Life and Muhlenberg College Hillel*