

Maintaining the Link: Jewish Life at College

Like most college-bound students, graduating independent high school seniors search for schools that mesh with their lifestyles. For some, that involves campus opportunities that build on their home and school-based Jewish experiences.

This is especially true for many TCI alumni, who seek a vibrant Jewish college community. In fact, it is what often drives their college choices.

TCI alum Greg, a graduate of Cambridge School of Weston in Weston, Massachusetts, is a sophomore at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. It wasn't just the school's strong academic reputation and small size that impressed him; it was also the college's rich Jewish life opportunities.

"I would only attend a college where there was something of a Jewish community," explained Greg, who twice attended Jewbilee, TCI's signature conference for independent high school teens.

"There also had to be an organized Jewish student club" said Greg.

At Earlham, Greg joined the Jewish Student Organization, similar to the Cambridge Jewish Student Organization he established with TCI's guidance. Next year, he will move into the Jewish Culture House, a special campus housing offering.

Danielle is a 2006 graduate of Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts, where she was an active member in Keshet, a TCI-supported Jewish club.

Like Greg, Danielle considered campus Jewish community in her college search. "I definitely felt it was important to have some sort of Jewish community at my college," said Danielle. "[It] was a significant factor in my final decision," added Danielle.

Danielle heads off to Boston University's School of Management, where she will identify herself as Jewish to connect to other Jewish students. She plans to get involved with the university's Hillel.

Adam just graduated from Kew Forest School in Queens, New York, where he co-lead a TCI-facilitated, Jewish-themed community service club — spearheading TCI's service learning trip to New Orleans — and attended Jewbilee 2006.

Adam will attend the State University of New York, Buffalo, where he says he will likely frequent Hillel. And, of course, the campus' Jewish deli. He might even join a Jewish fraternity.

Adam chose Buffalo, in part, because many Jewish students from New York City study there. He noted that even if he does not get involved with campus Jewish activities, he will still have many Jewish friends, like he does now.

For Josh, Jewish life was a “major factor” in his choice to attend Cornell University, where he will be a freshman this fall. Josh recently graduated from Phillips Academy Andover in Andover, Massachusetts, where he headed the Jewish Student Union. He also helped plan Jewbilee 2006 as a member of a select student advisory committee member.

Josh chose Cornell not only because, as he says, “it has the best classics department,” as well as other outstanding qualities, but also because he valued its large Jewish student population and Jewish activities.

“Judaism has always been an important part of my life...and always will be,” Josh emphasized. “There is no way I could imagine my college experience without some sort of involvement in the Jewish community.”

Josh plans to join Hillel and some of its affiliate clubs. And even though he is not strictly kosher, he will occasionally eat at the kosher dining hall to meet other Jewish students.

The University of California at Santa Barbara immediately captured Stephanie’s attention. The 2006 graduate from Mercy High School in San Francisco, California said she “fell in love with the campus and the city.”

And, partly Mercy is an all-girls Catholic high school, Stephanie looked for a college with greater religious and cultural diversity, which included Jewish organizations and Judaic studies classes.

“My high school didn’t have a Jewish [student] club because there would not have been enough members,” explained Stephanie. “I knew that in college I would definitely join a Jewish organization,” she added.

Stephanie explained that TCI enlightened her about varied options for Jewish involvement in high school and college.

“Jewbilee was my eye opener!” exclaimed Stephanie. “Meeting other teens from different places, learning about their backgrounds, and attending workshops showed me all the possibilities for getting involved in Jewish life on campus and everyday life,” she emphasized.

Spurred by a mix of Jewish influences, including TCI-sponsored programs, these students have made solid decisions to extend their “Jewishness” to the college campus, where Jewish opportunities await them. Whatever the venue, their cultural connections will remain a stronghold among their new life experiences.