

Not Just for the Pizza:
Jewish Student Union's Impact on its Current Members and Alumni

By

Benjamin Elliott Bloom

Capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

April, 2009

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

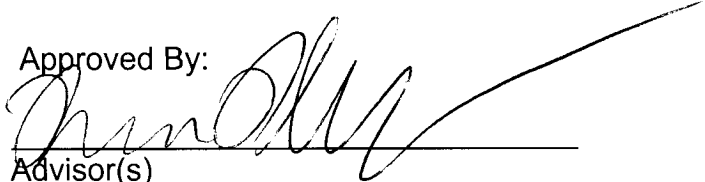
SCHOOL OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

Not Just for the Pizza:

Jewish Student Union's Impact on its Current Members and Alumni

Approved By:

Advisor(s)


Director, SJCS

SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF COMPLETED PROJECT

I/we, Benjamin Elliott Bloom _____, hereby submit two copies of
my/our completed project in final form, entitled:

Not Just for the Pizza: Jewish Student Union's Impact on its Current Members and Alumni

Degree Program MAJCS

04/20/09
Date

Ben E Bloom
Student Signature

Student Signature

Student Signature

RECEIPT BY SCHOOL OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

The above named project was received on

Date

School Official Signature

Abstract

The Jewish Student Union is an organization that aims to establish student organized clubs with the purpose to attract, program, educate and engage unaffiliated Jewish teens in public high schools. The JSU is not formally connected to any particular Jewish movement but, was started through the Orthodox Union's youth arm – the National Conference of Synagogue Youth. Since its beginning in Los Angeles in 2002, it has grown to over 150 clubs nationwide.

Evaluation research was conducted with the alumni of the JSU and with current members using surveys, focus meetings and, observations of club meetings. Findings indicate that the Jewish Student Union has made a positive impact on the Jewish lives of almost all who have participated. Indicators examined include the choices the participants have made about: who they date or marry; their relationship with Israel; what connections they have or expect to have with a Jewish community; and how they see their individual Jewish identity. Whereas the Jewish Student Union is successful in its efforts to create Jewish leaders and cultivate Jewish engagement through education, discussions and Jewish experiences, the research found that the JSU is not attracting its target audience, the unaffiliated Jewish teen. This project offers recommendations for the JSU as it continues to work toward its goal of engaging Jewish students in Jewish life.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Literature Review	12
Background to Jewish Choices & Jewish Involvement	12
Teens are Not Adults	14
The Disconnection	15
Jewish Education	16
Millennials & Judaism	18
Dating to Marriage	23
Israel	24
It's Good for You Anyways	26
Methods	28
Findings	32
Personal Background	33
Club Findings	36
Religious & Secular Education	40
Dating & Marriage	42
Israel	43
Current Jewish Identity & Jewish Involvement	46
Implications of Research for Policy Recommendations	49
Alumni Tracking	49
More Leadership, Same Outreach	51
Leaders Make the Difference	54
Bibliography	57
Appendix A: Current Student Survey with Results	59
Appendix B: Alumni Survey with Results	66
Appendix C: Focus Group Questions with Quotable Responses	85

Acknowledgements

There are few individuals I would like to thank for their support and guidance along the way to the completion of this project:

To Dr. Bruce Phillips,

Thank you for your guidance and assistance in helping me work through this project and getting it to its completion. I know it was never that easy to work with me but, I appreciate that you never gave up on me and kept me on track.

To Shoshana Hirsh,

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to study and learn about the organization that you lead so well. I greatly appreciate your concern and patience during the entire process. I hope that the information I have gathered and shared will assist the Jewish Student Union in some manner. And to Séamus, your assistance was very valuable and most appreciated.

To Lori Klein,

Without your guidance and patience this project might have never gotten started. In addition, thank you also for helping me by setting up a proper schedule that allowed this project to get on the right path to completion.

To Gwendelyn Steele,

Thank you so very much for your love, support, and encouragement. Your patience and tolerance for keeping me focused and on track was immeasurable. Thank You!

To the Readers and Rabbi Julie Pelc,

Thank you for your help in checking my paper for grammatical mistakes amongst other issues that arose from this paper. Your help was invaluable!

Introduction

There is information that has been found by a number of researchers of the Jewish people and organizations in the Jewish community that shows a very troubling trend. Researched data suggests there is a trend among the generation that is in school now is experiencing a sharp decline in Jewish community affiliation and Jewish identity following their *B'nai Mitzvah*. One organization whose aim it is to try to stem this trend is the Jewish Student Union. The Jewish Student Union is attempting to reach these Jewish students in the public school setting with the objective of re-engaging them in Jewish life and Jewish community.

The Jewish Student Union is an organization that assists students to organize a Jewish club on high school campuses, coordinates the funding for and the leadership of these clubs and helps to oversee that these clubs grow with the hope that the experiences had in these clubs engage Jewish youth to become more involved in Jewish life and community. The membership of these clubs consists primarily of Jewish students in public high schools but is also open to non-Jewish students. The reason for this openness is because of the 2001 Supreme Court case ruling of “Good News v. Milford” This ruling reinforced the Equal Access Act of 1984 that allowed religious groups to operate clubs in public high schools in America (Reifman, 2006, p.4). The goals of the Jewish Student Union are; to cultivate Jewish leadership, to provide inspirational Jewish education, to counter assimilation, and to build Jewish pride. The primary target audience for these goals is the unaffiliated Jewish high school students because they make up the largest population of Jewish youth.

This study sought to measure the impact of the programs, activities and leadership of Jewish Student Union on current members and alumni. By studying the JSU's clubs and its participants the intent was to discover what effects the JSU has on the choices

made by those that are current members and on the alumni of the organization. Success of this organization was difficult to label but generally, if a current member or alum is participating in Jewish community, Jewish life and has a better defined Jewish identity after having been involved with the club, success was achieved. The information that was gathered from this study is unique because this was the first study of the current and former members conducted during this organization's existence.

The Jewish Student Union was begun in 2002 with a four clubs in Los Angeles and has now grown to about 200 clubs nationally. The organization was started through the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, (NCSY), to fill a need in the community and provide leadership to the community. There had existed Jewish clubs prior to this but under the wing of the NCSY, there was now a national network of clubs across America. Having an organization for Jewish public school students that was operated through the Orthodox Union/NCSY could lead to biases and unintended effects. However, the concern about non-Orthodox Jewish youth becoming more engaged in Orthodox Judaism, even though the JSU claims to be non-denominational, very few non-Orthodox Jews have become Orthodox because of their affiliation with the Jewish Student Union. Also, the leaders of the clubs, which consists of Orthodox Jewish professionals intend to present Judaism as accessible for all and even non-Jews. The leaders of these clubs already have previous knowledge of how to lead Jewish youth and are trained and given direction by executives of the JSU before they work with these clubs.

The intention of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Jewish Student Union, as an organization and its programs, on its current students and alumni. To successfully complete this project the following methods were used: surveying both current students and alumni, conducting focus groups with the current students, and observing current students in the club environment to assess the impact the Jewish

Students Union on its participants. The intention was to evaluate the Jewish Student Union to determine its success as an organization. In addition, surveying the alumni allowed the possibility to measure long term the personal impact of this club on the Jewish identity of its former members.

The key questions asked of the current members were: What is it about the Jewish Student Union clubs on high school campuses that makes them attractive for those who attend the club meetings? Why do they attend their respective club meeting? What is basic information on the types of students that are attending these club meetings? And, what, besides the free kosher pizza, keeps the students interested in returning for club meetings again and again?

This study will develop an in-depth look into what impacts this organization has on the alumni of the Jewish Student Union program. A survey was used to assess the impact of the Jewish Student Union. What are the ethnic make-ups of the alumni? What sort of educational choices were made for them before they came to through the Jewish Student Union program? What kinds of educational choices did these alumni make after their high school years? What types of Jews made up the body of the Jewish Student Union clubs? What life choices were made with regards to dating, marriage, community involvement? And, what sort of Jewish choices were made about themselves and their lives that may have been inspired by their JSU involvement?

According to Shoshana Hirsh, the COO of the JSU, “The Jewish Student Union is a program of National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) that operates JSU clubs in public high schools in the hope to reach Jewish high school kids but, because the program is in a public school setting the clubs are open high schoolers of all religions.” She informed me that the goal of the JSU is, “to reach those students in the public school setting that might not be affiliated with the Jewish community and get them connected to

something Jewish and connected to other Jews.”

Generally in the United States and the Los Angeles area in particular, there is a large disparity of those Jewish youth who get formal Jewish education and those that do not. According to statistics found in the Los Angeles Jewish Population Study of 1997, there are approximately 30,000 Jewish teens in the Los Angeles area. Of this number more than 80% are receiving no formal Jewish education. If you accurately account for those who drop out of Jewish education after *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* this number is even higher.

According to the Jewish Student Union’s records, Jewish Student Union is referred to as - “The Club for Jewish Teens.”¹ The mission of the Jewish Student Union is to combat assimilation at its root by making Judaism attractive to the largest population of Jewish teenagers – the unaffiliated. JSU’s professionally trained outreach staff facilitates the formation of student run and school sanctioned Jewish culture clubs in public high schools that meet once a week. The JSU clubs offer a unique brand of specially crafted programming that enables participants continuously to enhance their personal Jewish identity, to nurture a connection to the State of Israel, and to develop a broader understanding of, and enduring involvement with, the Jewish community. This mission seems idealistic and difficult to attain. What gives them a better ability to reach the unaffiliated Jewish youth? How do they find unaffiliated, when they don’t want to be found?

Meeting with the leadership of the JSU was an important aspect of this research in order to better understand the organization’s goals in assessing the program. It seemed important to gather quantitative and qualitative information from current students and alumni in order to better understand the impact of the Jewish Student Union on its participants.

¹ Reifman, Shira. Jewish Student Union. “The Club for Jewish Teens.” (Teaneck, NJ. JSU. 2006), 4.

The Jewish Student Union had not previously done an evaluation of the program or its alumni since the organization's beginning in 2002. As a result, much of the data in this project is new. In order to discern the impact of this organization on its current and former members it will be necessary to utilize results from studies on similar organizations in order to compare it with those statistics. Information like that from the NJPS 2000-2001 which indicates data already known about this generation of Jewish teens will also be significant.

Literature Review

“Why be Jewish?” - Rabbi David Wolpe

“Because Judaism can teach us how to deepen our lives, to improve the world, to join with others who have the same lofty aims. Judaism can teach us spiritual and moral mindfulness, a way of living in this world that promotes joy inside of us and also encourages ethical action. But finally, the answer to why be Jewish must reside in the mystery of each seeking soul, trying to find its place with others and with G-d.”

Background to Jewish Choices and Involvement for Teens

Information about the newest Jewish generation shows some alarming trends for Jewish community and the future of the Jewish people. The hope is that by evaluating the Jewish Student Union, this study will provide further insight about this group in relationship to their Jewish identity and their Jewish future. Studies such as the Jewish Adolescent Study, 2000, and others have found that after a young Jewish person has a *bar/bat mitzvah* their involvement in Jewish life and Jewish education begins to slope to a decline and tends to continue throughout high school. “Whereas nearly all adolescent respondents participated in some Jewish educational, volunteer, or recreational activity in 7th grade, just over half did so in 12th grade. An increase in participation in Israel experience programs and Jewish employment opportunities throughout the high school years fails to offset the broader pattern of decline, which is due primarily to cessation of formal Jewish education” (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.iv).²

The Jewish Adolescent Study revealed that for high school students school dominates their lives because over 70% of Jewish students planned to attend elite universities. And for students, school fills all their time, centers a number of activities under one roof, and creates a community where it is very important to succeed and gain recognition. This study revealed something else of interest. From this study it appears that the students who have the highest hopes of their academic futures also are the same

² Kadushin, Charles, Shaul Kelner, and Leonard Saxe. Being a Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It. (Waltham, MA, Brandeis University, 2000), iv.

students whom Judaism and being Jewish really was important (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.iv-v). These attitudes toward their Jewish educations and Jewish futures did not carry over from their school driven academic settings.

Another very useful and interesting piece of information that came from the JAS was, “for the most part, these teenagers took their secular schoolwork seriously and enjoyed school. In contrast, their attitudes toward pre-*bar/bat mitzvah* Hebrew school were negative. Boys rejected their supplementary Jewish education - and, with it, continued involvement in Jewish life - more decisively than did girls. Actual participation in formal Jewish education showed a decline predictable from these attitudes, with the same gender differences persisting, though it may be surprising that so many students continued at all given the extent of the negative feelings. Overall, weekly participation declined steadily from 60% in 7th grade to 22% in 11th grade” (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.v).

Another enlightening finding from this report was that, “nearly two-thirds of the adolescents thought it was important to raise their own children as Jews, a value they shared in common with their parents. On the question of endogamy, however, there was a more complex interaction between parental and other social-environmental influences. Only one-third (32%) of the teenagers thought it “extremely” or “very” important to marry a Jew, as compared with 60% of their parents” (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.vi).

Jews who lived in more densely Jewishly populated area reported having more Jewish friends and had a higher likelihood of exclusively other Jews. And when Jews live in less Jewishly densely populated areas the opposite more commonly occurs. And, “Jewish immersion programs (e.g., summer camps, trips to Israel) are also likely to nurture friendships with peers not known through school”(Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe

2000, p.vi).

“Three-quarters of the teenage respondents cared seriously about a search for meaning in life. Among these, only 40% sought to find that meaning through their Jewishness. For many of these teenagers, being Jewish was about remembering the Holocaust, countering anti-Semitism, being ethical, and making the world a better place, caring about Israel, or feeling a connection to other Jews. But they did not implement their commitment to peoplehood, survival, and ethics through Jewish philanthropy, volunteering for Jewish organizations, or observing Jewish law”(Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe 2000, p.vii).

Jewish teenagers seem to pattern their behavior after one of two influential groups in their lives: their parents and their non-Jewish peers. Though they report caring about their Jewish identities and about Jewish history and culture, they do not express it by engaging in practices that might set them apart from a largely secular, pluralistic culture in which they are trying to fit in. Judaism, on principle, is important to them, but only as it “coheres or coexists with their aspirations for academic success, financial security, and social belonging” (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.vii).

Teens are Not Adults

The Jewish Student Union’s target audience is those in high school and the organization’s aim is to get Jewish teens to become more active or engaged Jewish community members in their years after high school. As such they desired to know more about this group. It is an interesting challenge to identify adolescents as a member of a particular “stage” of life as they are able to make many decisions on their own but, are not yet truly adults. According to professor Dr. Jeffery Arnett, who coined of the term *emerging adulthood*. People from a wide variety of backgrounds, ethnicities and regions consistently state the following as the top three criteria for adulthood:

“1. Accept responsibility for [oneself].

2. Make independent decisions.

3. Become financially independent.”

He notes that all three criteria are gradual, incremental,- (rather than occurring all at once). While many emerging adults begin to feel adult by the time they reach voting age. In actuality, it is not until some time in their mid- to late twenties that they have become confident enough to accept responsibility, make their own decisions, and are financially independent. During that process they are emerging adults, an in- between stage (Arnett, 2004).³ Dr. Arnett’s research illustrates that though there are differences between what happens in the lives of teens and young adults, their struggle with ideals and identities are very similar. The similarities between people in their teens and those in their early-twenties is more about how they view themselves opposed to how outsiders view them. The period of not really being a young teen and not quite becoming an emerging adult is a time of strange disconnection. This is also a period of time when habits and practices are formed on ones own.

The Disconnection

There is a disconnect in the lives of those that are in high school and those that are in college; not just location or station in life but, thoughts about self and choices. In her book “How goodly are thy tents” summer camps as Jewish socializing experiences, Dr. Sales best describes this disconnect between age and identity formation that has not been experienced or properly articulated from previous generations. “This individualistic view, however, is balanced with social or communal concerns. A grown-up is also defined as a person who is responsible and considerate and who eschews risky or illegal behaviors

³ Arnett, Jeffery J. Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Twenties. (New York City: Oxford UP, 2004.), 15.

that might injure others (Arnett 1998, 2001). Emerging adulthood is a time of increasing independence and responsibility towards others. It is a time of experimentation and exploration in love and in work. It is also the period in life when a person develops his or her own ideology or worldview (Arnett 2001; Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen 2001). Beliefs are not set during the high school years, but rather continue to form in important ways through college and the post-college years”(Sales, 2004, p. 133).⁴

While it could depend on factors like socioeconomics, race, and cultural norms the major similarities that are found between adolescents and emerging adulthood is that they are typically not married and are not yet parents. Other than this similarity, however, their lives are very different. Almost all adolescents aged 10 to 18 reside at home with one or both of their parents or guardians. On the other hand, most emerging adults have moved out of their childhood homes, and their living situations can be extremely diverse. Virtually all adolescents are experiencing the dramatic physical changes of puberty, attend a secondary school, and are legally minors, so they can't vote, drink, or sign legal documents. In contrast, emerging adults have reached full physical maturity, many go to college or are working but, not all, and are considered adults by the laws of America (Arnett, 2004, p.17-18). This age range, while their independence is important, it is also an important time in life to form habits that promote a healthy Jewish identity.

Jewish Education

The disconnect between being “young” and becoming an “emerging adult” is quite easily measured by the way in which Jewish education and educational choices made. According to the Los Angeles Jewish Population Study completed in 1997, there are about 30,000 Jewish teens in the greater Los Angeles area. Of this number more than

⁴ Sales, Amy L. “How goodly are thy tents” summer camps as Jewish socializing experiences. (Lebanon, N.H. UP of New England, 2004.), 133.

80% receive no formal Jewish education as teens. Seventy-five to eighty-five percent attend non-Jewish schools/public and non-Jewish private schools. And less than half attend and/or participate in something Jewish. It is because of these figures locally and the large numbers nationally that make it especially important that we better understand how and where these teens are growing into Jewish adulthood.

Clearly, a good Jewish foundation is essential and can be achieved through early Jewish education. “Advocates of Jewish education have long reported that Jewish education (be it schooling, youth groups, camps, or Israel travel) “works” to reduce inter-marriage, along with other effects that help keep Jews engaged. Research supports their claim: the more Jewish education in childhood and adolescence, the more in-marriage years later”(Cohen, 2005, p.44).⁵ This education can be formal as in Sunday school, Hebrew High School, or Jewish day schools. Alternatively, this education can be more informal – like summer camps, youth group events, and Jewish clubs. Learning and socialization that occurs informally but relatively frequently for people in their teen years can have a positive impact well after they have graduated high school and gone on with their lives (Cohen, 2005, p.46). Having Jewish experiences in unconventional settings goes a long to help maintain a Jewish community for years to come.

A Jewish educational experience for teens and emerging adults is not the sole factor of success in creating and maintaining a connection to Jewish life in adulthood. There are other factors in both formal and informal education that are important contributors to success. One factor is the Jewish leadership of the activity: leaders must possess a personality that is stable, appealing to youth, charismatic, open, enthusiastic, creative, and able to think on their feet. Another key factor important to leaders of these

⁵ Cohen, Steven. “Engaging the Next Generation of American Jews, Distinguishing the In-Married, Inter-Married, and Non-Married.” (Journal of Jewish Communal Service. Fall/Winter, 2005), 44.

experiences and this generation is the leaders' age; close to their own or at least sympathetic to remember what it was like to be a teenager. And, these leaders must be educated and serve as a role model reflecting those values embodied by the organization (Jewish Youth Databook/Brandies University).

Other factors for success [in Jewish education and Jewish activities] are related to the composition of the groups and the existence of group process. This includes: creating a collective identity, involving participants in the decision making process, fostering a sense of ownership and the presence of like minded peers with whom to socialize and interact. Other relevant factors include: substance, place, time, and support.

The factor of substance is needed to help convey the importance of Judaism, Jewish culture, Jewish history, and Jewish ideology. The place factor plays in because of how important the look and feel of the place where a program is held. The time factor is important due to the exposure to each other and to the commonality of purpose. And support from both the internal and the externally is important because without support who is going to know if the program or activity will be executed and maintained (Jewish Youth Databook/ Brandeis University).

Millennials & Judaism

The contemporary youth and emerging adults (known colloquially as Generation Y or Millennials) are different from generations in the past because of technology and other key factors. "For American Jews in Generation Y, being Jewish is not their sole identity. This generation has unlimited access to American society, therefore Generation Y Jews behave much like all other Generation Y Americans, regardless of religion" (Greenberg, 2006, p.7).⁶ This generation has so many factors that shape their multitude of

⁶ Greenberg, Anna. "Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam...": Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices. (Rep. New York City: Reboot, 2006.), 7.

identities that make up who they are that being Jewish and Judaism is just one of the many. Factors that shape their identity include; intermarriage in their families, diverse social and large networks, almost limitless boundaries around geography, gender, and sexual orientation. Another reason why this generation is different is that “...earlier generations of Jews felt a need to maintain tight connections as they experienced anti-Semitism, workplace discrimination and other challenges. But unlike Jews in the pre- and post-World War II era, this generation is fully integrated and does not need close communal cohesion in order to survive in a hostile society. Generation Y Jews no longer personally experience anti-Semitism or exclusion from the opportunities society has to offer; therefore, they are similar to their non-Jewish peers in that they worry about getting good grades, finding jobs and socializing with friends more than they worry about their religious identities” (Greenberg, 2006, p.7).

People in Generation Y, find it difficult “...to define a meaningful concept of “community” in general and a Jewish community in particular. They find it difficult to talk about what it means to belong to a community, and when asked, they instead refer to the neighborhoods where they grew up, the friendship circles they have at school, or the towns where they work”(Greenberg, 2006, p.7). And if actually connected to a Jewish community, “see themselves as tied to a global Jewish community, where they feel broadly connected to an abstract feeling of a people, more than a localized community or institution. For most, being Jewish starts with “family” and radiates outward to include a people who share a “culture,” a history of “oppression,” “language,” and “humor”(Greenberg, 2006, p.8). Having their sense of urgency to be Jewish put on a back burner can lead to a kind of Jewish apathy, which is a negative Jewish identity to develop and can lead them away from Judaism.

According to the study “Grande Soy Vanilla Latte With Cinnamon, No Foam...”,

Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices conducted by Anna Greenberg for Reboot. “The few who have had adult experiences with Jewish institutions are often left with negative impressions. Respondents from interfaith households, in particular, feel judged for “not being Jewish enough,” and feelings of intimidation create a barrier to participation. But even those who grew up in households with two Jewish parents feel disconnected from institutional Jewish life and harbor a range of feelings encompassed by the thought that Jewish organizations are “not for me.” The goal of Reboot is to be a facilitator that helps our generation “reboot” the traditions we’ve inherited and make them vital and resonant in our own lives.⁷

Also, this generation seems to feel little or no desire to ascribe to labels like “Reform” or “Conservative” because, according to the Reboot study, why should they for the most part “...celebrate important holidays with their families and friends in some manner but beyond these core traditions only a minority observes religious laws or practices rituals at all. In fact, most young Jews do not spontaneously bring up the subject of religion unless asked directly about it. When asked about religious practices, it seems that traditional synagogue worship feels like something people do while growing up — and possibly something to return to after having one’s own family — but it is not perceived as something that one does by choice as a single adult.” (Greenberg, 2006, p.8)

The young Jews in the Reboot study are able to easily label values and put them in a hierarchical order and call them American values but don’t see them as Jewish values . “We also find an individualism and self-directed focus in our respondents’ answers. When asked to prioritize their values, they highlight “achievement,” “personal growth,” “health,” “love,” and “humor,” as opposed to values that connect them to others and the

⁷ Reboot. About Us. http://www.rebooters.net/index.php?site=reboot&page=rbt_aboutus. Retrieved April 5, 2009.

world beyond themselves” (Greenberg, 2006, p.9).

What is clear from this study and this generation is that culture, and especially, popular culture (film, music, television, books and magazines), is the most dominant force in the lives of this generation. For Generation Y, consumption of pop culture is experienced through social networks, friends, events and not involvement with the institutions of their parents’ generation. The influence that these popular culture gatherings exude on this generation acts as an in-gathering and facilitates connectedness and meaning. It is this common language and experiences that Generation Y Jews cling to create and to discover their Judaism (Greenberg, 2006, p. 9).

It is the goal of the Jewish Student Union to help to form communities and a sense of Jewish identity in these Jewish teens in high school. The JSU wants them, the teens, to develop a place for Judaism in their lives, wherever they find it.

Exposure to Jewish culture for emerging adults has been an effective way to get young Jewish people to do and experience something Jewish. One theme that has come from the NJPS 2000-2001 is that the consumption of Jewish cultural is widespread, and that, for those less engaged in Jewish life this consumption constitutes a large aspect of their Jewish identities (Cohen & Kelman, 2005, p.4).⁸ Also they found in this study... “some of the functions of Jewish cultural engagement were to build community, and to construct and display forms of Jewish engagement that can be entertaining, playful, ironic, contemporary, and generationally distinctive” (Cohen & Kelman 2005, p.4). Additionally, it highlights that “Jewish young adults are ‘engaged, but unaffiliated’ Jews [who] seek cultural experiences that offer alternatives to an institutional world [that] they see as bland, conformist, conservative, and alien” (Cohen & Kelman 2005, p.5). Instead,

⁸ Cohen, Steven M., and Ari Y. Kelman. Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York. Rep. (New York City, Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal, 2005.), 4.

this generation wants a blend of cultures at the same time. Jews of this generation want to be involved in activities and programs that are between Jews and non-Jews, Jews and Jews, Jewish space and non-Jewish space, and distinctively Jewish culture with putatively non-Jewish culture (Cohen & Kelman, 2005, p.5).

In the winter of 2000 the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University that looked deeply into Jewish adolescence. The Jewish Adolescent Study was designed to investigate and develop a picture of the attitudes and behavior of contemporary young Jews. The researchers wanted to better understand how American Jewish teenagers saw themselves both as Jews and Americans. “The study was a systematic inquiry into the contexts, Jewish and American alike, that shape Jewish identity and affiliation among contemporary Jewish teenagers”(Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.iv).

This generation does not experience or conform to Jewish community as in the past. This generation is more accepted and immersed in American culture and American community. “To a significant extent, young people are creating their own identities and patterns of association, leading to what we could call “quasi-communities”—built around common interests and shared experiences rather than around institutions and organizations. Quasi-communities have porous boundaries, are fluid and dynamic”(Ukeles, Miller, & Beck, 2006, p.3).⁹ Whereas this generation does have some commonalities with older generations, they are primarily found in the Orthodox community; where adherence to laws and religious traditions are more normative. This project however was conducted involving public school attendees and alumni of public schools (it is assumed that the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jewish youth do not

⁹ Ukeles, Jacob, B., Ron Miller and Pearl Beck. “Young Jewish Adults in the United States”. (New York, American Jewish Committee, 2006.), 3.

attend public high schools.)

Dating to Marriage

Some facets of this study have to do with issues related to family and marriage. It is often during college or there after those Jewish emerging adults seriously date and begin thinking about marriage. Those involved with the Jewish Student Union wanted to know the religious identities of their members' chosen relationships and marriage partners. This relates to their goal of shaping Jewish identity and helping to ensure that the students maintain a connection to a Jewish community as they grow into young adulthood.

Jewish demographer, Dr. Steven Cohen, has studied the issue of intermarriage and its effects on the Jewish community at length. He discovered that the issue of intermarriage is a "key problem" to the future of the greater Jewish community. He notes that, "young adults" (as they are called by members of [his] generation) may be divided into three [groups], each with its own characteristic pattern of Jewish engagement: the in-married, the inter-married, and the non-married." These three groups are widely different when it come to affiliations, social connections, observances, passions within Judaism and with these differences it is very challenging to engage them uniformly and require unique practices and strategies by organized Jewry.

During his research and his interpretation of the NJPS 2000-2001 he has shared that Jewish involvement "indicators vary widely among those that are inter-married, in-married, and non-married." For instance, "of in-married parents, as many as 96 percent celebrate a Passover Seder as compared with just 46 percent of the inter-married parents and 60 percent of the non-married"(Cohen, 2005, p.43). He has also shown that membership to Jewish institutions and organizations by in-married families are over 60% more likely than inter-married families. There are also stark figures that he has published

that show other disparities between those that are in-married verses those that are inter-married. These are significant statistics, as the aim of the JSU is to help keep otherwise unaffiliated Jews from leaving Judaism.

However, Dr. Leonard Saxe, another Jewish demographer who teaches at Brandies, claims and has shown that when the NJPS 2000-2001 figures take into account other controls, that the numbers touted by Dr. Cohen are not so stark. It is Dr. Saxe's opinion that organizations have failed to keep up and that with the right ideas and changes in Jewish organizations, policies, and directions that this trend toward unaffiliation will self correct.

An issue that can be raised with Dr. Saxe's argument is that there are traditions and norms that are held by Orthodox Jewish communities that help to make this issue of inter-marriage a non-issue. Whereas, in the non-Orthodox Jewish communities, there is not the same pressure to marry someone Jewish and less of an established tradition. There will continue to exist this issue in the greater world Jewry. Because, "by almost every measure of Jewish connection, Orthodox young Jews are the most highly engaged. Non-Orthodox, in-married couples with children tend to be the next most Jewishly engaged, followed by non-Orthodox singles and in-married couples without children. Intermarried couples have the lowest levels of Jewish connections" (Ukeles, Miller & Beck, 2006, p.3-4). The Jewish Student Union, through unintended consequence, is aiding in the idea that Jews meeting, dating and marrying other Jews is a positive choice in the Jewish journeys of their members and alumni.

Israel

The state of Israel is a very important issue for young people to learn about, discuss, and visit. Over the past number of years, support of Israel and attitudes toward Israel has been on the decline. (NJPS 2000-2001) The gradual decline in interest and

support for Israel has caused many Jewish leaders and researchers to worry. Nor the lack of luster public relations that the state of Israel receives from university campuses worldwide have not helped this generation muster greater support for Israel either. It is the belief of these researchers and Jewish leaders that if Israel is not supported then it will not survive. There is research to support the notion that if young Jews and Jews that are emerging adults hold support for Israel that there is a direct correlation to affiliation with Jewish community and helps to shape one's Jewish identity (Saxe and Chazan, 2008). The influence that Israel and not other factors in Jewish life have on younger Jews is enormous. Israel helps to connect Jews not simply to their childhood synagogue but, to an entire world of Jewish people. This connection to Israel is one that is important to the Jewish Student Union.

So, another topic that needed to be researched for this project was opinions and relationships with Israel. A connection to the state of Israel proved to be a challenge for many teens, as their opinions about Israel are not the same as their parents' or grandparents' generations. Whereas, many who were alive and who remember the founding of the State of Israel have an unwavering commitment to the State of Israel, the next generation views Israel as a country with similar problems to those of other nations. The "baby boomer" generation and Generation X saw the contradictions of the State and Jewish values.

This current generation has an attachment to Israel but, is often ambivalent or ill informed about Israel's current situation. Many in this generation have, "expressed degrees of alienation from Israel. When they spoke about Israel at all, they spoke of moral complexities and ethical shortcomings. For some, pro-Israel advocacy in the organized Jewish community constitutes an impediment to affiliation. Their concerns about conventional Jewry entail not its support for Israel per se, but specifically

endorsement of “right-wing pro-Israel” positions and policies” (Cohen & Kelman, 2005, p.9). Since the beginning of Taglit-Birthright Israel, an organization that began to send emerging adults aged 18-26 to Israel for ten days free of charge, opinions about Israel and its situation have improved and, subsequently, have assisted in keeping Jewish emerging adults within the Jewish faith. Generally, this connection to Israel is more related to Jewish culture with few overtly religious connotations.

High school students reported that they believed that after going to Israel (if they went at all), their formal Jewish learning would cease. And, when Israel trips were taken advantage of it was more often girls who participated than boys. “Parental influence was felt especially strongly in the decision to continue formal Jewish education. Just over half of the parents either required or strongly encouraged post - *bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education, and this parental mandate or support was the second strongest predictor of actual enrollment. (Age was the first.) Parental attitudes also strongly influenced exposure to and impact of Jewish summer camps and Israel experience programs” (Kadushin, Kelner, & Saxe, 2000, p.v).

It’s Good for You Anyways

Involvement in a religious group is proven to be “good” for the participant of that religious group. The “good” that occurs is expressed through a positive self-esteem or positive social connections or some attribute similar. The reason the Jewish Student Union wanted to know how they were doing was so that they might illustrate to current members how their predecessors (now alumni) are faring and how the JSU experience affected them.

Published in 2002 by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, to show the relationship how between religious involvement aids to an overall successful young person, through the work of the National Study of Youth and Religion. The NSYR

showed the way in which religion factors into the creation of healthy young people. “The most significant factors included: religious service attendance and importance of religion (although religious affiliation and youth group participation were also important in many cases). The 12th graders who attend religious services weekly and high school seniors for whom religion is very important are significantly more likely to have positive attitudes toward themselves; enjoy life as much as anyone; feel like their lives are useful feel hopeful about their futures; feel satisfied with their lives; feel like they have something of which to be proud; feel good to be alive; feel like life is meaningful; enjoy being in school” (Smith & Faris, 2002, p.5). Thus it was the hope of the JSU staff that it would be found that religious affiliation and engagement in the Jewish community have the same effect on younger Jewish community members.

Simply stated, a good Jewish foundation fosters a quality Jewish life. The Jewish experiences had during teen years can have a great impact in later life. As is known, these teen years are more often influenced by people such as ones own peers in school and the connections made in the networks that teens associate, and less so from ones own family. So, the more Jewish friends and Jewish connections the richer the Jewish life will be in the later years. In addition to the friends made and experiences had as a teen, another factor that has a significant impact on a Jewish future is a quality Jewish education. This education doesn’t always have to be in the setting of the classroom but, efforts must be made to distinguish this learning as Jewish. All of these combined; add up to a positive Jewish life and journey.

Methods

Evaluation research, as a method, wishes to objective assessment of a program and/or an organization. This type of research is conducted most often for future planning or future funding purposes. To discover useful information using evaluation research, measurable objective outcomes must first be created. Then, often participants are surveyed or interviewed to discover what outcomes are achieved and how do these outcomes align with the organizations intent.

It was important to make certain decisions about process, goals, and results before conducting research on behalf of the JSU in order to determine their overall effectiveness. The following questions were key: How to determine the definition of success for the JSU? Who were the most important people from whom to gather data? How to most efficiently and effectively gather the information?

The Jewish Student Union was “...established with four main objectives in mind: cultivating Jewish leadership, providing inspirational Jewish Education, countering assimilation, and building Jewish pride” (Reifman, 2006, p.10). Keeping those objectives in mind there are four points that can describe what that organization’s mission is for the public high school students they intend to engage in their organization. These four points are; 1. Enhance teens’ Jewish identity, 2. Nurture a connection to the State of Israel, 3. Provide a portal for deeper involvement with the Jewish community, and 4. Inspire an enduring relationship with the Jewish people.

In order to address these four points, it was essential to find answers by way of objective outcomes through some important questions: Did the alumni have a good Jewish identity? Did these members do Jewish activities and lead a life that expressed their Jewish identity in some way? Did they “do Jewish” by themselves or with others? What was their relationship with the State of Israel? Did they participate in Jewish

community? Did they participate with a formal institution or an informal group? Do they have an enduring relationship with the Jewish people? What is their relationship with other Jews? Are the alumni (who have now graduated High School) left with positive feelings and opinions about their lives, their Judaism, and about Israel that are in line with the JSU's mission and objectives?

After learning more about the Jewish Student Union's objectives and goals, the feeling was that the most efficient and direct way to learn if the organization had achieved success was to produce a combined quantitative and qualitative survey using an online web service. To this end, SurveyMonkey.com was used to gather information from the individuals that had been associated with the Jewish Student Union both alumni and current students.

While the use of the survey is very useful and their conclusions and findings can be of great importance, there needed to be a more nuanced view of the Jewish Student Union as well. In order to accomplish this end, I needed to get access to the students and their clubs to successfully conduct some focus group discussions with the students to get more qualitative information.

There were four meetings with the students; Two clubs on the city side of Greater Los Angeles and two clubs on the valley side of Los Angeles. For these club visits, there were two meetings with Rabbi Solly Hess, who oversees at two clubs in the city. For this project, with his assistance, information was gathered during a visit with members who attend Hamilton High School and Santa Monica High School. And in the valley, with the assistance of Devorah Lunger, information was gathered from two schools, one club at Van Nuys High School and another at Cleveland High School.

At all of these clubs, I either took up a portion of or all of their club time to ask questions to the students and hand out my current student survey. I wanted to meet with

the students to not only get a better understanding of the club but, also to get a better understanding of the people involved with this organization. I wanted to know from them a few basic questions; why do they come to the club? What motivates them to be a part of the club? How they feel about their club? What immediate impact does this organization have on them? What about this club experience is important to them? The questions asked gave me valuable information and a nuance of the organization that I was seeking from these club members.

In addition to talking with the teens in clubs, the site visits to these clubs were important to be able to just sit and observe the clubs in action. On the visits to the clubs in the city in particular, being able to sit in the back of the room and watch Rabbi Hess engage and lead his clubs was illuminating. He did this in a manner that was both commanding and uplifting. Rabbi Hess was able to inspire the students to really get into a discussion and wrestle with issues that were very mature and was still able to get the students to approach the topic with a Jewish lens without presenting the Jewish view as the only view. Meeting with the clubs and observing them allowed me to see that the success of a given club often came down to the overall effectiveness of the individual running the group.

The clubs that are popular and that gather larger crowds are those clubs that can challenge, inspire, and engage young people. This was observed in action with all of the clubs that were visited. What was observed were students who want to know more about Judaism and engage in conversation and debate about issues that are interesting to them and that Judaism can be discussed with interest assuming it presented in a way that is easily accessible to any average high school student?

The Jewish Student Union has had over 12,000 participants in its approximately one hundred twenty-six clubs nationwide since its inception in 2002 according to their

own information. It should be noted that the 12,000 number also includes those who have attended three or more meetings per year. This comes to one of the problems encountered in doing the research. Though these 126 clubs nationwide are all funded and under the umbrella of the Jewish Student Union, they are all operated and organized in a decentralized manner. Because of the absence of uniformity as to how they operate and what information they keep and think is critical, it made it difficult to gather and track for future uses of the Jewish Student Union. To effectively use an Internet survey service, the email address information must be correct. And it seemed the vast majority of alumni have continued on in their lives and the clubs have not maintained any organized or detailed way to contact them upon graduation. Some clubs and cities have been more successful than others at keeping alumni information but, for the most part, the alumni graduate and move on. This made it difficult to find alumni of the JSU to survey.

Findings

The original intention of this project was to study the long term impacts or effects that the Jewish Student Union and its programming have had on the Jewish alumni that have participated in the clubs when they were in high school. Because this organization has been in operation since 2002, reaching this target audience was a challenge. But, due to a lower than desirable response rate from an alumni list that was not properly up to date or was inaccurate, a decision was made that changed the make up of the study and allowed for the project to move in a new direction. This new direction opened up questions into a study of both current students and alumni to better understand them as a cohort; who the current students and alumni are demographically, what education they have both religious and secular, what dating and marriage choices they make, what influences their parents have, what their involvement is in the Jewish community, where Israel is in their thoughts and opinions, and what role the JSU club has in their “Jewish journeys”?

These surveys were compiled from questions that have been asked before in the NJPS 2000-2001, questions that the Jewish Student Union wanted to know, and questions that were relevant to a successful survey of this nature. The questions fall into five main themes; JSU club information, Jewish and secular education, family backgrounds, dating and marriage, and Jewish involvement. In addition to these surveys, also conducted were site visits to four clubs in the Los Angeles area; two clubs in the city and two clubs in the valley. During these site visits informal focus group discussions were conducted to learn about the club and those that attend. The questions asked during the visits related to getting a deeper understanding of why those attendees came to the club. In what other Jewish activities were they engaged outside of the club? How did they feel about their clubs and advisors? And, what they thought they were going to do Jewishly after high

school? Their anecdotes and interests helped me get a fuller picture of the Jewish Student Union and its effects on their participants.

Personal and Family Background

In researching the club's members and alumni, the JSU wanted to know what the background of these groups. They wanted to know what was their religion and parents' religion, their ethnic make up, and a few other pieces of demographic information. The alumni survey and current student survey were not the same because of time constraints and directional changes. First, there will a discussion of the current student background and then move on to the alumni respondents.

Of the current members that were surveyed, when asked religion best describes who they are, what was found that the majority of current members were Jewish, 75%, 10% claimed no religion, 10% were Christians, 2 individuals claimed to be both Jewish and Christian, about 4% claimed their religion as Islam and, one claimed his religion as Hinduism. Also, a hand full of people claimed to be agnostics.

14. What religion best describes you?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Judaism	75.0%	63
Christianity	9.6%	8
Islam	3.6%	3
Buddhism	0.0%	0
Hinduism	1.0%	1
None	10.7%	9
Other (please specify)		10
answered question		84
skipped question		8

About 70% of their mothers are Jewish, almost 20% are Christians, one is Muslim, one is Hindu, one is Baha'i, and one is Pagan. The fathers of these members are

about the same as the mothers. Another item to note is that 9% of their parents have no religion, claimed their children.

Of the alumni, as mentioned before, different questions were asked with some relevant overlap. The majority of the respondents, 64%, attended high school in Southern California, 13% were from Illinois, 1 respondent was from Kansas, 1 was from Massachusetts, and one from North Carolina. Please note that 23 individuals chose not answer this question, for reasons unknown. 75% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 21. The remaining few were mainly about 17-18 years of age. The majority of the respondents are female, 63%, and the remaining 37% are male.

35. What is your gender?		Response Percent	Response Count
Male	1	37.5%	23
Female		62.1%	36
Other (please tell us know)			2
answered question			58
skipped question			3

Of the alumni that answered the survey, one in five were foreign born – that's a large percentage. 81% of the alumni were born in the United States, two were born in Israel, three were Persians born in Iran, five were born in the Former Soviet Union, one was born in Canada, and one born in Central America. Also, a question was asked as to where their parents were born and this is what was discovered: 44% of the parents were born in the United States; 21% of the parents were born in Iran; 6% of the parents were born in Russia; 5% of them were born in an Eastern European country; 4% of the parents were born in Israel; 3% born in a Western European country; 3% of the parents were born in South America; and 14% of the parents were born in countries or global areas that the

respondents wished not to share.

In this survey to the alumni, it was important to learn; how many of them belonged to a synagogue while in high school. It is of even greater importance because this organization aims to reach the unaffiliated Jewish teen population. And, as a follow up, if they did belong to a synagogue, what was the denomination of Judaism of the synagogue. Of those that answered the question; did your family belong to a synagogue at anytime when you were in high school? The alumni responded that about 70% of the 92% that answered this question did belong to a synagogue during high school, and that 44% of those that belonged to a synagogue, attended a Conservative synagogue. The remainder of those that chose to share where they went to synagogue when they attended 23% were members at an Orthodox synagogue, 19% belonged to a Reform synagogue, 10% attended a Chabad synagogue, and one attended a Reconstructionist synagogue. 31% of the alumni chose not to answer this question.

12. Did your family belong to a synagogue at anytime when you were in high school?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	59.5%	33
No	30.4%	17
	answered question	56
	skipped question	5

13. Was this synagogue...		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Modern Orthodox	27.0%	12
Conservative	42.5%	18
Reform	21.6%	9
Reconstructionist	2.7%	1
Other, please specify:		5
	answered question	37
	skipped question	24

Club Findings

Relating back to importance of peer relationships and the impact peers have, both current members, with 82%, and alumni, with 63%, primarily found out about the Jewish Student Union from other students at school. Also, in cases where students have come from Jewish day school to public high schools there seems to be some previous knowledge of the club. Also, as to whether their parents had any influence through encouragement for attending JSU club meetings and by a fairly narrow margin of between 53% and 58% from both the alumni and current members said that their parents did not encourage them to attend. In asking the current students if this was their first year as a club member, 56% marked that this was not their first year in the club. According to my surveys, the students who are coming into high school either know something positive about the Jewish Student Union or haven't heard of it because over 50% of both current students and alumni have an opinion of the clubs that is either positive or they just have never heard anything about it before.

When asked a question, why do/did you want to go to your JSU club? Most of the members attend to be with their peers. The Jewish Student Union has been known and continues to be a place to get free pizza, have some fun during a school day, and be with friends that also attend the club meetings. An answer that didn't fit into why these members attend the clubs was, "Singular connection to Judaism" during a week. Of the respondents only about 20% responded that this was one reason they came to the club. This is an item that will be discussed at another point in this paper. Of both the alumni and the current students, be it either their first year of being a member of a JSU club or be it a members last year, or current year, the members of the club have a high rate of regular attendance. The attendance rate for the alumni of the program was between 82% to 84% attending always or almost always attending club meetings. And, of the members

of the program currently, they attend “most of the time” to “always or almost always” 80% to 92% percent of the time from the first year to their current year.

5. Why did you want to go to your JSU club? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)			Response Percent	Response Count
Fun	<input type="checkbox"/>		55.3%	61
Free Food	<input type="checkbox"/>		57.4%	62
Be with friends who attend the JSU club	<input type="checkbox"/>		70.7%	65
Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>		55.2%	60
College Resume	<input type="checkbox"/>		47.8%	41
Singular connection to Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>		13.5%	18
Meet new people	<input type="checkbox"/>		43.4%	39
A connection with Israel	<input type="checkbox"/>		20.7%	19
Other (please specify):				6
answered question				82
skipped question				0

Current Members

5. Why did you want to go to your JSU club? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)			Response Percent	Response Count
Fun	<input type="checkbox"/>		53.1%	49
Free Food	<input type="checkbox"/>		31.4%	46
Be with friends who attended JSU club meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>		75.3%	45
Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>		57.5%	34
College Resume	<input type="checkbox"/>		50.3%	30
Singular connection to Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>		22.0%	13
Meet new people	<input type="checkbox"/>		54.4%	38
A connection with Israel	<input type="checkbox"/>		37.3%	22
Other (please specify):				6
answered question				59
skipped question				2

Alumni Members

In studying this organization and learning about what makes it a successful program for Jewish students in public high schools, there was interest as to what

programs they really liked and which types of programs they could maybe live without. This was of importance to determining why they had success in their attendance and, potentially, could have a degree of relevance to their ultimate impact. In both the survey of the current students and the alumni, there were four main types of programs that were the best received: “Just chillin’,” “Holiday Celebrations,” “Guest Speakers,” and “Discussions.”

Although being with friends is the main draw, the content is also important. One student at Santa Monica High School said, “It’s what we talk about here in our club that I really like.” Similar responses were heard at all the clubs. A student at Cleveland High School said, “I really like having debates about stuff... like issues that we don’t normally talk about.” That is a unique dimension to the quality of the JSU, being able to go deeper into topics. Finding this response encouraged me to delve deeper into this answer. Another question was asked to them to try to explain this response more deeply and to receive some greater understanding about this point. At Hamilton High School when I asked this, a respondent said, “...the topics we talk about here (in the JSU club), we don’t normally discuss in our other classes or just amongst our friends.... we discuss things like today, fate versus pre-determination. We can’t have these discussions in our other classes. And Solly makes these topics interesting and easy to understand and discuss.”

And these answers revealed another factor, the influence of the club advisor, to the discussions being had at these club meetings. “Solly makes the topics he presents to us interesting and [he] makes it fun to talk to about,” (a Santa Monica student). Another Santa Monica Student said, “These aren’t issues or topics that we would talk about in any other place... we can’t talk about most of these topics with other adults in school because of politics, I think?” And at Cleveland High School, a student told why they think the discussions are so great for the clubs, “Because our club advisor has much different

opinions then we do... she's much more conservative than us and we're liberal, it makes it so that we talk about issues that could more challenging and more interesting." It appears that who is chosen to be club advisors is of great importance to the club's success.

After learning about which programming the members of the club enjoy best, it felt appropriate to learn which ones they enjoyed the least. While the survey asked them to choose the three they liked the least, two events occurred. First, many of those surveyed responded to this question - by not giving a response at all, 16% of the current students and 30% of the alumni skipped this question. And secondly, there were only two choices that both cohorts agreed to enjoying the least. The two that were enjoyed the least were "Arts & Crafts projects" and "Lectures/Presentations." The option of "Arts & Crafts projects" was inserted to help give them options of activities they might have done.

Both the alumni and current students agree on the impact of the Jewish Student Union. When asked to the alumni of the program in the alumni survey, what was their overall or general impression of the involvement in the Jewish Student Union during high school? And an overwhelming majority, 85%, felt that their involvement with the organization was positive to very positive. This means that they felt they got something out of being involved, that they were positively impacted by this program in their high school during those years. What sorts of impacts then did this have? What sort of impacts do the current member feel it does and will have on them? From these questions, we have learned what impacts this program had on the majority of the alumni participants. The majority of alumni felt that the program had a positive impact in; "making Jewish friends," "learning about Judaism," "learning about Jewish culture and/or Jewish history," and "became more interested in Judaism." And of the current students felt similarly about "making Jewish friends," "learning about Judaism," and "leaning about Jewish culture and/or Jewish history." The difference came about in that instead of

“becoming more interested in Judaism” they put in a higher level of impact, “learning about Israel.”

Religious and Secular Education

For this study, there was an interest to know how these JSU members were educated both in a Jewish setting and a regular school setting. This was of interest because Jewish education relates directly to Jewish communal affiliation. And there was wonder if there were any trends in education that existed amongst the current members and the alumni. In the surveys, responses for questions relating to this received some conflicting trends and a great number of similarities. There is a feeling that this section will need further research in the future. But, what the study wanted to know was; what kinds of elementary and middle school or junior high school these people attended? What was their Jewish education like during those years? And for the alumni, what other programs they were involved in during high school?

For the alumni, 74% attended a public elementary school and 27% attended a Jewish day school. And these about 48% of the alumni of the program had two or more days per week of Hebrew school or religious school. As for the current students, the answers on the survey may have been ordered in a challenging manner or another factor was in play because they reported only about 47% attended a public elementary school and 37% reported to attending a private school that was not Jewish. In middle school the percentages were the same for current members and for the alumni the attendance in Jewish day schools was slightly less and public school attendance was slightly more in a similar percentage. The attendance by the alumni and current members to the variety of kinds of schools throughout their years prior to high school shows the openness and acceptance of Jewish youth into the American educational system.

When it comes to Jewish education for both cohorts there were some themes of

interest. The alumni who were involved in the JSU during high school had very high rate of religious education during elementary and middle school. For the alums, in both elementary and middle school, 49% of them attended Hebrew school or religious school two or more times per week. And, during high school 20% of them attended a Sunday school, 31% attended Hebrew High School, 22% went to Confirmation Classes and 38% participated as a volunteer with a Jewish organization or agency. And for the current members about 65% claim they have no formal Jewish education but, about 20% attend at least one day a week of Hebrew school or religious school, there is suspicion that the attendance was at Hebrew High School. A point to note about the alumni is that no one responded that they were apart of a Zionist Youth Organization and approximately a quarter went to a Jewish camp and a fifth were participants in a non-Jewish organization.

The majority of the alumni surveyed are still in college or a technical school and have not yet graduated. One question asked that was very similar to a question found on the NJPS 2000-2001 was about Jewish involvement on a university campus. Of those surveyed, 37% have or are currently taking courses in Judaic studies in a university setting. Almost 75% of the JSU alumni participate in Jewish activities on campus. Not so

20. In college did you participate in any of the following?				Response Count
	Yes	No	Not Answerable	
Courses in Judaic studies	37.0% (20)	55.6% (30)	7.3% (4)	54
Jewish activities on campus	74.1% (40)	24.1% (13)	2.7% (1)	54
Mitzvah	83.7% (41)	16.4% (9)	2.0% (1)	49
Jewish activities on campus	58.0% (28)	38.0% (19)	4.0% (2)	50
Chabad near campus	55.3% (26)	42.6% (20)	6.4% (3)	47
Attend a Jewish lecture, concert, or program on campus	71.2% (37)	26.0% (13)	2.8% (1)	52
answered question				55
skipped question				6

surprisingly, 75% participate in some fashion with Hillel and 53% have participated in Israel activities on campus. About 47% have had a connection with a Chabad House near campus. And, 67% have attended a Jewish lecture, concert, or program on campus.

Dating and Marriage

Professionals and Researchers alike, who care and work in the Jewish communities, are highly interested in who Jews are dating and choosing as spouses and life partners because of the impact these future families will have on the Jewish community. Also, there are some Jewish organizations that exist solely in the hopes of ensuring that young Jewish people are meeting and in-marrying. This is extremely relevant because 86% of the alumni are still single and never married. While the Jewish Student Union does not exist to accomplish this goal, it is their hope that Jewish high schoolers are creating for themselves Jewish futures and one part of this Jewish future is meeting and marrying some else who is Jewish. For this survey a few dating and marriage questions were asked of the alumni cohort. These questions included; who they dated while in college or simply after high school; what is their marital status; is or was the person they were married to or dating seriously Jewish; and who are they dating currently?

The alumni cohort claimed that after high school or while they were in college 40% dated only Jews, while 25% claimed to not date. Of those that did not strictly date Jews, 15% dated mostly Jews, 8% dated both Jews and non-Jews, 4% dated mostly people who were not Jewish, and 9% dated only non-Jews. 13% of the total cohort did not answer the question.

21. After high school or in college, I date or dated...		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Only Jews	39.5%	21
Mostly Jews	15.1%	8
Both Jews and non-Jews equally	7.5%	4
Mostly non-Jews	3.5%	2
Only non-Jews	9.4%	5
Did not date	24.5%	12
	answered question	53
	skipped question	8

The alumni cohort for the most part is still in college but, 14% are in a committed relationship but, not married. Again, 8% of the alumni cohort did not choose to answer the question. When asked whom these people are currently dating at the time that they answered this survey: of the 90% who answered this question, 36% are only dating someone Jewish, 13% are mostly dating other Jews, 11% are dating equally Jews and non-Jews, 2% are choosing to date only non-Jews, and 36% are not dating currently at all.

29 IF YOU ARE NOT MARRIED Do you currently date?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Only Jews	35.7%	20
Mostly Jews	12.5%	7
Both Jews and non-Jews	10.7%	6
Mostly non-Jews	3.6%	2
Only non-Jews	1.8%	1
Not currently dating	35.7%	20
	answered question	56
	skipped question	5

Israel

Another topic of interest to this study was Israel because a hopefully positive

relationship with Israel is a part of the objective of the Jewish Student Union. Have people been to Israel? How and why did they go to Israel? Do any of them plan to live in Israel? Are they living there now? And, what is the relationship that alumni of the Jewish Student Union have with Israel? The topic of Israel is of great importance to professionals in the field of working in Jewish communities because of fears that many older people have about the loss of support and fears related to losing the State of Israel.

The alumni of these clubs are fairly active when it comes to Israel. Since high school, about 45% have been to Israel. Their travels there have included: going on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip (52%); a gap year between high school and college (4%); done a college year abroad in Israel (4%); a handful have done a self tour in Israel (12%); over a quarter have done a family trip to Israel (28%); many more on other organized trips to Israel (36%); and a fifth have gone to Israel to study in a Yeshiva or another religious institutions (20%). One individual went to Israel with his Jewish fraternity brothers on an Alpha Epsilon Pi trip. A couple traveled to Israel to volunteer for organizations in Israel. Many have been to Israel several times for different reasons and many more wish to go in the future. Of those who have not been to Israel yet, 94% plan to go to Israel in the future but, 36% of them don't want to go just yet. Of course, without a control group we can't attribute this only to the Jewish Student Union but, it probably helped.

31. If you marked yes on the previous question, please mark all that apply:		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Taglit-Birthright Israel	51.0%	13
Gap Year (between high school and college)	4.0%	1
Year abroad during college	4.0%	1
Self Tour	12.0%	3
Family Trip	28.0%	7
Organized trip other than Taglit-Birthright site	38.0%	9
Year or religious study	20.0%	5
Other (please specify):		2
answered question		25
skipped question		36

The findings from this alumni survey also uncovered information about making Aliyah to Israel two respondents currently live in Israel and eight individuals plan to live there in the future. 38% of the alumni respondents don't know if they will or will make Aliyah and 44% flatly reject the option of making Aliyah to Israel. And, the alumni cohort has a variety of relationships to the State of Israel. When asked about this relationship with the state, they responded; 50% have family in Israel, 67% have friends who are Israeli, 71% hold an admiration of Israel, 73% want to visit either for their first time or again, 53% hold an interest in learning Hebrew, 38% hold very Zionist views about Israel, 9% feel conflicted about the state, one individual views Israel negatively, and 9% avoided answering this question.

34. What best describes your current relationship with the State of Israel? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
None	1.8%	1
Have family in Israel	30.9%	25
Have Israel friends	67.3%	57
Admire Israel	70.9%	59
Want to visit	72.7%	60
Want to speak Hebrew	52.7%	43
Very Zionist	39.2%	32
Feel Confused	9.1%	8
View Israel Negatively	1.8%	1
No Opinion	0.0%	0
Care to elaborate, but not required		15
answered question		55
skipped question		6

For this question, an opportunity existed for people to elaborate more freely on their relationship with Israel. One respondent said, “A fairly negative perception of Israel overall on campus has made me both cautious and yet more ‘Zionist’ in the way in which I voice my opinion with others who disagree.” Another student with an opposing view, “I am pro-Palestinian after taking a class on the middle east in college. My dad is strongly pro-Israel because of persecution in Iran, anger towards Muslims, and American press. I have a friend serving in the IDF and family as well.” The conflicts in their responses is concurrent with views of those who are still currently members of a JSU club. One current club member at Cleveland High School said, when they were asked about Israel, “I love Israel... I just don’t agree with it some of the time.” However, these findings from the alumni show that support for the existence of the state of Israel is still high.

Current Jewish Identity and Jewish Involvement

In this study the staff of the JSU also wanted to know about other Jewish elements in their life that could help me get a more full understanding of their Jewish life currently.

This study has found that half of the respondents feel that the Jewish population was a factor in deciding where to live and, since most are in college, where they went to school. What was found was that of those that answered: 32% claim to be Conservative Jews; 18% claim to be Orthodox Jews; 22% are Reform Jews; and 28% claiming that they are “Just Jewish.” With over a quarter of the alumni surveyed claiming to be “Just Jewish,” it illustrates the idea of post-denominationalism, an era where Jews don’t affiliate with a specific Jewish movement or governing body like the Orthodox Union or Union for Reform Judaism for example, the next generation is becoming a reality and that must be planned for in the future.

Also, during the last year, this cohort of alumni reported many other Jewish connections. Of those that answered questions relating to Jewish study or interests (85%); 75% of them read a Jewish newspaper, magazine or other publication and 64% of them have listened to a CD, podcast, mp3, album, or other media because it contained Jewish content. A large portion (73%) of them have seen a movie or rented a DVD because it had Jewish content and read a Jewish book, other than holy Jewish texts (60%). An interesting finding is that in the last year 79% of those that answered this question have used the Internet for Jewish related information. And, just under half (47%) of the alumni have attended a Jewish education class or some kind of adult Jewish learning, such as, a book group, a study group at home or work, a Tanakh study group or synagogue program, of course, not including a college course.

24. During the last year, did you attend any adult Jewish education classes or any other kind of adult Jewish learning, such as, a book group, a study group at home or work, a bible study group or synagogue programs? (Excluding any college courses you may have taken)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	47.3%	25
No	52.7%	29
answered question		55
skipped question		6

And lastly, there was interest to find out what organized Jewish entities these alumni are affiliated with. For this question, 20% decided not to answer. Of those that responded to this question: 14% belong to a Jewish Community Center; 38% belong to an alternative Jewish organization like a Jewish social action group or Jewish political group; 55% of the respondents belong to a synagogue; 10% belong to Havura or a minyan group; 72% claim they are apart of a Jewish club; and one individual is a member of a Jewish sports league. The alumni are also involved in Hillels, Jewish fraternities, and even a Jewish band.

25. Do you currently belong to any of the following... (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Community Center	14.3%	8
Alternative Jewish organization (i.e. Jewish social action groups, Jewish political groups, Jewish volunteer orgs.)	38.1%	19
Synagogue	54.5%	27
Havura or Minyan	9.5%	4
Jewish clubs	71.4%	36
Jewish sports leagues	2.4%	1
Other (please specify):		5
answered question		42
skipped question		13

26. Is/Was Jewish population a factor in choosing where you live?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50.0%	20
No	50.0%	20
answered question		56
skipped question		5

Implication of Research for Policy Recommendations

The research for this project and the findings that have come from this research have lead to a few topics and themes that could help this organization be even more successful in the future. This organization serves a great purpose in the Jewish community and tends to have a positive impact on the lives of those who participate in this program. The Jewish Student Union fills a niche that might not have otherwise been filled by an opportunity that has injected another dose of Judaism into the lives of those who participate. Many of the findings that have been discussed in this project are not new and, are to some relief, similar to information gathered from other like Jewish populations found across the United States. These are a few themes that could use some further explaining and understanding to continue to help elevate this organization to operating at an even higher level as an organization and for the participants. These three areas that I have outlined are; alumni tracking, more leadership and less outreach, and the leaders make all the difference.

Alumni Tracking

This first implication from the research is tracking the alumni of the Jewish Student Union. A major problem in conducting research of the participants of the Jewish Student Union clubs was being able to find these alumni of the program and having them respond to inquiries of research of their former club experiences and learning about what and where they are currently.

This problem became very troubling to the research because the alumni list I had started with was well over 700 names and email addresses for alumni of the program since the organizations first year of operation back in 2002, and that was just the clubs in Los Angeles. When the surveys for this project began to go out to the alumni of the clubs in Los Angeles. Of the 700+ email addresses that were sent an initial survey about 350

email addresses came back with an automated response claiming that those email addresses were now not in use or were maybe just incorrect. In the research to complete this project, this became a critical concern. In addition, the remainder of the active email addresses, where an individual did receive an email, the vast majority chose not to respond to this project that would be assisting the organization that they were a member of for a few years.

During the research of this organization a particular Jewish Student Union document was read, it claimed that after graduating high school participants would be supplied, “The K.I.T. - a Jewish Guide for **Keeping In Touch**” (Reifman, 2006, p.26). In this handbook would contain many use resources for students to use as they make the transition from high school to college to help maintain their Jewish connection. In addition, “the handbook will include information about staying in touch with JSU, joining the online alumni network through JSU’s website, and being a goodwill ambassador for the organization” (Reifman, 2006, p.27). Also, in the document there was discussion of a way to link Hillel professionals up with incoming freshman to ensure a continuity of Jewish involvement for the alumni of the Jewish Student Union. It reads, “Therefore, with the help of the national JSU database, JSU professionals will develop “the Hillel Handoff,” an effort that has already begun in some JSU locations around the country” (Reifman, 2006, p.27). While there is no doubt that there is an online JSU alumni network and that there is a database of email addresses compiled of alumni of the Jewish Student Union. There is a problem with these in terms of actual functionality of these two forms of alumni tracking. Using the recommendations listed below, these are some that if implemented could help better track the alumni of the JSU.

Alumni Tracking Recommendations:

Nationally Standardized Database

- It would be of great benefit if there were to be a central database kept of all the participants' information. This could be done at the national office by an executive or have a specific city director in charge.
- A standardized nationally used form that collects all the information needed on an individual. For instance needed would be their; Name, Address, Phone Number, Email Address, etc.
- Regularly updated database – make sure the information is current and that the information gathered is active.

Updated Email Addresses

- Encourage participants to put JSU in their contacts list – so, when they go to college and forward their emails from lets say Yahoo or Gmail to their university accounts they will continue to have a contact with the Jewish Student Union.
- JSU should send the alumni a newsletter via email – this will help to continue a connection but, also will serve to keep email information updated.

Consolidate Social Networking Platforms

- Create and maintain a national social networking site. Using an alumni network based in the website of the organization is now an outdated medium. Use another social networking platform (Facebook or LinkedIn) to maintain an online social network.
- Create only one national JSU social network. If other cities want to make their own sites that is okay but, set up rules as to how that site is used, linked, and titled.

More Leadership, Same Outreach

Before really jumping into do research for this project, getting to know the basic information of this organization was very important. And in learning the basics about the JSU, like other organizations, getting an understanding of their purpose, goals, mission, and values was important to this research. The Jewish Student Union, on the most basic level, is to get more Jewish teens to do Jewish things and connect with the Jewish community. Yet, “On a deeper level, JSU’s goal is to combat assimilation at its root by making Judaism ‘cool and relevant’ to the largest population of Jewish teenagers – the unaffiliated” (Reifman, 2006, p.12). The JSU clubs design their programming to; “enhance teens’ Jewish identity, nurture a connection to the State of Israel, provide a portal for deeper involvement with the Jewish community and, inspire an enduring relationship with the Jewish people” (Reifman, 2006, p.12).

The facts from the research findings show information that is not currently in-line with the intentions of the organization. The findings have shown that of the majority of alumni who have participated in a Jewish Student Union club on their high school campuses are not typically – the unaffiliated. In fact the majority have been exception to the national norm of Jewish teen involvement. The findings have shown that almost 70% of the alumni belonged to synagogue while in high school and that about 60% of the alumni had been involved at least one or more days a week of another Jewish connection through a Hebrew school or a religious school like Hebrew High School (31%), a Sunday School (20%), or have participated as a volunteer with some Jewish organization or agency (38%).

This is to show that more effort can be placed into creating more Jewish leadership within the individuals who attend the club already and that just as much effort should be placed into the outreach side of the organization to attract – the unaffiliated. Also, these clubs appear to be very peer driven and directed. The large majority of those

that attend these clubs find out about it and are encouraged to come by their friends who are Jewish and already attend (63%). In its own information the organization has mentioned this as a key to their success. That “Friends: The social environment of the JSU Club provides a safe place for teens to connect with each other”(Reifman, 2006, p.12).

More Leadership, Same Outreach Recommendations:

Encourage more leadership opportunities

- Try to encourage that they create and lead their own Jewish experiences outside of the sphere of the Jewish Student Union. Start a sports team, or another affinity group within the JSU club. Get a number of different people to lead these opportunities So that it’s not just one leader all the time.
- Engage and challenge the clubs to set their own agendas for what they learn and experience during their club meetings.
- Guide the clubs to help them put Jewish values and ethics into more practice. Make every experience a Jewish one.

Seek out more Jewish teens

- Engage the current club members to find other Jews who may not come often or Jews that are personally discouraged from coming because they feel they don’t “fit in” with the club or its members.
- Get those that rarely show to make a one commitment to show up and hold them accountable. Being aware that Judaism is just one part of their life, help them to connect anyway.
- Keep in contact, personally, with those that rarely show by calling them on the phone or seeking them in the halls of school to meet with them. This can be

done by either members or club advisors.

Leaders Make the Difference

While conducting research for this project, there have been chances to encounter some of the wonderful club advisors. The people come basically every week to these schools to help guide these clubs on the path to success. Without the leaders that come for about 50 minutes each week to the schools the clubs might not meet and this would just be another missed opportunity to engage Jewish teens and help them along the way on their Jewish journeys. These leaders come with topics to discuss with the clubs, assist them with their queries about Judaism and Jewish life, and provide the crucial slice in these clubs, the pizza.

The Jewish Student Union prides itself that these leaders are charismatic and that charisma is another key to success. “Charismatic JSU youth advisors make Judaism ‘relevant and cool’ to the teen mindset. Furthermore, since the only way to have a meaningful impact on the life of the teenager is to have a sustained relationship with him or her, JSU’s club advisors work hard to develop personal relationships with the teens and follow up with on a regular basis outside of club meetings”(Reifman 13). Some research that was uncovered during club visits was that some members claimed that the advisors have such a huge impact on their lives, that if wasn’t for that club advisor leader they may not show up for these club meetings.

However, there is a message of caution that should be conveyed about the club advisors. The Jewish Student Union is an organization that is not affiliated by any specific movement but, the program was started through and works in close relationship with the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY). The NCSY is the youth arm of the Orthodox Union. This leads to two concerns; first, most of the club advisors are Orthodox Jews and, second, most of the unaffiliated Jews are not Orthodox Jews. There

exists a disconnect in the leaders and their target audience. Those doing the outreach and finding those Jews in public high school that are unaffiliated have typically very little in common and could find it hard to relate to the adult leaders of the clubs. Most of the unaffiliated Jews have not and do not typically wish to associate with Orthodox Judaism.

The first concern affects the second concern. While conducting research no evidence was found that having an Orthodox Jew lead these clubs had a deeply negative effect. In fact, the leaders that were seen during this research did an exceptional job of relating to the teens and speaking with authority on Jewish topics and questions that were raised from many different perspectives. There was some difficulty and discussion about club leaders that had differing opinions about certain topics then the teens and that it could have the potential to turn off those whom are most often unaffiliated – non-Orthodox Jews.

The NJPS 2000-2001 has helped to uncover that those most often and likely to not affiliate with Jews and Jewish community are those that come from intermarried households and those Jews in the Reform and other more liberal denominations of Judaism. The challenge comes when those more liberal Jews who are unaffiliated feel that the well intentioned, charismatic, wonderful club advisors are “too Jewish.” This large swath of the Jewish community might feel as if the leader him or herself is a barrier for access to this successful and important Jewish organization. Maybe some recommendations should be offered.

Leaders Make the Difference Recommendations:

Leaders from a variety of Jewish denominations

- Recruit charismatic, knowledgeable, and trustworthy Jewish club advisors who are not Orthodox Jews.
- Get guest speakers who can present Jewish issues and topics from different

perspectives.

- Work in teams of multi-denominational groups to attract as many Jewish teens as possible.

Leadership training seminars

- Get the best leaders and most favored leaders to share with other leaders
- Establish norms of operation of the clubs and how issues and topics are taught and how to better get the members engaged, so they're not just there for the free pizza.
- Increase awareness of the denominational differences of all Jewish denominations to all the leaders to help increase the inclusion of all Jews to this club.

Quality leadership retention

- Once quality leaders are found they must be encouraged to stick around, not just because it is a job.
- There must be room for advancement or, great people could go elsewhere for employment.
- The leaders that are quality must have impact and say into the operation of the organization and should take on fund raising responsibilities to ensure the organizations success and growth.

Bibliography

- Arnett, Jeffery J. Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Twenties. New York City: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Cohen, Steven. "Engaging the Next Generation of American Jews, Distinguishing the In-Married, Inter-Married, and Non-Married." Journal of Jewish Communal Service 1st ser. Vol. 81.Fall/Winter (2005): 43-52.
- Cohen, Steven M., and Ari Y. Kelman. Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York. Rep. New York City: UJA-Federation of New York, Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal, 2005.
- Greenberg, Anna. "Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam...": Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices. Rep. New York City: Reboot, 2006.
- Kadushin, Charles, Shaul Kelner, and Leonard Saxe. Being a Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It. Publication. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2000.
- National Jewish Population Survey. North American Jewish Data Bank. Mandell L. Berman, 2001.
- Reboot. About Us. (n.d.) Retrieved April 5, 2009. from http://www.rebooters.net/index.php?site=reboot&page=rbt_aboutus.
- Reifman, Shira. Jewish Student Union."The Club for Jewish Teens." Teaneck, NJ. 2006.
- Sales, Amy L. "How goodly are thy tents" summer camps as Jewish socializing experiences. Lebanon, N.H: Brandeis UP in association with The Avi Chai Foundation, published by UP of New England, 2004.
- Saxe, Leonard, and Barry I. Chazan. Ten days of Birthright Israel a journey in young adult identity. Waltham, Mass: Brandeis UP, UP of New England, 2008.

Smith, Christian, and Robert Faris. Religion and the Life Attitudes and Self-Images of American Adolescents. Publication. Ser. 2. Chapel Hill, NC: National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002.

Ukeles, Jacob, B., Ron Miller and Pearl Beck. "Young Jewish Adults in the United States", New York, American Jewish Committee, 2006.

Appendix A: Current Member Survey with Results

1. How did you first learn about JSU on your high school campus? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
From an older brother or sister _____	22.6%	12
From another student at school _____	82.1%	69
School bulletin or newsletter _____	14.3%	12
My parents _____	3.3%	7
Poster on campus _____	25.0%	22
Rabbi, youth group advisor, or someone else at my synagogue	2.4%	2
Other (please specify): _____		11
answered question		84
skipped question		8

2. Did either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) encourage you to attend the JSU clubs?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
No _____	57.5%	53
Yes _____	42.4%	39
answered question		92
skipped question		0

3. Is this your first year attending the JSU club?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
No	55.7%	49
Yes	44.3%	39
answered question		88
skipped question		4

4. Before attending your first JSU club meeting, what was your opinion of the JSU?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Positive _____	24.0%	22
Positive _____	29.7%	27
Neutral _____	24.0%	22
Negative _____	0.0%	0
Very Negative _____	0.0%	0
Didn't know anything about it _____	22.0%	20
	answered question	91
	skipped question	1

5. Why did you want to go to your JSU club? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Fun _____	66.3%	51
Free Food _____	67.4%	52
Be with friends who attend the JSU club _____	70.7%	55
Culture _____	65.0%	50
College Resume _____	47.8%	44
Singular connection to Judaism _____	19.6%	15
Meet new people _____	42.4%	33
A connection with Israel _____	20.7%	16
	Other (please specify): _____	5
	answered question	92
	skipped question	0

6. (IF THIS IS YOUR 1ST YEAR ATTENDING JSU CLUB, PLEASE SKIP QUESTION #6) How often did you attend meetings of the JSU last year?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Always or Almost Always	58.2%	32
Most of the time	21.6%	12
Occasionally	14.5%	8
Rarely	5.6%	3
answered question		55
skipped question		37

7. How often have you attended meetings of the JSU club this current year?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Always or almost always	61.1%	55
Most of the time	31.1%	28
Occasionally	2.0%	2
Rarely	5.6%	5
answered question		90
skipped question		2

8. What three types of JSU programs have you enjoyed the MOST? (MARK THREE THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Playing Games	33.3%	29
Holiday Celebrations	43.7%	39
Guest Speakers	54.0%	47
Lectures/Presentations	29.5%	26
Arts & Crafts Projects	14.5%	13
Community Service Projects	12.6%	11
Videos	18.4%	16
Discussions	37.5%	33
Just Chillin'	53.2%	55
Other (please specify):		5
answered question		97
skipped question		5

9. What three types of JSU programs have you enjoyed the LEAST? (MARK THREE THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Playing Games	14.3%	11
Holiday Celebrations	10.4%	8
Guest Speakers	19.6%	15
Lectures/Presentations	42.9%	33
Art & Crafts Projects	45.8%	36
Community Service Projects	27.3%	21
Videos	27.3%	21
Discussions	24.7%	19
Just Chillin' _____	14.3%	11
Other (please specify):		12
answered question		77
skipped question		15

10. What Impact, if any, has the JSU had on you? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
No Impact: _____	2.3%	2
Made Jewish friends	71.3%	52
Learned about Judaism _____	74.7%	65
Learned about Jewish culture and/or Jewish history _____	70.1%	51
Learned about Israel	69.6%	52
Gave me a Jewish connection	49.4%	42
Learned about and became involved in other Jewish teen programs/organizations _____	14.3%	12
Gained interests in Israel _____	40.2%	35
Gained interests in Judaism _____	37.5%	32
Became more observant: _____	31.0%	27
Brought out more involvement with a Jewish community	21.6%	19
Enabled me to visit Israel	10.3%	9
answered question		87
skipped question		5

11. What kind of elementary school did you attend? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Day School	17.6%	16
Private School	37.8%	34
Public School	47.8%	43
Charter School	5.6%	5
Other (please specify):		3
answered question		90
skipped question		2

12. What kind of middle school or junior high school did you attend? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Day School <input type="checkbox"/>	9.1%	8
Private School <input type="checkbox"/>	42.0%	37
Public School <input type="checkbox"/>	51.1%	45
Charter School	0.0%	0
Other (please specify):		1
answered question		86
skipped question		4

13. What is the main kind of Jewish education you are currently receiving?

	Response Percent	Response Count
No formal Jewish education	67.9%	55
One day a week Hebrew School or Religious School	21.0%	17
Two or more days per week Hebrew School or Religious School	9.9%	8
Private Tutor	1.0%	1
Other (please specify):		9
answered question		81
skipped question		11

14. What religion best describes you?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Judaism	75.0%	63
Christianity	9.5%	8
Islam	3.6%	3
Buddhism	0.0%	0
Hinduism	1.0%	1
None	10.7%	9
Other (please specify):		10
answered question		84
skipped question		8

15. What religion best describes you Mother or Guardian?				
			Response Percent	Response Count
Judaism		1	70.1%	61
Christianity			19.6%	17
Islam			1.1%	1
Buddhism			0.0%	0
Hinduism			1.1%	1
None			8.0%	7
	Other (please specify):			4
	answered question			87
	skipped question			5

16. What religion best describes your Father or Guardian?				
			Response Percent	Response Count
Judaism		1	71.4%	60
Christianity		1	15.6%	13
Islam			1.0%	1
Buddhism			0.0%	0
Hinduism		1	2.4%	2
None			9.6%	8
	Other (please specify):			5
	answered question			84
	skipped question			8

Appendix B: Alumni Survey with Results

1. Have you ever attended a Jewish Student Union club meeting?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes _____	55.1%	58
No _____	44.9%	47
	answered question	105
	skipped question	0

2. How did you first learn about JSU on your high school campus? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
From an older brother or sister	10.7%	11
From another student at school	52.5%	55
School bulletin or newsletter	21.4%	22
My parents	5.4%	6
Poster on campus	14.3%	15
Rabbi, youth group advisor, or someone else at my synagogue	23.2%	24
	Other (please specify):	7
	answered question	105
	skipped question	5

3. Did either your parent(s) or guardian(s) encourage you to attend the JSU?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	47.4%	50
No	52.5%	55
	answered question	105
	skipped question	4

4. Before attending your first JSU club meeting, what was your opinion of the JSU?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Positive	13.75%	12
Positive	13.05%	11
Neutral	25.25%	16
Negative <input type="checkbox"/>	3.34%	2
Very Negative	0.00%	0
I didn't know anything about it. <input type="text"/>	25.55%	18
I never attended a JSU club meeting.	3.34%	2
answered question		61
skipped question		0

5. Why did you want to go to your JSU club? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Fun	85.11%	45
Free Food <input type="text"/>	91.45%	48
Be with friends who attended JSU club meetings	75.33%	40
Culture	57.65%	30
College Resume <input type="text"/>	50.38%	26
Singular connection to Judaism	22.00%	11
Meet new people	54.45%	28
A connection with Israel <input type="text"/>	37.35%	20
Other (please specify):		6
answered question		65
skipped question		2

6. How often did you attend meetings of the JSU in the FIRST YEAR you were involved?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Always or almost always <input type="checkbox"/>	55.6%	30
Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	22.2%	12
Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/>	14.3%	8
Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	3.6%	2
	answered question	55
	skipped question	5

7. How often did you attend meetings of the JSU in the LAST YEAR you were involved?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Always or almost always <input type="checkbox"/>	55.6%	30
Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	37.4%	17
Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/>	6.9%	3
Rarely <input type="checkbox"/>	7.1%	4
	answered question	55
	skipped question	5

8. What three types of JSU programs did you enjoy most the MOST? (MARK THREE THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Playing games <input type="checkbox"/>	24.1%	13
Holiday celebrations <input type="checkbox"/>	70.4%	38
Guest speakers <input type="checkbox"/>	59.3%	32
Lectures/Presentations <input type="checkbox"/>	29.6%	16
Arts & Crafts projects <input type="checkbox"/>	14.9%	8
Community Service projects <input type="checkbox"/>	13.0%	7
Videos/Films <input type="checkbox"/>	16.7%	9
Discussions <input type="checkbox"/>	48.1%	26
Just Chatting <input type="checkbox"/>	56.7%	30
	Other (please specify)	3
	answered question	54
	skipped question	7

9. What three types of JSU programs did you enjoy the LEAST? (MARK THREE THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Playing games <input type="checkbox"/>	28.6%	12
Holiday celebrations	7.1%	3
Guest speakers <input type="checkbox"/>	15.7%	7
Lectures/Presentations	52.4%	22
Art & Crafts projects	35.1%	15
Community Service projects <input type="checkbox"/>	14.3%	6
Videos/Films	19.0%	8
Discussions <input type="checkbox"/>	19.0%	8
Just Chillin'	14.3%	6
Other (please specify):		11
answered question		42
skipped question		15

10. At the completion of high school, what was your general/overall impression of your involvement with your Jewish Student Union?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Positive	53.6%	30
Positive <input type="checkbox"/>	35.7%	20
Neutral	8.9%	5
Negative <input type="checkbox"/>	1.3%	1
Very Negative	0.0%	0
answered question		56
skipped question		5

11. Thinking back, what impact, if any, did the JSU have on you while you were still in high school? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)				
			Response Percent	Response Count
I made Jewish friends	<input type="checkbox"/>		66.1%	37
Learned about Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>		62.5%	35
Learned about Jewish culture and/or Jewish history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	64.3%	36
Learned about Israel	<input type="checkbox"/>		44.5%	25
Gave me a Jewish connection	<input type="checkbox"/>		51.3%	29
Learned about and became involved in other Jewish teen programs/organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	41.1%	23
Became interested (or more interested) in Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>		59.9%	33
Became interested (or more interested) in Israel	<input type="checkbox"/>		39.3%	22
I became a more observant Jew	<input type="checkbox"/>		25.0%	14
sought out more involvement with a Jewish community (either during or after high school)	<input type="checkbox"/>		44.5%	25
Enabled or empowered me to visit Israel	<input type="checkbox"/>		15.1%	9
No impact on me at all	<input type="checkbox"/>		7.1%	4
			answered question	66
			skipped question	5

12. Did your family belong to a synagogue at anytime when you were in high school?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	65.6%	35
No <input type="checkbox"/>	34.4%	17
answered question		52
skipped question		5

13. Was this synagogue...

	Response Percent	Response Count
Modern Orthodox <input type="checkbox"/>	27.0%	10
Conservative <input type="checkbox"/>	45.6%	16
Reform <input type="checkbox"/>	21.6%	6
Reconstructionist <input type="checkbox"/>	2.7%	1
Other (please specify):		5
answered question		37
skipped question		24

14. What kind of elementary school did you attend? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Day School <input type="checkbox"/>	27.3%	15
Private School <input type="checkbox"/>	3.6%	2
Public School <input type="checkbox"/>	74.5%	41
Charter School <input type="checkbox"/>	1.3%	1
Other (please specify):		5
answered question		65
skipped question		6

15. IF YOU DID NOT ATTEND A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL: What was the main kind of Jewish education, if any, you had during elementary school?

	Response Percent	Response Count
No formal Jewish education	32.8%	12
One day a week of Hebrew School or Religious School	28.2%	11
Two or more days per week of Hebrew School or Religious School	48.7%	19
Private Tutor	7.7%	3
Other (please specify):		2
answered question		35
skipped question		22

16. What kind of middle school or junior high school did you attend? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Day School	15.1%	9
Private School	0.0%	0
Public School	85.9%	47
Charter School	0.0%	0
Other (please specify):		1
answered question		56
skipped question		5

17. IF YOU DID NOT ATTEND A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL: What was the main kind of Jewish education, if any, you had during middle/junior high school?

	Response Percent	Response Count
No formal Jewish education	23.3%	10
Bar/Bat Mitzvah training only <input type="text"/>	14.0%	6
One day a week of Hebrew School or Religious School	16.3%	7
Two or more days per week of Hebrew School or Religious School <input type="text"/>	46.5%	20
Private Tutor	0.0%	0
Other (please specify):		2
<i>answered question</i>		43
<i>skipped question</i>		18







18. When you were in high school, did you participate in any of the following? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Sunday School <input type="checkbox"/>	20.0%	9
Hebrew High School	31.1%	14
Confirmation Classes <input type="checkbox"/>	22.2%	10
Synagogue Youth Groups <input type="checkbox"/>	26.7%	12
Participate as a volunteer with a Jewish organization/agency <input type="checkbox"/>	37.8%	17
BBYO <input type="checkbox"/>	15.6%	7
Zionist Youth Organization	0.0%	0
Jewish Camp	24.4%	11
Non-Jewish service organization <input type="checkbox"/>	20.0%	9
Other (please specify):		10
<i>answered question</i>		45
<i>skipped question</i>		16



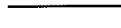

19. What is the highest level of education you have completed thus far?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
High School	—	1.9%	1
Currently enrolled in college or a technical school		53.6%	30
Some college completed but, not yet graduated	_____	25.7%	20
Yeshiva	—	1.9%	1
Completed college or university	—	2.8%	2
Currently enrolled in a graduate program or specialty equivalent	—	2.8%	2
Completed a graduate program or specialty equivalent		0.0%	0
answered question			56
skipped question			5

20. In college, did you participate in any of the following?				
	Yes	No	Not Available	Response Count
Courses in Judaic studies	37.0% (20)	55.6% (30)	8.3% (5)	54
Jewish activities on campus	74.1% (40)	24.1% (13)	3.7% (2)	54
Hillel	83.7% (41)	19.4% (9)	2.0% (1)	49
Israel activities on campus	58.0% (29)	38.0% (19)	4.0% (2)	50
Chabad near campus	55.3% (26)	42.6% (20)	8.4% (3)	47
Attend a Jewish lecture, concert, or program on campus	71.2% (37)	25.0% (13)	3.3% (2)	52
answered question				55
skipped question				6

21. After high school or in college, I date or dated...

	Response Percent	Response Count
Only Jews 	39.6%	21
Mostly Jews 	15.1%	8
Both Jews and non-Jews equally 	7.5%	4
Mostly non-Jews 	3.8%	2
Only non-Jews 	9.4%	5
Did not date 	24.5%	12
answered question		53
skipped question		8

22. Do you consider yourself to be...

	Response Percent	Response Count
Modern Orthodox 	18.0%	9
Conservative 	32.0%	16
Reform 	22.0%	11
Reconstructionist	0.0%	0
Just Jewish 	28.0%	14
Something else		0
answered question		50
skipped question		11

23. During the past year, did you do any of the following? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Read a Jewish newspaper, magazine or other publication	75.0%	39
Listen to a CD, album, podcast, mp3, or etc. because it contained Jewish content	62.5%	32
See a movie or rent a video/DVD because it had Jewish content	72.1%	36
Read a book, other than holy Jewish texts, because it had Jewish content	59.8%	31
Use the internet for Jewish related information	78.8%	41
	<i>answered question</i>	52
	<i>skipped question</i>	9

24. During the last year, did you attend any adult Jewish education classes or any other kind of adult Jewish learning, such as, a book group, a study group at home or work, a bible study group or synagogue programs? (Excluding any college courses you may have taken)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	47.3%	24
No	52.7%	28
	<i>answered question</i>	55
	<i>skipped question</i>	6

25. Do you currently belong to any of the following... (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Jewish Community Center _____	14.3%	6
Alternative Jewish organization (i.e. Jewish social action groups, Jewish political groups, Jewish volunteer orgs.) _____	38.1%	16
Synagogue _____	54.9%	23
Havara or Minyan _____	9.5%	4
Jewish clubs _____	71.4%	30
Jewish sports leagues _____	2.4%	1
Other (please specify): _____		6
answered question		42
skipped question		19

26. Is/Was Jewish population a factor in choosing where you live?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes _____	50.0%	28
No _____	50.0%	28
answered question		56
skipped question		5

27. What is your current marital status?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Single, never married	85.7%	48
In a committed relationship, not married	14.3%	8
Married	0.0%	0
Divorced/Separated	0.0%	0
Widow(er)	0.0%	0
	<i>answered question</i>	56
	<i>skipped question</i>	5

28. Is/Was your spouse or partner Jewish?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	41.2%	7
No	52.9%	9
In the process of conversion	6.8%	1
	Other (please specify)	2
	<i>answered question</i>	17
	<i>skipped question</i>	44

29. IF YOU ARE NOT MARRIED, Do you currently date?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Only Jews <input type="checkbox"/>	35.7%	20
Mostly Jews <input type="checkbox"/>	12.5%	7
Both Jews and non-Jews <input type="checkbox"/>	10.7%	6
Mostly non-Jews <input type="checkbox"/>	3.6%	2
Only non-Jews <input type="checkbox"/>	1.9%	1
Not currently dating <input type="checkbox"/>	35.7%	20
<i>answered question</i>		56
<i>skipped question</i>		5

30. Have you visited Israel since your high school years?

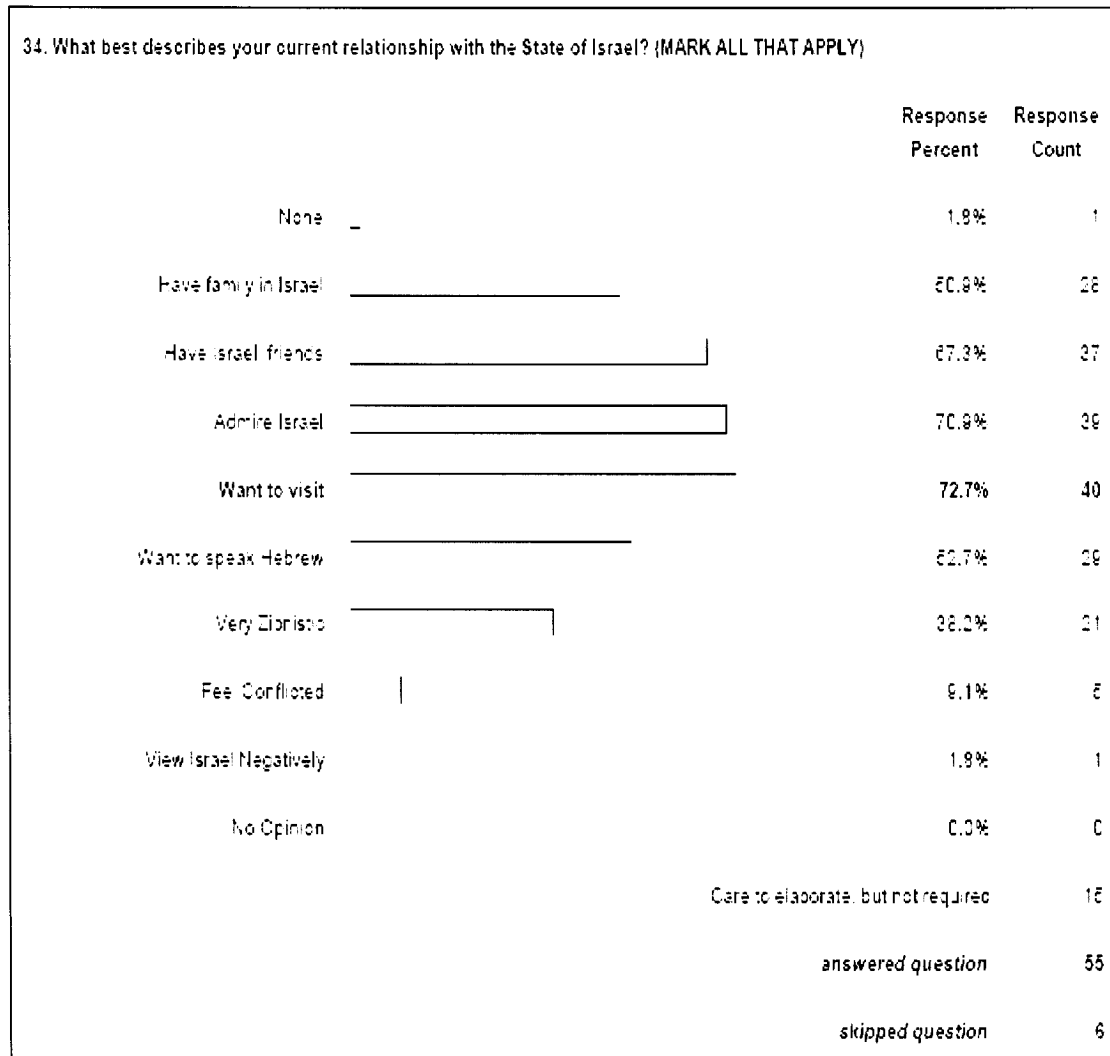
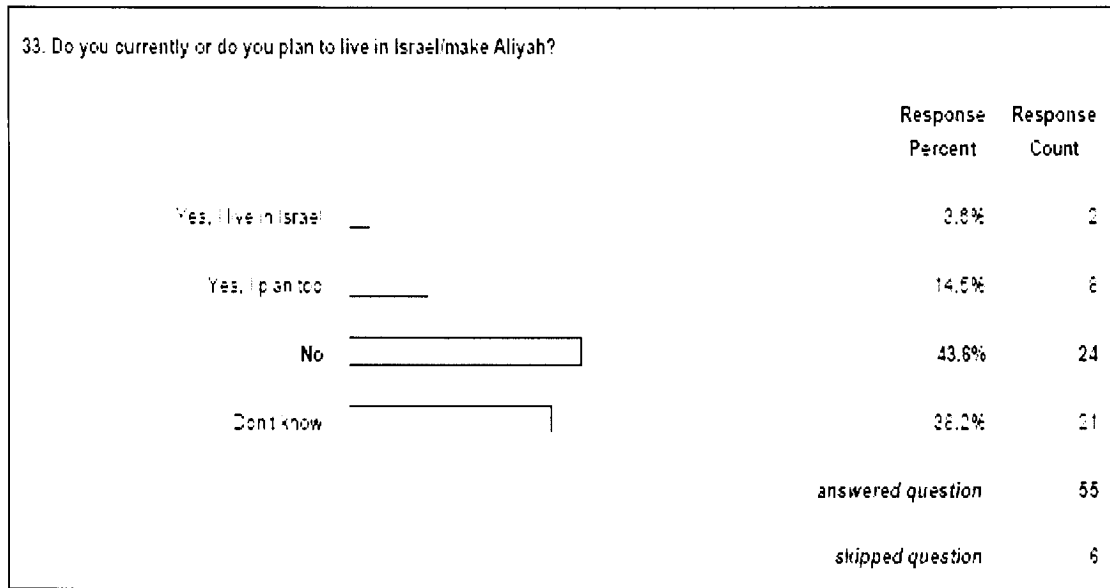
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	44.6%	25
No <input type="checkbox"/>	55.4%	31
<i>answered question</i>		56
<i>skipped question</i>		5

31. If you marked yes on the previous question, please mark all that apply:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Taglit-Birthright Israel <input type="checkbox"/>	52.0%	13
Gap Year (between high school and college) <input type="checkbox"/>	4.0%	1
Year abroad during college <input type="checkbox"/>	4.0%	1
Self Tour <input type="checkbox"/>	12.0%	3
Family Trip <input type="checkbox"/>	28.0%	7
Organized trip (other than Taglit-Birthright Israel) <input type="checkbox"/>	28.0%	6
Yeshiva/Religious study <input type="checkbox"/>	20.0%	5
Other (please specify) _____		2
<i>answered question</i>		25
<i>skipped question</i>		36

32. If you have not yet traveled to Israel, do you plan to go?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	58.1%	18
Yes, but not yet <input type="checkbox"/>	35.5%	11
No <input type="checkbox"/>	6.5%	2
<i>answered question</i>		31
<i>skipped question</i>		30



35. What is your gender?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Male <input type="checkbox"/>	27.9%	22
Female <input type="checkbox"/>	62.1%	36
Other (please let us know) <input type="checkbox"/>		0
<i>answered question</i>		58
<i>skipped question</i>		3

36. In what year were you born?

	Response Percent	Response Count
1951 <input type="checkbox"/>	0.0%	0
1952 <input type="checkbox"/>	0.0%	0
1953 <input type="checkbox"/>	0.0%	0
1954 <input type="checkbox"/>	1.7%	1
1955 <input type="checkbox"/>	2.4%	2
1956 <input type="checkbox"/>	2.5%	2
1957 <input type="checkbox"/>	2.8%	4
1958 <input type="checkbox"/>	20.3%	12
1959 <input type="checkbox"/>	32.2%	19
1960 <input type="checkbox"/>	23.7%	14
1961 <input type="checkbox"/>	1.7%	1
1962 <input type="checkbox"/>	0.0%	0
1963 <input type="checkbox"/>	0.0%	0
1964 <input type="checkbox"/>	1.7%	1
<i>answered question</i>		59
<i>skipped question</i>		2

37. In what state did you attend high school?

	Response Percent	Response Count
California	97.4%	38
Florida	0.0%	0
New York	0.0%	0
New Jersey	0.0%	0
Kansas	2.6%	1
Missouri	0.0%	0
Pennsylvania	0.0%	0
Another state		20
<i>answered question</i>		39
<i>skipped question</i>		22

38. In what country were you born?

	Response Percent	Response Count
United States	82.5%	47
Israel	2.5%	2
Iran	5.3%	3
A Western European Country	0.0%	0
An African Country	0.0%	0
Former Soviet Union	8.9%	5
An Eastern European Country	0.0%	0
A South American Country	0.0%	0
If your country was not listed, please let us know...		4
<i>answered question</i>		57
<i>skipped question</i>		4

39. Where were your parents born?					
	Father	Mother	Male Guardian	Female Guardian	Response Count
United States	64.7% (22)	35.3% (12)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	34
Russia	60.0% (3)	40.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5
Iran	62.5% (10)	37.5% (8)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	16
Israel	66.7% (2)	33.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3
Europe-East	25.0% (1)	75.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4
Europe-West	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	1
South America	0.0% (0)	100.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2
South Africa	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0
Another Country	27.3% (2)	72.7% (8)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	11
answered question					59
skipped question					2

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions with Quotes and Summaries

Focus Group Questions

Besides the pizza, why do you really attend the JSU club meetings?

- “I really love the discussions we have here!”, Hamilton High student
- “It’s what we talk about here in our club that I really like.”, Santa Monica High student
- “I get to hang out with my Jewish friends.” Van Nuys High student
- “I really like having debates about stuff... like issues that we don’t normally talk about.” Cleveland High student

[Based on the answer given] Why is that really of importance to you?

- “I don’t have other opportunities to during my week to meet up and hang out with Jewish friends at school ‘cause I’m so busy with other things in my life.” Van Nuys High student
- “...the topics we talk about here(in the JSU club), we don’t normally discuss in our other classes or just amongst our friends.... we discuss things like today, fate versus pre-determination. We can’t have these discussions in our other classes. And Solly makes these topics interesting and easy to understand and discuss.” Hamilton High student
- “Solly makes the topics he presents to us interesting and [he] makes it fun to talk to about.” Santa Monica Student
- “These aren’t issues or topics that we would talk about in any other place... we can’t talk about most of these topics with other adults in school because of politics, I think?” Santa Monica High student
- “Because our club advisor has much different opinions then we do... she’s much more conservative then us and we’re liberal, it makes it so that we talk about issues that could more challenging and more interesting.” Cleveland High student

What is your opinion of Israel? Generally? Specifically?

- The general opinion I heard from students at these schools was that they loved Israel and most wanted to visit, if they haven’t already with their families. But, they didn’t agree with all their policies and felt conflicted about what they feel Israel should do in regards to their conflict with the Palestinians and their Arab neighbors.
- “I love Israel... I just don’t agree with it some of the time.” Cleveland High student

Are you going to participate in something Jewish after high school?

The majority of the students intend to go to college after high school and the majority of them said that they want to go to and get involved with Hillel. And, if there wasn’t a Hillel they mentioned they wanted to participate in something Jewish.