

University of Pennsylvania

The JLIC educators at the University of Pennsylvania are Rabbi Mordy and Limor Friedman.

Demographics:

There are at least 2,000 Jewish undergraduates at Penn, which is about 20% of the entire undergraduate population, and approximately 350 identify as Orthodox. About 250-300 students attend the weekly Orthodox Friday night minyan. Each class has about 30-40 students who spent a year of study in Israel so there are well over 100 students in the Orthodox Community at Penn (OCP) who spent a year in Israel prior to enrolling at Penn.

Kosher Food:

Penn offers a kosher meal plan as part of the university meal plan, and there is a kosher dining hall located in the Hillel building. The kosher dining hall serves lunch and dinner every day except on Sunday, when it is closed. In addition to the full service cafeteria, there are various packaged kosher goods such as fresh sandwiches available for sale in the kosher dining hall and in other locations and dining halls around campus. The dining hall has a Mashgiach Temidi and Kashrut supervision is provided by the Va'ad of Philadelphia.

Programming and Shiurim:

The OCP offers a wide variety of programs and services for Orthodox Jewish students at Penn and at neighboring schools. These include social events like the ever-popular Casino Night, wine & cheese tasting, murder mystery night, Jews on Ice (ice skating), dodge ball competition, Football league, Onegs, occasional Melaveh Malkas and Tisches and celebrations for Jewish Holidays.

The OCP also provides a number of educational opportunities. Many prominent rabbis and world-renown scholars come to the community as Scholars in Residence. In addition, the Bet Midrash for Women (BMW) brings in female scholars on a bi-weekly basis to learn with female students in an intimate setting.

The OCP Shiurim Committee ensures that Shiurim constantly take place at Penn. These include: Advanced Talmud, Hilchot Brachot, Hilchot Shabbat, Hilchot Niddah, Parshat Hashavua, Tanach – Shoftim, Literary approach to Sefer Tehillim, Mesilat Yesharim and Rav Hutner, Philosophy of Rav Kook, Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Sunday Mussar, Thursday night Mishmar.

The hallmark of OCP learning at Penn is its Sunday Night Learning (SNL) program in which over 120 students come together on Sunday night for dinner, and to learn for an hour of one-on-one Chavrutah study.

Orthodox Community:

There is a formalized community structure for the Orthodox students called the Orthodox Community at Penn (OCP), which is entirely student run. It is run by two elected co-chairs. Over 15 committees oversee various aspects of daily life, such as Shiurim, Tzedakah, hospitality, Divrei Torah, Chessed, and many more. Each committee has committee head and committee

members. There are also two carefully appointed Gabbaim who oversee the religious aspects of the community. To learn more about the OCP, visit www.pennocp.org.

Orthodox students at Penn live in many places all over campus. The largest concentration of Orthodox students is in High Rise North, or Rodin College House, which is directly across from the Hillel building and houses anywhere from 50-75 Orthodox students on the lower floors. Many upperclassmen live in houses off campus, and many freshmen live in mandated freshman housing all over campus (though mostly in the Quad and Hill House).

Penn Hillel has a large, fully-stocked Beit Midrash filled with thousands of Seforim. The Penn library also has a large collection of Jewish books, as does the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies which is in downtown Philadelphia and is one of Penn's affiliated libraries.

There are about 125 Orthodox graduate students on campus, and another 50 or so Orthodox grads or young professionals who live in downtown Philly or in the suburbs. There are several Orthodox communities within a twenty-minute car ride, but these communities generally do not offer programs or hospitality to undergraduate students. A handful of students run Bnei Akiva programs in the Lower Merion community.

At Hillel, there are two Shacharit Minyanim and two Mincha Minyanim. Depending on the time of year, there are either two or three Maariv minyaim, one of which takes place in High Rise North. Minyanim are always available on Shabbat and holidays. Depending on the week there may be a Sefardi Minyan option as well, and the main Minyan has a Cerlebach-style service once a month. On occasion, there have been women's Kabbalat Shabbat services.

Shabbat at Penn:

There are three different types of Shabbat services offered on Friday night, and about 250 students attend the Orthodox service. Several hundred students eat together Friday night at Hillel, and many some students make private meals as well. Once a month Penn Hillel has a program called PHridays that brings 400+ students together to eat in the kosher dining hall. On Friday night there is occasionally an Oneg or Tisch.

There are numerous education and social opportunities that occur on Shabbat for Orthodox students. Students give Divrei Torah on Friday night and on Shabbat morning, and a graduate student gives a short Sefer Hachinuch Shiur following services Shabbat morning.

Following morning services there is a community wide Kiddush, and Seudah Shlishit is intercommunal as well. Students sing slow Shira and one of the students gives a Dvar Torah. There are often special speakers, guest lecturers, learning opportunities and scholars in residence on Shabbat.

There is an Eruv that extends over the entire university and hospital area.

Additional Resources:

Since JLIC has arrived at Penn, the community has continued to grow both in numbers and in strength as a social and learning community.

The Jewish Studies major and minor is popular among many Jewish students.

“The Orthodox Community at Penn (OCP) has played an enormous role in shaping my college experience. Over the past four years, I found amazing friends, inspiring role models, and a multitude of ways to be involved with chessed, leadership, and learning within the community. The OCP offers students all the resources that they need to grow as individuals and community members, and an environment that encourages students to take advantage of the wide-range of opportunities offered through the greater Hillel community as well.”

--Shalhevet Roth, '08 and former OCP co-chair

"Over the course of my time at Penn, I've seen a number of my friends become more religious. Kids who never before had a serious Jewish education began to show up to minyan every day, come to gemara shiur, and study in yeshiva over the summer. I think that much of this has to do with the fact that at Penn, students are exposed to a vibrant and welcoming Orthodox community, one which makes living as an Orthodox Jew both stimulating and accessible."

--Joe Scherban, '08 and former gabbai