

Guide to Jewish Life on Campus

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For the Residential Life Staff at the
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what is Judaism?

Judaism is a religion, culture, and social group. Judaism can be a combination of those elements, and one individual's Judaism can be very different from another's.

The religious aspect of Judaism is focused on the belief in one God. Jews take direction from the Torah, or the Old Testament Bible, basing their actions on the 613 mitzvot (commandments) given in the Torah. In addition to the Torah, Jewish belief and practice are motivated by the teachings of religious leaders and scholars.

Culturally, Jewish tradition has developed over the past 3,700 years to include holiday celebrations, foods, and language (both Hebrew and Yiddish). Socially, Jews may be drawn together by commonality of upbringing, culture, or belief.

Judaism is more about actions than beliefs, and flexibility exists within the organized system of Jewish belief and practice.¹ Out of the need for flexibility developed different movements of Judaism, or denominations.

Orthodox Judaism: Belonging to the most traditional of Jewish movements, Orthodox Jews believe God gave the Torah to the Jewish people through Moses at Mount Sinai.

Reform Judaism: Reform Judaism developed out of a desire to further modernize Orthodox Judaism, moving away from the belief that observance of the 613 mitzvot was central to Jewish practice. Reform Jews do not believe that the Torah was written by God, but use Jewish ethical values to guide their actions and observe some cultural traditions.

Conservative Judaism: Conservative Judaism lies between Orthodox and Reform, and as a movement is a proponent of the Torah as the word of God while supporting the idea that Jewish practice should be able to adapt to fit with secular culture.

Reconstructionist Judaism: Reconstructionist Judaism emphasizes observance of Jewish law as a choice made because Jewish law is culturally and ethically valuable. Reconstructionist Judaism does not believe in God as a personified deity with control over historical events.

Secular Judaism: Secular Judaism involves a cultural identification with the Jewish people without a belief in God. Religious observance is not always a part of secular Jewish life.

¹ Judaism 101, www.jewfaq.org

Major Observances and Holidays

Jewish holidays and observances are linked to Jewish history, Torah, and Jewish law.

Shabbat – Shabbat is the Jewish Sabbath, and is one of the most important rituals in Jewish practice. Jewish people believe that God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day God rested. Shabbat is the celebration of this day of rest. It begins each week on Friday at sundown and ends Saturday at sundown. Some Jewish people attend Shabbat services Friday night and/or Saturday morning. The service that concludes Shabbat and welcomes in the new week is called Havdalah. You may know that on Shabbat some Jews do not work. “Work” is defined differently depending on one’s level of observance. It can include driving, cooking, using electricity, and writing, but is not limited to these efforts. Work is also not permitted as part of other Jewish holiday observances.

Rosh Hashanah – Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. The evening of the day that human beings were created, the sixth day of the creation of the world, was the first Rosh Hashanah, making Rosh Hashanah a collective birthday for all the people in the world. Rosh Hashanah begins in the evening and extends over two more days (Reform Judaism does not require observance of the second day of Rosh Hashanah).

Yom Kippur – The Day of Atonement; the day Jews are symbolically written into the book of life for the next year. Jews are commanded to fast on Yom Kippur, from sundown the night before the first day of the holiday to sunset on the first day. The time in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is a time of repentance; Jews consider what they could have done differently or better over the past year and commit to changing for the better in the next year. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are called the High Holidays and are the holiest days in the Jewish year. Students should not feel that they have to go to class or take tests on these days; the University has a policy to help students make arrangements.

Sukkot – The word “Sukkot” means “booths;” during this festival, Jews are commanded to live in three-sided dwellings with roofs designed to see the stars. The building of a Sukkah (booth) commemorates the 40-year period during which the Jewish people wandered the desert and lived in similar temporary shelters. Sukkot is also a harvest festival. During the time spent in the Sukkah, Jews should shake the lulav (made up of a palm branch, two willow branches, and three myrtle branches tied together) and etrog (a citrus fruit that grows in Israel) and say a blessing signifying that God is everywhere. Work is not permitted on the first and second days of Sukkot, though the holiday lasts for seven days.

Simchat Torah – Following Sukkot, Simchat Torah is the day on which the annual cycle of Torah readings is completed. The Torah is read weekly; on Simchat Torah, the final portion is read and immediately followed by the first portion, beginning the cycle of readings again. Jews dance with the Torah scrolls. The holiday is a festive celebration during which work is not permitted.

Chanukah – One of the holidays that marks the survival of the Jewish people. Chanukah is not a major celebration in comparison with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But, it is a very family-oriented holiday, and it is important to create that environment for students during the holiday. Hillel can provide materials for Chanukah celebrations and can bring Chanukah programming to the residence halls.

Passover – Passover is an 8-day remembrance of the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt. It is a celebration of freedom, during which Jewish people do not eat bread or bread products. Jewish students can get kosher for Passover food at Hillel so that they can follow the food restrictions associated with the holiday.

Jewish Holiday Calendar

All Jewish holidays begin at sundown on the dates listed, and continue for at least 24 hours.

	2001-2002	2002-2003
Rosh Hashana	Sept. 17	Sept. 6
Yom Kippur	Sept. 26	Sept. 15
Sukkot	Oct. 1	Sept. 20
Simchat Torah	Oct. 9	Sept. 29
Chanukah	Dec. 9	Nov. 29
Passover	Mar. 27	Apr. 16

why is there a movement for Jewish Life on Campus?

The largest Jewish campus organization in the world, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life provides opportunities for Jewish students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network of over 500 regional centers, campus Foundations and Hillel student organizations. Hillel is working to provoke a renaissance of Jewish life.

Hillel's mission is to maximize the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews. Hillel actively seeks to engage uninvolved Jewish students on their own terms: to provide them with opportunities to do Jewish that are meaningful and appealing to them. Students are empowered to take responsibility for their Jewish identity, whether they wish to participate in a community service project, express themselves artistically, participate in a social event, engage in informal Jewish learning or attend religious services. Any student may participate in Hillel - no membership is required. Hillel is committed to a pluralistic vision of Judaism that embraces all movements.

Why is Hillel important to the Jewish community?

It is estimated that 80 percent of college-age Jews – approximately 400,000 individuals – attend some form of institution of higher education. The Jewish community believes that the college years offer the last opportunity to provide Jewish content to young people before they disperse to the working world. Most of these young people know little of their Jewish heritage. Hillel provides Jewish content at a time when young people are searching for meaning in their lives and are in danger of assimilating into the community around them.

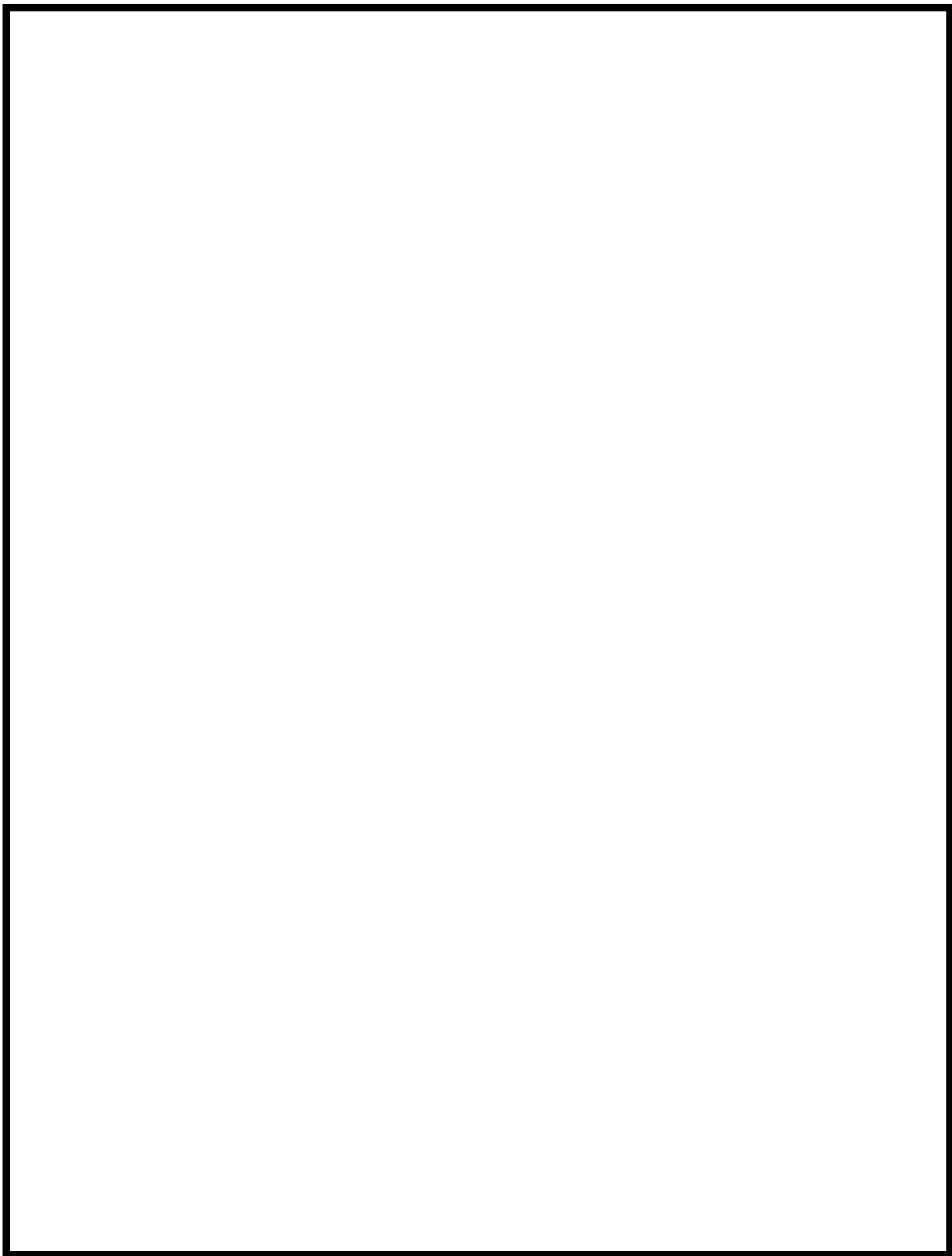
How is Hillel structured?

Hillel has granted Foundation status to 120 Foundations in the United States, Canada, Israel, Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa and the states of the former Soviet Union. Through a model of *interdependent self-sufficiency*, Hillel's international center and regional offices help local Foundations in the areas of development, human resources, fiscal administration, student programming and communications. Hillel ensures high operating standards through ongoing review, consultation and accreditation.

Who funds Hillel?

Founded at the University of Illinois in 1923, Hillel has been the central address for Jewish students on college campuses for over 75 years. Today, Hillel is supported by individual benefactors and foundations as well as by Jewish federations and international organizations. Since 1996, Hillel has raised over \$108 million in its six-year, \$200 million Campaign for Jewish Renaissance to strengthen Jewish life on campus locally and internationally.²

² www.hillel.org



Why Jewish Life in the Residence Halls?

- Programming aimed at Jewish students living in the residence halls helps to create community for Jewish students where they live. The environment that students find most comfortable—where their friends, their food, and their beds are—is enriched when religious, cultural, or spiritual elements are incorporated.
- For students who are not Jewish, cultural programming allows them to come face-to-face with holidays, foods, or people with whom they may never have come into contact before. Promoting cultural awareness in a student's living space works toward establishing cultural acceptance on a University-wide level.
- For the Jewish student who is looking for a way into a large university such as the U of I, Jewish programming in the residence halls can offer him or her an entry point. Friendships begin, confidence grows, and Jewish campus leaders result.

What Can Jewish Life Look Like in the Residence Halls?

Shabbat-to-go: Jewish Campus Service Corps fellows, recent college graduates who spend the year working on campus to bring Jewish life to students in out-of-the-box ways, will deliver dinner to a group of students in a residence hall on Friday night. The delivery includes a complete Shabbat celebration package—challah, candles, and grape juice—and can involve Jewish learning facilitated by the fellows.

Group walks to Hillel for Shabbat and High Holiday services: Students can sign up to walk with a group of Jewish students living in nearby residence halls to walk together to religious services at the Hillel House. One or two students from each residential area are selected to lead each group.

Chanukah study breaks: Chanukah often coincides with finals week. Serving mass quantities of latkes (potato pancakes) and jelly donuts, traditional Chanukah foods, to students living in the residence halls and giving them the chance to take a break from studying with a game of dreidel and an opportunity to light a menorah brings one of the more family-oriented Jewish holidays home.

Pre- and post-Passover pizza parties: To break the fast from bread after the eight days of Passover, students can throw a pizza party.

Jewish life doesn't always have to take a formal form. Learning about and discussing what it means to be a Jewish student—with other Jewish students or with non-Jewish students—is a great way to begin bringing Jewish life into residential life.

What it Means to be a Jewish Student at the U of I

Jewish students come to campus from different backgrounds. Sometimes Judaism is the central part of a student's life, sometimes it is peripheral. Some Jewish students are ready and willing to answer questions about Judaism and their Jewish lives, some are not and view being "Jewish all the time" as stifling. It is important to be measuring where students are at and to meet them there.

Some issues Jewish students may be thinking about:

- Should I go to class or not go to class on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?
- Should I go to Shabbat services?
- How can I go home so I can go to Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur/Shabbat services with my family?
- Do I want to hang out with other Jewish students? How can I meet them?
- Where can I get kosher food for Passover?
- What is going on in Israel and the Middle East? How does that affect me?
- I'm not really interested in being Jewish in college.
- I'm really interested in being Jewish in college.

Individual students may be thinking about more than one of these issues at a time, may go back and forth on their positions at different points during their time in college, or may not give thought to any of these issues. Knowing the resources that are available on campus for Jewish students is a part of knowing how to respond to students who are working to become comfortable with their Jewish identity.

Referring Jewish Students to Jewish Life on Campus Resources

Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellows: This year, the U of I has two Jewish professionals specifically focused on working with Jewish students where they're at on campus—in the residence halls, Greek houses, coffee shops, and the Union. JCSC Fellows are the most obvious “alternative” to traditional Jewish involvement on campus through Hillel; though we work with Hillel to provide programming and resources for Jewish students, we also understand how students might not feel comfortable with organized Jewish campus life.

Hillel: Hillel, the center for Jewish life at the U of I, works to create a warm and welcoming environment where students from all backgrounds can meet, explore and celebrate Jewish life. The Hillel building is in Champaign, on John Street across from Panera.

Kosher Food: Hillel houses a Chicago Rabbinical Council-certified kosher kitchen and serves kosher food five nights a week. Students can sign up for the meal plan by going to the Hillel website and clicking on the Kosher Food link.

Contact information: Hillel Foundation, 503 E. John Street, Champaign, IL 61820
344-1328
www.uofi-hillel.org

The Drobny Interdisciplinary Program in Jewish Culture and Society: The Drobny Program offers a minor in Jewish studies, a major through the Program for the Study of Religion, and graduate studies with a concentration in the study of Jewish Culture and Society. Classes in Hebrew and Yiddish are also offered through the program. These language classes can fulfill the University's language requirement.

Contact information: 109 English Building, Box 291, MC-718
608 S. Wright Street, Urbana, IL 61801
333-7978
www.english.uiuc.edu/jewishculture

Sinai Temple: Sinai Temple is a Reform congregation that belongs to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. It is the only synagogue in Champaign-Urbana. Its membership is composed of a variety of types of Jews.

Contact information: 3104 W. Windsor Road
Champaign, IL 61821
352-8140
www.shalomcu.org/sinai