A Profile of
Hillel Leaders

B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations
National Hillel Leaders Assembly Survey

A Joint Project of
B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations
Center for Campus Study
and the
Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University

Prof. Lawrence Sternberg, Associate Director
Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

Preface by
Richard M. Joel, International Director
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Research Report 4
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Acknowledgments

This project originated in a conversation between Dr. Gary Tobin, the Cohen Center’s Director, and Tom Neumann, the Executive Vice President of B’nai B’rith International. Members of the Cohen Center staff had long been interested in conducting research on college age Jews, and the dialogue resulted in our contacting Richard Joel, B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations International Director.

This Report is the product of a true collaboration between the staffs of the Cohen Center and B’nai B’rith Hillel’s National Center. From the initial meeting with the Cohen Center staff in May 1989, through the completion of the draft of this Report, Richard Joel has been an enthusiastic supporter, contributing his insights and articulating his and Hillel’s interests and concerns. Members of both staffs reviewed the initial drafts of the questionnaire and of the final Report and generously shared their comments.

Special thanks are due to several individuals who played prominent roles in this project. Dr. Ruth Cernea was responsible for coordinating the construction of the questionnaire with others at the Hillel National Center, and, along with her colleagues, read and commented on the final draft of the Report. Gabriel Berger, research fellow at the Cohen Center, was responsible for the final construction of the questionnaire and, as always, provided valuable comments on the final draft. Rabbi Richard J. Israel, and Drs. Sylvia Barack Fishman and Mordechai Rimor added their insights to the questionnaire as well.

Dr. Mordechai Rimor, research associate at the Cohen Center, supervised the data entry and was responsible for programming
and running the data. Finally, Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman, senior research associate at the Cohen Center, not only provided her excellent editorial skills, but also supervised the publication of the Report. Guy Farber did a splendid job of formatting the manuscript in \LaTeX at the Feldberg Computer Center at Brandeis University.

While all of these colleagues provided invaluable services, the author assumes sole responsibility for the final Report.

On a personal note, my interest in studying leaders has been influenced in no small part by my parents, Jo and Jerry Sternberg, who exemplify the variety of backgrounds leaders possess and the different styles of effective leadership. I also want to thank my wife, Sara, for her interest in all my work at Brandeis; she provides support and critical perspective to my efforts. Our daughter, Ariel, provides a different kind of perspective, watching her learn and grow as a Jew and as a human being is truly wondrous.

L.S.

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Preface

With this study, the B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations has inaugurated a comprehensive program of research about Jewish campus life. As a cooperative undertaking of Hillel’s Center for Campus Study and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, this on-going research will have important implications not only for Hillel and its campus constituency but also for the entire Jewish community in America.

Students on campuses today are the Jewish community of America tomorrow. Who they are, what they think, and how they value their heritage will determine the direction of Jewish society in the years to come. Through its network of hundreds of professionals and volunteers, Hillel provides Jewish fellowship and enriches Jewish identity during these crucial, exploratory college years. These studies will enable Hillel to understand and better serve the campus community—not only the Jewish campus activists, who were the focus of the present study, but also the broader, less visible, Jewish campus population.

As indicated by this first study, research will raise fundamental questions about community priorities and strategies. The campus is often seen as a way station between parental and professional demands, but young people return to the “real world” soon enough, carrying with them their accumulated experience of Judaism. This study of campus activists is replete with details about critical, formative experiences that made Jewishness a valued and beautiful way of life and exciting way of seeing the world.

How different are these Jewish “leaders” from the “non-leaders”
on campus? How may the community prepare young people so that they come to college with a rich understanding of their heritage and an excitement about being Jewish? What are the best ways for Hillel and for local communities to shape young Jewish lives with joy and understanding, to foster commitment and leadership? How can the community continue the involvement of Jewish campus activists, and reach out to those who prefer to be quietly—but indelibly—Jewish? These are vital and continuing questions, which must be revised and rethought with each generation and in response to changing political and social events. This research is a promising start.

Richard M. Joel
International Director
B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

In August, 1989, a survey of 91 leaders of Hillel Foundations nationwide was conducted by Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies together with B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations’ Center for Campus Study. The study was undertaken to provide a profile of Hillel leadership and to begin an assessment of the clientele which Hillel serves. The survey was conducted as part of a week-long Hillel National Leaders Assembly, attended by students at the invitation of their local Hillel Directors or other Hillel professional staff. The students were asked to complete the survey on the first day of the Assembly.

The Sample

The 91 students came from 48 different campuses, most of which are located in the Northeastern United States (from Washington, D.C., northward); 14 students represented six West Coast universities; five students represented four universities in the South; 16 students represented nine Midwestern universities; and 14 students represented seven Ivy League universities. About half (49%) of the students were enrolled in private universities, and a similar percentage (47%) were enrolled in public universities. Forty-five percent of the respondents were entering their senior year, 26% were entering their junior year, and 28% were entering their sophomore year of college. Forty-four percent of the leaders were male, and 56% were female.

The students came from diverse Jewish communities in the United States and elsewhere. Forty-seven percent of the
students indicated that their “home” communities—the communities in which they lived before they began their college careers—were in the Northeastern United States: one-fifth were from New York State, 13% from New Jersey, 13% from Pennsylvania, and one percent from Massachusetts. Nineteen percent of the students came from Western states: mostly from California, with one percent from both Washington State and Hawaii. Thirteen percent of the students were from Midwestern states: mostly from Ohio and Michigan, with a few from Missouri and Illinois. Eleven percent of the students were from Southern states: most were from Florida, with others from Texas, Tennessee and Virginia. Another three students were from outside the United States—from Israel, France and Canada.

We must acknowledge that this was a self-selected sample: we are studying a particular group of young Jewish leaders who share in common their attendance at the Hillel Leaders Assembly. These were likely to be highly involved, committed individuals. We are not, therefore, making a claim that these leaders in any way represent Jewish college youth as a whole. On the contrary, as we will argue, it is likely that these leaders differ in significant ways from the “average” Jewish college student. Making generalizations about all Hillel leaders based on our sample is also problematic. We cannot be certain that our sample of Hillel leaders is representative of Hillel leaders as a group. We did not, after all, take a random sample of all Hillel leaders nationwide. However, based on reactions to presentations of the data to Hillel professional staff, we believe that the trends we identify in the report are consistent with the overall profile of Hillel leaders. Still, in order to be precise, when we use the term “Hillel leaders,” we are referring specifically to those students who were part of our sample.

The Survey Instrument

The survey was constructed to elicit information concerning the Jewish background of the respondents, as well as their current interests and levels of involvement in Hillel and other campus organizations. The questionnaire was designed to assist in identifying experiences and attitudes which Hillel leaders share in common. Such information increases our understanding of the processes responsible for their involvement in Hillel. It also clarifies the nature of other involvements which may either complement or compete with Hillel involvement.

The questionnaire utilized questions about the respondents’ Jewish backgrounds, including: levels of religious observance in their parental homes, whether their parents were members of a board of directors of a synagogue or other Jewish organization, respondents’ experiences in formal Jewish educational settings, their attendance at Jewish summer camps, their level of activity in Jewish youth groups, and how many times they had visited Israel. In addition, the survey contained information concerning the respondents’ Jewish identity, including: denominational identification, current levels of religious observance, Jewish friendship patterns, experiences with and attitudes toward interdating and intermarriage, voluntary and philanthropic behavior, levels of attachment to Israel, attitudes toward aliyah (immigration to Israel), perceptions of and experiences with anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment on campus, political identification, and voting behavior.

The survey contained a battery of questions regarding Hillel, and the importance the leaders attach to various programmatic elements of Hillel. They were also asked what types of programs they thought would be of most interest to other college
students who were not Hillel leaders or activists. To put some of these responses into context, the students were asked how important they felt various issues were for the organized Jewish community.

Jewish Involvement

Overall, the data indicate that these Hillel leaders are intensely involved in Jewish life. As previous research on Jewish leadership groups has shown⁴, Jewish leaders tend to maintain higher than average levels of religious observance than Jews generally. Although among other Jewish leadership groups the extent of this exceptionalism may be limited to ritual behavior, volunteerism and philanthropy, the Hillel leaders possess a combination of Jewish background and current involvement which clearly extends into all of the conventional measures of Jewish identity, including denominational identification, levels of Jewish education, previous involvement in informal Jewish educational settings, Jewish friendship patterns, levels of attachment to Israel, and interest in aliyah.

Jewish Background

One of the most impressive findings of our research has been the extent to which Hillel leaders share common background characteristics. For instance, while parents of these Hillel leaders come from a variety of denominational backgrounds⁵ (12% Orthodox, 41% Conservative, and 33% Reform), 90% belonged to synagogues, and 50% of the leaders indicated that their parents had served as members of a board of directors of a synagogue or Jewish organization. Patterns of religious observance in the homes of their parents were also fuller than those of the “average” American Jewish household (see Figure 1): for example, in 60% of the households Shabbat candles were always or usually lit, and 43% reported that the household in which they were raised was always or usually kosher—percentages significantly higher than the average.

Figure 1

Religious Observance in Leaders’ Parental Homes
Percentages Responding Always and Usually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light Shabbat candles</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passover seder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Jewish</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holiday celebrations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Shabbat</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t drive/ride on Shabbat</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep kosher</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Always          Usually
The Hillel student leaders come from homes which are exceptional in their levels of religious observance. However, their behaviors and attitudes were also influenced by the Jewish educational and organizational environments in which they were socialized. These experiences include formal Jewish education, youth group involvement, and summer camps. Ninety-five percent of the leaders received some type of formal Jewish education. While two-thirds received this education in afternoon schools, 36% had some part of their Jewish schooling in a day school, and 23% spent six years or more in day school. Eighty percent of the leaders attended Jewish summer camp at some point in their lives, 55% attended Jewish summer camps for three years or more, and 32% attended them six years or more. These leaders were also the products of Jewish youth groups: 85% of them participated in Jewish youth groups in high school, and 60% were officers of Jewish youth groups. Among these leaders, 70% attended Jewish summer camp and participated in Jewish youth groups; only five percent had neither experience (see Figure 2).

### Jewish Identity

These Hillel leaders as a group are the end result of what we call a leadership track, that is, they are the products of not only home environments which have educated them, but also of formal and informal Jewish educational experiences. Their continued involvement in Jewish life as college students—a time when many choose not to be involved Jewishly—cannot be seen in isolation from their previous Jewish experiences. This does not mean that other college age students who have similar backgrounds are just as likely to be active in Hillel; it suggests rather that those who are most active in Hillel are often the product of these experiences. Since many Jewish youth have such experiences, one question for future research is why some college students continue active Jewish involvement through Hillel while others do not.

The Hillel leaders are a highly identified group of Jews. There are many ways in which to measure Jewish identity. These leaders are exceptional on a host of measures, including: denominational identification, levels of Jewish observance, volunteer activity for Jewish causes, continuing their formal Jewish education in college, and intention to continue to serve as leaders in the Jewish community.

### Religious Identity and Commitment to Jewish Education

The leaders tend to be traditional in their levels of religious observances, when compared to Jews as a group, or even other groups of Jewish leaders. For example, 35% attended religious services weekly or more, another 22% attended services several times a month, and 13% attended about once a month—totaling 70% who attended religious services monthly or more.
(see Figure 3). One-third of the leaders indicated that they always kept kosher (another 18% indicated they usually kept kosher), and 15% never drove on Shabbat. With the exception of lighting Shabbat candles, their levels of observance are consistently greater than levels in their homes during their childhood. These are extraordinary levels of religious observance, especially among college age students.

![Figure 3](image)

**Leaders' Religious Observances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observance</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light Shabbat candles</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a Passover seder</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Jewish holiday celebrations</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Shabbat dinner</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't drive/ride on Shabbat</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep kosher</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jewish Identity**

The continued commitment to Jewish education among these leaders is also noteworthy. General surveys of Jewish populations indicate that continued formal Jewish education among adults is relatively rare: about five percent of adults (those over the age of 18) are engaged in some form of adult Jewish education. Forty-six percent of Hillel leaders have taken college courses in Jewish studies for credit, 39% of whom had taken three or more courses. Since 45% of the student leaders were entering seniors, and more than half of the students had two or more years left to take courses, we can safely assume that the figures are an indication of the great interest among this group in continuing their Jewish education.

**Volunteerism, Philanthropy and Future Leadership**

The level of leaders’ involvement in Hillel, based on the amount of time volunteered to Hillel, is rather extraordinary. Some will argue that students have a great deal of time, and that we should not be terribly impressed with the fact that over 50% volunteered more than 10 hours a week for Hillel (see Table 1). However, as we will show, most of these leaders work for pay during the academic year, and most also volunteer time for other organizations and causes, Jewish and non-Jewish. Therefore, we ought to take the level of volunteer activity among these leaders as a sign of their high level of commitment to Hillel and as yet another indication of a strong sense of Jewish identity.

In addition to their involvement in Hillel, more than two-thirds (69%) of the leaders volunteered time for Jewish causes other than Hillel. Among all Hillel leaders, 30% spent four hours or less, 20% spent between five and nine hours, and 11% spent 10 or more hours a week volunteering for these Jewish causes (see Table 1). Among non-Hillel Jewish involvements, activity...
on behalf of Soviet Jewry was the most popular cause among Hillel leaders: 34% indicated they were active in this area. Students were involved in a host of other areas, including Israel groups, AIPAC, Jewish newspapers, Jewish cultural and political groups, as well as activities within denominational groups and chavurot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteering for:</th>
<th>Number of hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillel</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Jewish causes</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hillel leaders did not limit their activities to specifically Jewish causes. Fifteen percent were involved in fraternities or sororities, 14% of the leaders were in student government, 14% participated in campus sports, 11% served on the campus newspaper, 12% were dorm leaders, and 13% were involved in political activities or causes which were not specifically Jewish.

Philanthropy is another means of measuring Jewish involvement. While students may not be capable of giving large sums of money to Jewish causes, their participation as donors to Jewish causes is an important sign of their commitment to the community. Overall 63% of the leaders donated money to UJA in 1988-89, and 27% indicated they served as UJA campus volunteers. Fifty-seven percent donated money to other Jewish causes during 1988-89 and 59% donated to non-Jewish causes during 1988-89.

The great majority of student leaders expressed an interest in being active in the Jewish community in the future; many also indicated an interest in a career in the field of Jewish communal service. Seventy-six percent of the leaders indicated they would be interested in serving on a board of directors of a Jewish organization in 20 years, 22% indicated they were not sure and only two percent indicated they were not interested. Sixteen percent of the leaders indicated an interest in a career in the rabbinate, Jewish education, Jewish communal service, or Jewish studies. More were interested in the Jewish communal field than any other career.

**Employment**

As we have seen, most of the student leaders volunteered a substantial number of hours for Hillel and other causes. However, almost two-thirds (64%) of the Hillel leaders worked for pay while attending classes at college. Among those who were employed, the number of hours varies considerably: about 30% worked nine hours or less a week, 21% worked 10 hours a week, 19% worked between 11-19 hours a week, and 30% worked 20 hours a week and more. Hillel Foundations across the country must therefore acknowledge that both employment and volunteerism affect the discretionary time students have and both are likely to have an impact on the number of hours student leaders can give to Hillel.

Jewish college students have often been used as resources by the Jewish communities in which they attend university. Local Bureaus of Jewish Education generally network with Hillel Foundations to identify talented teachers for Jewish schools, and synagogues and Jewish youth organizations often search
for Jewish role models to serve as youth group advisers or as counselors for Jewish summer camps. It is therefore instructive for us to examine the extent to which the Hillel leaders are employed within the Jewish community while they are students, and whether they tend to serve in teaching and other capacities within the Jewish community. Among student leaders who worked for pay, 48% either taught Hebrew or Sunday school or served as an adviser of a Jewish youth group. Almost three-quarters (73%) of the student leaders worked during the summer as well, 35% of whom combined working with summer school or travel or both. About three in five (59%) leaders have served as staff members in Jewish summer camps. Prior to coming to college half of the leaders had served as staff at Jewish summer camps, while 37% had served as staff members since coming to college.

Israel

Israel is a central component of the Jewish identity of Hillel leaders. Ninety-one percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Caring about Israel is a very important part of being a Jew." Seventy-nine percent indicated that they were either extremely or very attached to Israel, and 51% indicated that they would consider making aliyah.

While American Jewish travel to Israel has greatly increased in the past twenty years, the level of Israel experience among Hillel leaders is truly extraordinary. About three in four (73%) of the leaders have visited Israel and 97% indicated that they plan to go to Israel at some time in the future. Of those who have visited, 50% have been to Israel more than once. Among those who have not visited, 63% indicate that their reasons for not visiting have been financial. Only one individual indicated no interest in visiting Israel.

One of the more surprising findings from the survey is in exploring the relationship between visiting Israel and Jewish identity. As Table 2 illustrates, those who have visited Israel showed markedly greater levels of attachment to Israel. A separate study of this phenomenon, prepared for a Conference at Harvard University, concluded that, after controlling for the effects of other variables (including Jewish background and self-identification) visiting Israel accounted for more than 25% of the variance in levels of attachment to the Jewish State. The study also showed that visiting Israel was related to increases in other indices of Jewish identity among Hillel leaders. Those who had visited Israel were likely to have greater levels of religious observance, volunteered more time to Hillel, and were more likely to have donated money to Jewish causes other than UJA than leaders who had not visited Israel. These behaviors were significantly related to visiting Israel even after controlling for other background variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Visiting Israel and Levels of Attachment to Israel Percentages Among Visitors and Non-visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel Visits</td>
<td>Extremely Attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have visited</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not visited</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings suggest that Israel plays an important role not only in supporting that component of Jewish identity which is measured in levels of attachment to Israel, but also in areas of religious and civil (volunteering time and donating money) Judaism which may seem distant from the effects of a visit to Israel. One of the key themes of the Harvard Conference was the importance of outlets for continued involvement in the Jewish community after a visit to Israel. Hillel thus serves a critical role in providing an important avenue for involvement among college age students.

Friendship Patterns, Interdating and Intermarriage

Most Jews, even those under the age of 35, associate closely with other Jews. What might be called “clannishness” by some is offered by others as a healthy sign of ethnic identity. More than half (55%) of the leaders indicated that all of their three best friends were Jewish. Twenty-seven percent indicated that two of their three best friends were Jewish, 11% indicated that one of their three best friends was Jewish, and four percent indicated that none of their best friends was Jewish.

The tendency to have mostly Jewish best friends does not exclude an openness to friendships with non-Jews. In fact, almost three in five Hillel leaders (59%) reported that they had dated non-Jews. More than half of those who had dated non-Jews indicated they rarely did so. However, overall we must face the reality that, among a group of highly committed young Jewish leaders, one in four either sometimes or often dated a non-Jew.

Here we face what appears to be a contradiction. When asked, “How important is it to you that you marry a Jewish person?” 93% of the Hillel leaders responded “very important,” five percent responded “moderately important,” and one percent answered “somewhat important.” Not a single leader answered “not at all important.” Similarly, 96% of the leaders indicated that it is “very important” for their children to be raised as Jews. There are several possible explanations for the apparent contradiction between their attitudes toward intermarriage and their patterns of interdating. The first is that at this point in their lives the leaders do not believe that dating necessarily leads to marriage. The second is that while dating may lead to marriage, there is no compelling reason to pre-judge a potential mate based on his or her religion. Judaism will remain important to the respondent and should the problem of intermarriage arise, it will be resolved either through conversion, or failing that, the respondent will take responsibility for raising his/her children as Jews. Finally, it is possible that what we see here is a typical inconsistency between a behavior, interdating, and attitudes toward intermarriage. Such gaps between attitudes and behaviors are found frequently by social psychologists.

These tentative explanations, however, do not address whether and how Hillel professionals ought to assist these leaders in thinking about interdating and intermarriage. More research on this important issue is needed to explore how the leaders and other college age students have and would respond to programmatic initiatives in this area.
Importance of Various Types of Programs for Hillel Participation

The leaders were asked how important various types of programming were in their own participation in Hillel, in the participation of other students who are active in Hillel and for those Jewish students who do not participate actively in Hillel. Their responses to this set of questions are indicative of the diversity of programs which attract them to Hillel and their perceptions that for other students—both those who are active in Hillel and those who are not involved—social programming is primary.

Two-thirds of the leaders indicated that social programs were very important, and about three in five indicated that cultural events and political and social action programming were very important to them (see Table 3). It is interesting to note that while 70% of the leaders attended religious services monthly or more, only 52% indicated that religious services were very important to them. “Hanging out”—informal socializing—was very important to 47% of the leaders. Relatively few, 29%, felt that Jewish studies courses were very important in their own participation in Hillel. This may appear puzzling, since the Jewish identity level of these leaders is very high. However, as we indicated, nearly half of the leaders have taken Jewish studies courses for college credit. Only 26% have taken Jewish studies courses sponsored by Hillel. Thus we might say that since many leaders pursued Jewish studies outside Hillel, they indicated that this type of programming within Hillel is not very important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Importance of Various Types of Programs to Hillel Leaders, Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Program</td>
<td>Degree of Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish studies courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political &amp; social action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The leaders' perceptions of the importance which others attach to various types of programming cannot substitute for information from other Hillel activists or those who do not utilize Hillel. However, these perceptions do give us some insight into how leaders see the constituency which Hillel serves. It is therefore interesting to note that in one area, social programming, there is great consonance. In each case the leaders indicated that of all the program areas, social events were most important. Three out of four of the leaders indicated that they believe social programs were very important for others who are active in Hillel, and more than one-third (36%) indicated that they thought social programs were very important to those who do not participate in Hillel (see Tables 4 and 5). The category “hanging out,” which is most related to social programming, was also seen by the leaders to be more important—both for others who are active and for those who do not participate actively—than other areas of formal programming.
Table 4
Hillel Leaders' Perceptions of Importance of Programs to Most Jewish Students Who Actively Participate in Hillel, Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish studies courses</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political &amp; social action</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious services</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5
Hillel Leaders' Perceptions of Importance of Programs to Jewish Students Who Do Not Participate Actively in Hillel, Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish studies courses</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political &amp; social action</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social events</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israel Sentiment

Hillel leaders tend to see greater levels of both anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment in American society-at-large than on their own campuses. One-third of the leaders (34%) believed that there is a great deal of anti-Semitism in the United States, compared to only one in ten (9%) who thought there was a great deal of anti-Semitism on their campus (see Figure 4). More than half (54%) believed there is a moderate amount of anti-Semitism in the United States, while slightly more than one-third (37%) indicated there was a moderate amount on their own campus. Thus, for Hillel leaders overall the campus harbors less anti-Semitism than the society as a whole. This result ought not to surprise us, since most data indicate that, with few exceptions, increased education results in less prejudice and anti-Semitism.

Figure 4
Leaders' Perceptions of Anti-Semitism in the United States and on Campus

- A great deal: 34%
- A moderate amount: 54%
- A little: 45%
- None: 0%

In the U.S. vs. On Campus
The leaders perceived that anti-Semitism is more prevalent in the society than on campus despite the fact that more than half (54%) of the leaders reported experiencing anti-Semitism on campus. Among the leaders who experienced anti-Semitism, the types of incidents they reported fall into the following categories: 42% reported either verbal abuse or graffiti, 23% reported reading anti-Semitic attacks either in the campus newspaper or in other literature distributed on campus, eight percent reported a visit of Louis Farrakhan to their campuses, another eight percent attributed the anti-Semitism to misunderstandings, six percent reported JAP-baiting incidents and six percent reported anti-Zionist events as forms of anti-Semitism, four percent indicated hidden or subtle anti-Semitism, and two percent witnessed vandalism to a Jewish institution on campus.

The leaders also thought that anti-Israel sentiment is less prevalent on campus than it is in the society-at-large. Thus, twice as many leaders believed that there is a great deal of anti-Israel sentiment in the United States as those who believed there is a great anti-Israel sentiment on their own campus 42% to 21% (see Figure 5). About four in ten (39%) thought there is a moderate amount of anti-Israel sentiment in the United States compared to slightly less than half (47%) who believed there is a moderate amount of anti-Israel sentiment on campus.

The leaders' perceptions seem at odds with the commonly held belief among Jews that campuses are hotbeds of anti-Israel activity. Again, most (54%) leaders had personal experiences with anti-Israel events on campus. As was the case with perceptions of anti-Semitism on campus, personal experiences with anti-Israel events did not lead to an assessment that a great deal of anti-Israel sentiment existed on campus. Thus, we may say that while there is in fact anti-Israel activity on campus, Hillel leaders did not believe this reflects widespread anti-Israel sentiment on campus.

Among those leaders who reported experiencing anti-Israel events or demonstrations on campus about half (52%) cited PLO activity, 13% indicated that the campus newspaper contained anti-Israel viewpoints, others indicated various types of anti-Israel events, including films and speakers.
Political Profile and Voting

The Hillel leaders were asked a series of questions regarding their political identity and activity. The proportion of leaders who thought of themselves as Democrats (59%) is similar to the proportion among Jewish population as a whole. However, the proportion of those who identified with the Republican party is greater among the Hillel leaders than among Jews generally—24% of the leaders thought of themselves as Republicans compared to 14% of Jews surveyed in the 1988 National Survey of American Jews—while only 15% of Hillel leaders identified themselves as Independents, compared to one in four Jews nationally who are Independents.

It is interesting to note that while the Hillel leaders identified with the Democratic party at about the same rate as the Jewish population at large, they were more likely to identify themselves as liberal than Jews generally. Fifty-three percent of the Hillel leaders indicated they considered themselves liberal, compared to only 29% of Jews in national surveys; one-quarter of the Hillel leaders consider themselves middle-of-the-road, compared to 46% of Jews; 15% of the leaders considered themselves conservative, compared to one-fifth of Jews nationwide.

Four-fifths (81%) of the Hillel leaders reported they had registered to vote, and three-quarters (77%) indicated they had voted in the 1988 Presidential election. Compared to Americans generally, this is a very high level of political participation. However, for a group as involved in Jewish life as these leaders are to have one in five not participate in electoral politics is a cause for concern. This area merits more attention among Hillel professionals and the Jewish community generally. There have been reports of a drop in voter turnout among Jews.

Conclusion

Not only should we be encouraging our campus leaders to set an example in this area, we ought to be enlisting their aid in insuring greater participation among Jews in the American political process.

Conclusion

Those who attended the Hillel leaders Assembly are a truly exceptional group, possessing a strong Jewish background, with a deep commitment to Jewish life. They are the products of their upbringings—the families in which they were reared and the institutions in which they have been active. These leaders are not the “average” Jewish college student. They have high levels of participation in Jewish and non-Jewish causes, and they are strongly concerned about the Jewish future.

This profile of Hillel leaders is just a first step in our understanding the nature of Jewish student identity and involvement, and Hillel’s role in deepening Jewish attachment. By focusing on Hillel leaders we understand that we are looking at a tremendous reservoir of commitment to the Jewish community and to Jewish continuity. They represent a success story, of which Hillel and the community can be justly proud.

As in other areas of American Jewish life, student leaders must understand that the form of their Jewish identity and their own level of activism may not be the norm of others. By examining the depth and breadth of their own Jewish identities, Hillel leaders can be encouraged to explore the richness and diversity of Jewish identity in others whom Hillel seeks to serve. Keeping in mind Hillel’s dictum “If I am not for myself, who will be for
me?” they will continue to affirm their deepest feelings through leadership roles on campus and beyond. However, they must also recognize in Hillel’s next question, “And if I am only for myself, what am I?” the need to reach out to others and to respect and encourage the various forms of Jewish identity and association.

Outreach to these less visible Jewish students is a high priority on Hillel’s agenda. These efforts will benefit from a fuller understanding of the larger campus population, and suggest many worthy topics for future research.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all percentages include missing cases (the number of those who did not answer the question). For any given question there may be from 0 to 18 missing cases. Rather than assume that those who do not respond to a question will distribute in the same manner as those who do, we have computed the percentages based on the total number of respondents (n=91). In many cases the total reported percentages will not add up to 100%. We have also rounded percentages, so there may be cases in which the total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

2. A number of presentations were made to Hillel professional staff. The first formal presentation by Lawrence Sternberg entitled, “Building Campus Community: Leaders Are Just the Starting Point,” was given at the Annual Conference of Hillel Professionals on December 19, 1990.

3. Patterns of religious observance were investigated using a list of specific religious observances. Respondents were asked how often—always, usually, sometimes, or never— they observe the following religious practices: lighting Shabbat candles, participating in a Passover seder, participating in Jewish holiday celebrations, participating in a Shabbat dinner, not driving or riding on Shabbat, fasting on Yom Kippur, and keeping kosher.


5. Denominational backgrounds of parents are based on the denomination of the synagogue to which they belonged. The figures reported here indicate the overall percentage of affiliation to each denomination among the parents of all 91 respondents. Eleven percent did not answer the question, and 3% of the students' parents belonged to congregations not affiliated exclusively with one of the major denominations.


7. Steven M. Cohen, The Political Attitudes of American Jews, 1988: A National Survey in Comparative Perspective, December 1988, p. 98. Cohen reports percentages for those who answer questions only (he excludes missing cases), therefore, for purposes of comparison, in this case percentages were not calculated based on the total number of respondents (n=91) but rather based on those responding (n=82).

8. Ibid. For purposes of comparison, in this case percentages were not calculated based on the total number of respondents (n=91) but rather based on those responding (n=83).