

Jewish Life at Duke Facts & Frequently Asked Questions

- Jewish students make up 11-12% of the undergraduate student body.
 - Jewish Life at Duke (JLD) is an accredited Hillel by Hillel International.
 - JLD is a department within the Division of Student Affairs of Duke University.
 - JLD is housed in the Freeman Center for Jewish Life, conveniently located between Duke's East and West campuses, and easily accessible via the free campus bus line.
 - Kosher dining is included in the Duke meal plan. The Freeman Center is home to Durham's only kosher kitchen, and is a resource for halal, vegetarian, and vegan diners throughout the community.
 - **COVID-19 Update:** For Fall, 2020, we are shifting our operations to a la carte dining with the ease of ordering in advance. For details, visit [Duke Dine-Out Mobile Ordering](#) to learn about placing an order for lunch or dinner.
 - JLD hosts dynamic holiday and Shabbat services, meals, and celebrations
 - **COVID-19 Update:** For Fall, 2020, our services will be held virtually due to social gathering restrictions.
 - **COVID-19 Update:** Reform and Conservative High Holiday services will be held virtually with free box holiday meals available for students to pick up.
 - Passover Seders typically happen at the Freeman Center on both the first and second nights of Passover. Students will also have the opportunity to host their own Seders; JLD provides the food, haggadot, and Seder plates for each student-hosted Seder. Each year, approximately 700 students attend a JLD hosted or sponsored Passover Seder.
 - **COVID-19 Update:** Our plans for Passover, 2021 are pending.
 - JLD is comprised of a robust staff of trained Hillel professionals including a campus rabbi and dedicated Israel educator.
 - Duke University's religious observance policy recognizes Jewish holidays and excuses students from classes on those days once they have spoken with their professors.
 - Students have the opportunity to travel to Israel with Duke's own Birthright Israel trip each May (when travel is again permitted by the US and Israel). Students may also join JLD on a Spring Break trip, Roots to Rights, which takes them on a 6-day civil rights bus tour through the American South.
 - There are diverse opportunities for academic engagement into Jewish history, thought, culture, and Biblical Hebrew through the Duke Center for Jewish Studies, and Modern Hebrew through Duke's Asian & Middle Eastern Studies (AMES) Program.
 - The major and minor in Hebrew is offered through AMES. Students can earn an interdisciplinary Certificate in Jewish Studies through the Center for Jewish Studies.
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- There are six independent, JLD-affiliated undergraduate student groups, which include three Israel groups and the Jewish Student Union.
- Durham, NC is a quickly-growing cosmopolitan city with a vibrant, close-knit Jewish community and plenty of Jewish resources including a Jewish Federation, JCC, and three independent synagogues.

Is there a Hillel at Duke?

Yes. The Rubenstein-Silvers Hillel, a part of Jewish Life at Duke (JLD), is accredited by Hillel International and has even been selected for several prestigious Hillel International initiatives. One thing that makes JLD unique is that in addition to being a fully accredited Hillel, it is also a department within the division of Student Affairs of Duke University. This means JLD benefits from the best of both worlds—simultaneous support from two major institutions committed to JLD's future and success.

Is there Kosher food available on campus?

Yes. Kosher food is included at no extra cost on the Duke meal plan. The Freeman Center is home to Durham's only kosher kitchen, and is a resource for halal, vegetarian, and vegan diners throughout the community. Due to COVID-19, we are shifting our operations to a la carte dining with the ease of ordering in advance. For details, visit [Duke Dine-Out Mobile Ordering](#) to learn about placing an order for lunch or dinner.

Are there classes on Jewish holidays?

Yes. Duke University does not cancel classes that happen to coincide with Jewish holidays, however, under the religious observance policy, students may be excused from their academic commitments on those recognized days. Students may speak with their professors to be covered under this policy. Students are required to remind their professors ahead of time if they will not attend class and be prepared to make alternative arrangements if necessary.

Can students go home for the holidays?

Duke's religious observance policy recognizes Jewish holidays and excuses students for holiday observance on those days only. Students may be able to arrange to miss more days, though this is done on a case-by-case basis and at the full discretion of each individual professor.

Is there a Rabbi?

Yes. JLD has a full-time campus Rabbi, Elana Friedman, on staff. She was ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and has a diverse rabbinic background, which she relies on to serve a variety of student needs. Rabbi Elana serves as chief Jewish educator and spiritual leader of the campus Jewish community. In her role as campus Rabbi, she provides counseling for students, offers opportunities for Jewish learning, and serves as liaison for Religious Life. She also facilitates the observance of Jewish holidays, the kashrut policies of the kitchen, and duties related to educating the greater campus community about Judaism and Jewish observances.

What happens for the High Holidays?

During the High Holidays, JLD holds both Conservative and Reform services. Campus Rabbi Elana Friedman leads the Conservative Services and Rabbi Laura Lieber, PhD, Director for Jewish Studies at Duke, leads Reform Services. During this time of social distancing, services will be held online and for those on campus, box meals and some ritual supplies will be available for pick up. Under the religious observance policy, students may be excused from academic obligations on these days.

What is the Shabbat experience like at Duke?

Due to COVID-19, our regular Friday night Shabbat experience is held via Zoom. It incorporates a variety of traditions, including a song session.

What is the experience like for a student who is shomer Shabbat?

Currently, there are very few shomer Shabbat students at Duke. Dorm access and dining options are via electronic key card and ID swiping. Mechanical key access is available upon special request. Students use the bus system to travel between Duke's East and West campuses (approximately 1.5 miles) and the Freeman Center, which is located roughly mid-way between the two campuses. To get to the Freeman Center to celebrate Shabbat, some students choose to ride the bus, treating it like a 'Shabbat elevator', while others find a friend to walk with them. Durham is home to a tight-knit Jewish community, and local families have been known to invite students for Shabbat meals as well. On Saturdays, there is no formal Shabbat programming through JLD, however Beth El Synagogue, a conservative congregation, is located just beyond Duke's East campus. Beth El also houses an Orthodox Shabbat minyan which welcomes Duke students. Chabad at Duke provides a non-egalitarian Friday night Shabbat service option as well as an alternative for Friday night Shabbat dinner.

What kind of programming does JLD offer?

Even throughout a pandemic, JLD offers a robust range of programming virtually—from community service projects, to Jewish educational programs, cultural Israel programs, social gatherings, holiday celebrations, and much more. JLD hosts guest speakers, film screenings, facilitates discussion, and partners with campus wide programming as well. Additionally, JLD is always receptive to students taking initiative to suggest and help develop new programming.

Is there Chabad on campus?

Yes, Chabad is a recognized student group at Duke, although it is not directly affiliated with JLD. There are two Chabad organizations in the area (in Chapel Hill and in Durham), both of which welcome Duke students. The overall mission of JLD is to support the individual needs of Jewish Duke students so while JLD offers plenty of opportunities for students on campus, they also support those students who attend Chabad. Many students attend both JLD and Chabad programming throughout the year.

What is the Israel climate on campus?

Duke University is an environment that prides itself on diversity of experience and opinion. As at many other universities, Duke students and faculty have different political views regarding Israel. Fortunately, the discourse at Duke is predominantly civil. Many Duke students engage with Israel through travel, study, advocacy, and extracurricular activities. Duke students are involved in Duke Friends of Israel, TAMID, Duke J Street U and Duke Israel Public Affairs Committee (DIPAC). JLD has a Jewish Agency Israel Fellow on staff to work with students, staff, and faculty on campus, promoting Israel engagement and education. While there are a handful of Duke faculty who support the BDS movement, Duke University is on record opposing the academic boycott of Israel and signed a 2013 statement opposing the boycott of Israeli academic institutions. JLD continues to monitor potential Israel issues on campus, and remains in continuous communication with University administration in this regard.

Is there anti-semitism on campus?

It is disappointing and frustrating to report that in today's climate, occasional instances of anti-semitism have touched Duke's campus. When compared with peer universities, occurrences at Duke have been limited, but even limited instances are of concern. JLD has prioritized empowering students and giving them the tools they need to live their authentic Jewish identities openly and freely at Duke. Our team offers one-on-one conversations, group discussions, and training on anti-semitism and hate speech regularly, punctuated with nationally-renowned speakers on this important topic at least once an academic year. Our Hillel has the full support of Duke University leadership and JLD is in regular communication with administration officials, campus police, the ADL, and the FBI. A coordinated security plan remains in place should any issue arise—all it takes is one phone call. JLD is extremely fortunate to be housed on a campus that takes decisive action should any issue arise.

Additional questions? Contact:

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