



## Admissions 101: Unexpected Suitors

Today, a great number of little-known colleges and universities are interested in increasing the number of Jewish students on campus as part of their commitment to wider diversity. In addition, many of them support their Jewish students in campus programming, providing Jewish Studies courses, offering kosher eating plans, and actively engaging in Jewish student recruitment. Here's what you need to know about some schools you may not have considered.

### Why would colleges encourage Jewish applicants?

The strong emphasis that Jewish tradition places on education is appreciated by many college admissions officers. Greg Zaiser, dean of Admissions at *Elon University* in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, told me in a telephone interview that "Jewish students seem to have a high propensity for success in college." Gordon Gee, the former chancellor at *Vanderbilt University* in Nashville, Tennessee, said in a 2002 *Wall Street Journal* interview that the school wanted to "boost Vanderbilt's status and academic rankings..." And Lou Hirsh, director of admissions at the *University of Delaware*, wrote to me: "A Jewish applicant who has a significant leadership position in Jewish organizations is going to have an edge."

### Are smaller colleges demonstrating particular interest in Jewish applicants and/or students on campus?

Yes. Here are four possibilities.

At *Allegheny College* in Meadville, Pennsylvania, Hillel advisor Yana Geyfman is also an admissions officer



SEDER AT ALLEGHENY COLLEGE HILLEL, MEADVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, 2008.

who visits high schools and fairs where a great number of Jewish students are in attendance. On campus, Rabbi Ron Bernstein-Goff from West Virginia teaches three courses and holds office hours. And well over 100 students attended the Passover seder this year.

*Oglethorpe University* in Atlanta has made a change in direction. No organized religious activities—either Christian or Jewish—existed on campus when President Lawrence Schall arrived in 2005. Soon thereafter, Jewish high school senior Nathaniel Goldman told him that he was considering the school but was concerned about its paucity of Jewish life. Dr. Schall responded by encouraging him to come to Oglethorpe and start a Jewish student union. Goldman did just that, as the college president discovered when he ran into the freshman holding several "Come to a Meeting September 6" signs under his arm. Today the Jewish group is very visible on campus, sponsoring Shabbat dinners, a "Break Fast" at the end of Yom Kippur, and many more activities.

While *Elon University* is affiliated with United Church of Christ, it has a

growing Jewish student population because it is actively promoting diversity in faith within its student body. A new brochure touts Jewish life at *Elon*, *Elon's* website links to Hillel, and a part-time rabbi is on staff. Parents are very active and make direct contact with Jewish students. And last year, *Elon* participated in the college fair for Jewish families in the D.C. area.

And *Muhlenberg*

*College* in Allentown, Pennsylvania, affiliated with the Lutheran Church, has a long history of being welcoming to and enrolling significant numbers of Jewish students. A few years ago, the Hillel director, Patti Mittleman, was named "National Hillel Director of the Year." With her input, *Muhlenberg* schedules its fall break around Yom Kippur.

### How can I find out about other colleges that are supportive to Jewish students?

Check out this magazine's chart of schools Jews choose (pp. 44-45). Click on the links colleges provide to Jewish activities, services, dining options on campus. Search the Hillel website ([www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org)). Email the admissions office with additional questions. And when you're on campus, ask yourself: Would a Jewish student be comfortable here?

—*Claire D. Friedlander, college consultant to Jewish Family Service in the greater Stamford and Westport areas of Connecticut and Jewish Family Services of Greenwich, and former vice president of Temple Sinai in Stamford*