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## Seeking friendly faces Some students hope Jewish life on campus will ease college transition

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Walking onto a college campus for the first time as a freshman can be intimidating. There are lots of new people, places, classes and experiences ahead of students who, for the most part, are only a few months removed from their high school graduation.

Some students attending the College Quest College Fair, held recently at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington in Rockville, are hoping that finding a friendly face at the campus Hillel will help ease that transition.

Ilana Avergun, a junior at Thomas S. Wootton High School in Rockville, is hoping to find an experience similar to those she's had at the B'nai B'nai Youth Organization.

"Similar to BBYO, you're kinda brought into the organization, taught about what it is and given responsibility and opportunity to do what you want with it," Avergun said. "I'm expecting the same thing out of Hillel, the same camaraderie and welcoming that BBYO provides."

Ira Rickman, another Wootton junior, agrees.

"When I joined BBYO, it was very welcoming, they were immediately trying to get me into it, making sure that I would get the opportunity to experience it," he said. "I want that same feeling [in college]."

Avergun and Rickman touched on a trend that Tracy Schneidkraut, JCCGW's 'tween and teen coordinator and the event's staff planner, has noticed.

"I've talked to many families who have said [they are] looking for the camaraderie that comes with the Jewish tradition," she said. "I wish I had known about an event like this [when I was looking at colleges] to see what a big school entails, what kind of Jewish life on campus there was, what kind of sororities and fraternities there are on campus. That's what we're showing, which is really nice."

Community was the prevalent theme for the nearly 70 colleges and universities that filled the JCCGW gym during the fair and provided 93 families with plenty of information.

"It was the close-knit community. We did all kinds of social activities together, planned trips," remembers Janna Craig, an alumna of the University of Delaware, which boasts a 13 percent Jewish population and an active Hillel. "Even from your very first September on campus when you're looking for somebody to go to Rosh Hashanah services with, you have a community; it's built in," said Craig, representing her school.

Alan Freeman, an alumnus of Columbia University, argues that his alma mater is the easiest campus to be Jewish in America.

"New York's probably the most comfortable city in the world to be Jewish outside of Israel. Columbia is the most comfortable place in New York to be Jewish," he said. "It's an incredibly vibrant religious community, but it's an equally vibrant Jewish cultural community. É I think what really makes it great is that it's easy to be Jewish and find your own Jewish identity there."

The University of Maryland Hillel, which boasts a staff of 13 that provides a kosher meal plan and many resources for the more than 6,500 Jewish students on campus, had a strong presence at the event.

"We hope we're a resource on campus to help students answer some of those questions [about Jewish identity], whether it's through a travel experience, a social action or community service opportunity, an Israel program, any of those things," said Allison Buchman, director of student life at the University of Maryland. "We hope we can help students identify things that are important to them."

For some students, diversity is as important as Jewish life.

"I definitely think that Judaism is going to be very important in my selection, having a good Hillel program," said Orli Berman, a sophomore at Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda and another active BBYOer. "But I don't want to be living with only Jews my entire life. I love reaching out to different cultures."

One of the schools aiming for such diversity is Villanova University, a Catholic institution just outside of Philadelphia.

"The whole goal of the Augustinian ethos is to engage everybody together in an educational [community], learning from one another," said Brian Galloway, the university's assistant director of admission. "The goal is to get as many students from as diverse backgrounds as possible to add to the fabric of the community."