



INSIDER'S GUIDE TO COLLEGE LIFE CAMPUS LIFE

Campus Life 204: My Jewish Brothers

Since the founding of the first Jewish fraternity in 1903 (Zeta Beta Tau), generations of students have participated in Jewish fraternity life. Here's what today's generation has to say about the experience.

Why join a Jewish fraternity?

Lee Solomon (senior, Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity, University of Chicago): "Some guys see it as an extension of their high school Jewish youth groups like NFTY, BBYO, or USY. Others see it as an opportunity to learn more about a heritage they never had a chance to explore before through the lens of brotherhood. A large number of the guys in my chapter only have one Jewish parent and didn't have a bar mitzvah."

Jordan Blimbaum (junior, Sigma Alpha Mu Fraternity, Ohio State): "Coming into college, many students try to find a place where they feel comfortable, and, being a member of BBYO in high school, I felt most comfortable surrounding myself with other Jews. Also, when one first comes to college there is a strong need for a sense of religious identity. Fraternities help to supply that sense of identity, and for Jewish students, it is even stronger within the Jewish frats."

In general, how do Jewish fraternity chapters differ from one another?

Lee Solomon: "In Alpha Epsilon Pi, we expect each chapter and each individual member to affirm a commitment to Jewish life. The actual content of this Jewish life varies from chapter to chapter and member to member. Some chapters engage in Israel activism and Holocaust awareness. Some chapters organize Shabbat dinners and cultural performances. Everyone is encouraged to experiment, to find out which Jewish activi-



SIGMA ALPHA MU BROTHERS JEFF NATTER, A.J. BOLDER, AARON BERKENWALD, AND STEVE LEFF AT THE WESTERN WALL.

ties are most relevant to his own personal Jewish journey."

David Safier (senior, Sigma Alpha Mu Fraternity, Ohio State): "In my opinion, there are two different types of Jewish fraternities: those in which the members are looking for a Greek experience with other Jews or those looking for a Jewish experience through the Greek system. Students without a strong Jewish connection are likely to join for the Greek experience and those students with a significant Jewish connection are likely to use the Greek system to enhance their religious experience. Many campuses have chapters that are historically Jewish but currently lack a significant religious presence; other chapters emphasize Jewish customs and holidays throughout the year. Similarly, some fraternities are actively involved in Jewish campus organizations such as Hillel; others may attend Jewish events, but be less Jewishly involved. The key is for each individual person to identify how important religion is on a daily basis and then find a Jewish fraternity that's right for him."

What's the best part of being part of a Jewish frat?

Ben Shamis (senior, Zeta Beta Tau Fraternity, Indiana University): "How easy it is to make friends. Most of the men who join Jewish fraternities have similar interests and values, making it very easy for everyone to get along."

Josh Nason (senior, AEPi, Cornell): "As a Texan, being part of a Jewish fraternity has helped me to see the connection among Jews from all over. I never felt like an outsider on campus because the fraternity experience gave me a sense of a community. And once I found my niche, the big campus seemed a lot smaller."

Jared Kramer (junior, AEPi, Georgetown University): "It's having a strong sense of brotherhood. The bond I have with my Jewish brothers is so much stronger than what I have found in any other organization or club on campus because it involves everything from a place to live and parties to philanthropy and Jewish programming. Our focus isn't just on the here-and-now success of our fraternity, but the establishment of a cultural footprint, carrying on our integral traditions to future classes of Jewish students at Georgetown."

How has being a frat member influenced your Jewish identity?

Josh Nason: "It's given me confidence in the ability of the Jewish people to come together. In AEPi we have Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and unaffiliated Jews. We also have students who practically live at Hillel and students who stay away from Hillel. This is in stark contrast to our home Jewish communities, where a person typically sees his Judaism through the lens of his synagogue."

Evan Slaton (senior, AEPi, Ohio State)
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