



# Jewish Life at Columbia and Barnard



**Columbia / Barnard Hillel**  
The Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life





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CB Hillel has empowered me to define my own Jewish experience at Columbia. It exposed me to different Jewish communities and made me feel comfortable exploring different practices. I felt welcomed into the larger Hillel community and encouraged to define my own identity and experiences. Hillel is a wonderful advocate and safe space for all Jewish students on campus.

—  
*Quentin B. SEAS'25*

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## A Message From Our Leadership

Jewish life at Columbia University and Barnard College is vibrant and strong. While some challenges persist on campus, we still consider Columbia and Barnard to be a top destination for Jewish students. Many universities struggle with antisemitism on campus, but few have a Jewish community as large and supportive as ours. This booklet is intended to give prospective students and their families a snapshot of how Columbia/Barnard Hillel fosters and maintains our thriving Jewish community.

The pages ahead will give you a good sense of what we offer at the Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life to enhance and elevate our Jewish community. Our team of professionals, along with dedicated student leaders, work hard to fill the calendar and campus with opportunities to celebrate and connect with Judaism. The foundation of our work has always been and will continue to be building deep, meaningful relationships with and between Jewish students on campus. Guiding everything we do, we never lose sight of the fact that the lifeblood of our community is the amazing Jewish students who choose to make Columbia and Barnard their home at this exciting and formative point in their lives. Each student brings a unique background, intellectual and extracurricular interests, and connection to their Jewish identity. These individual Jewish stories and journeys are what allow the Kraft Center to prosper as a diverse, vibrant, and resilient Jewish community.

It is impossible to cover everything in this booklet. We encourage you to follow @cbhillel on social media, and explore websites and social media channels for affiliated organizations, including but not limited to Chabad at Columbia University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, and Jewish fraternities and sororities. Most importantly, we hope you will visit campus, see the Kraft Center, and meet with current students.

We are confident that as you learn more and get to know us, you will see for yourself what makes Columbia/Barnard Hillel and the broader Columbia University Jewish community so special.

**Brian Cohen**

*Lavine Family Executive Director*  
Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life





Event Spaces



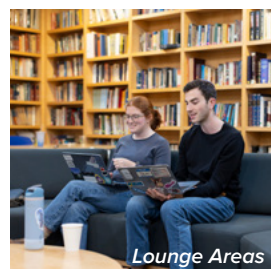
Outdoor Spaces



Classrooms



Study Spaces



Lounge Areas



Game Areas

280

First Year students who explored Jewish life through Hillel

...

150

Students who gained direct leadership experience

...

1,300

One-on-one conversations with Hillel professionals

...

4,500

Shabbat meals served at the Kraft Center and around campus

...

360

Participants in fellowships and immersive trips

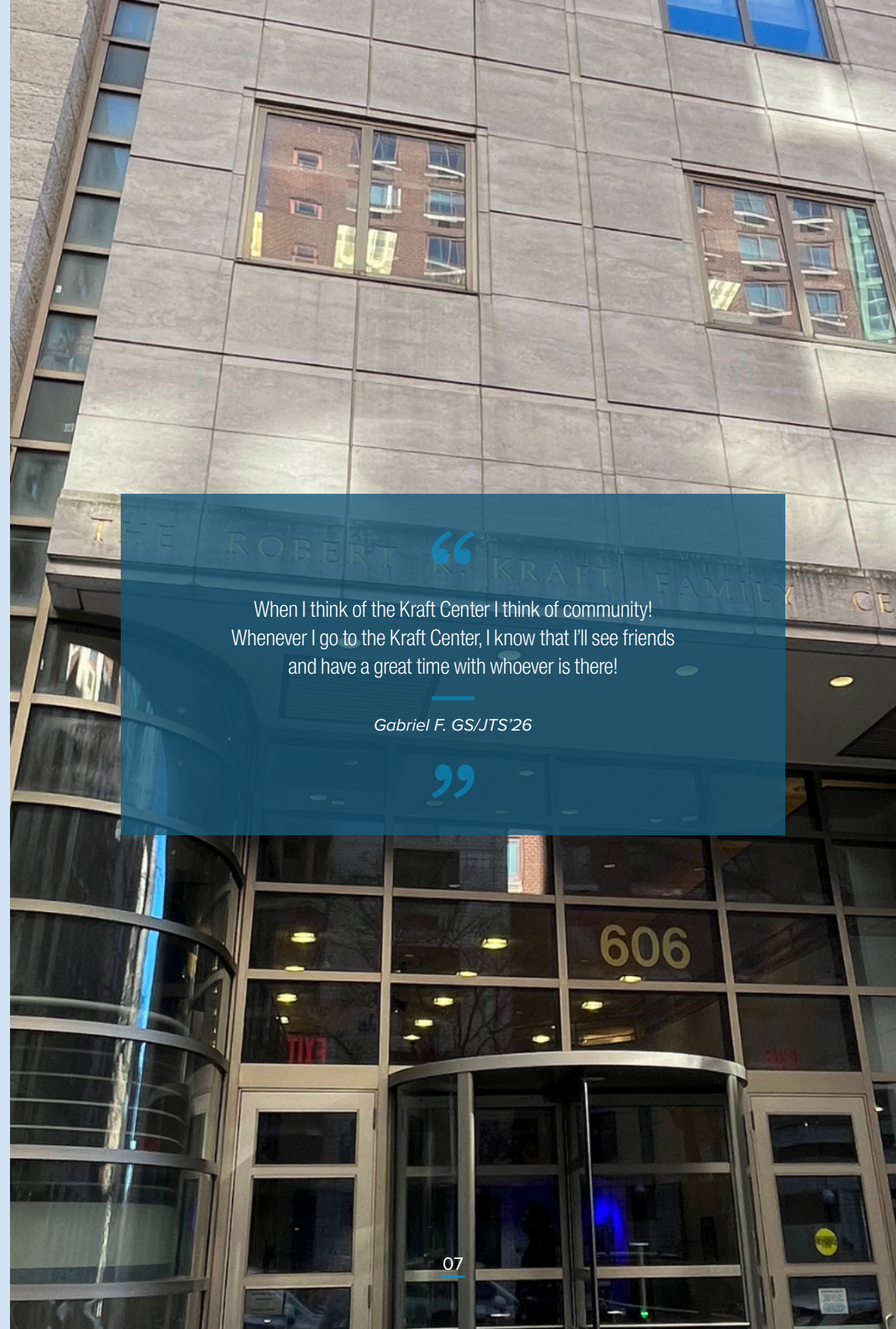


## The Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life

The Kraft Center is a seven story Jewish student center located on 115th Street between Broadway and Riverside. The building is conveniently located across Broadway from the Columbia University campus, and one block south of Barnard College.

The Center opened in 2000 and was the vision of Robert K. Kraft CC63. Today, it features a cafe where students study, watch games and movies, and hang out, Rennert Hall – a beautiful auditorium, a Beit Midrash – a room for Jewish learning, and multiple meeting rooms and multi purpose spaces where vibrant Shabbat, holiday and daily services are held, multiple Shabbat dinners take place every week, and classes are taught.

During the school year, The Kraft Center opens at 8:00am and closes at midnight, seven days a week, making it one of the most accessible student centers on campus.



“When I think of the Kraft Center I think of community!  
Whenever I go to the Kraft Center, I know that I'll see friends  
and have a great time with whoever is there!

—  
Gabriel F. GS/JTS'26

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When I first started college, I wasn't sure how involved I'd be in Jewish life, but since connecting with Columbia/Barnard Hillel, I've had opportunities to take on leadership roles, pursue my passions, and travel to Jewish communities around the world.

—  
Jacob S. CC'24

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## Shabbat & Religious Life

### CELEBRATIONS, MEALS, COMMUNITY

Columbia/Barnard Hillel celebrates the full spectrum of religious observance and engagement through Shabbat and holiday meals, services, and community-building opportunities

- **Hundreds of students join us in the Kraft Center every Friday for Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform Shabbat services.** Shabbat morning Conservative and Orthodox services are followed by a communal Shabbat lunch through Barnard Kosher Dining, with the Kraft Center serving as a hub for hanging out, playing games, and relaxing throughout Shabbat.
- **Kraft Shabbat Dinner is our weekly, free Shabbat dinner open to all undergraduate students, regardless of background or affiliation.** Some come dressed up for services, others come by as the first stop for a night out - all are welcome to come as they are to celebrate Shabbat together. Every spring we celebrate MEGA Shabbat. Held in memory of Myra Kraft, it is Columbia's largest Shabbat gathering which brings together up to 1,000 students, faculty, and staff.
- **Our community gathers regularly for holiday celebrations, meals, and other festivities both at the Kraft Center and on campus throughout the Jewish calendar.** Rosh Hashanah dinner under the stars on our Kraft Center terrace, a campus-wide Hanukkah party, and a variety of Passover seders are some of our holiday highlights.





# First Year Experience

## NEW FRIENDS. NEW COMMUNITY. NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Transitioning to college can be challenging, exciting, and full of twists and turns. Columbia/Barnard Hillel is committed to helping you settle into campus, find your people, and support you during your first year on campus. There is no single path or way to be Jewish on campus, so grab a hot drink with someone on the Hillel team or a student leader so they can get to know you and help connect you to what's right for you.

**Summer:** Once you've committed to Columbia or Barnard, let us know so we can send you a merch package. Meet with students and professionals at Columbia/Barnard Hillel Summer Welcomes around the country, then look out for us on campus throughout move-in.

**Fall:** Kick off the semester with Welcome Weekend, when a team of upperclassmen will introduce you to Jewish life on campus with Shabbat dinner, an activities fair, and other opportunities to meet new people and get involved. Participate in a first-year-only fellowship, whether it's developing your leadership skills or a discussion group to discuss with new friends how to build a Jewish life on campus.

**Spring:** Step into a leadership role, settle into a study routine at the Kraft Center, or travel across the world on an Alternative Spring Break trip (including one just for first years).







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Going on Birthright with Columbia/Barnard Hillel had a tremendous impact on my understanding of Israel and my Jewishness. When we met the 8 Israeli soldiers who joined the trip, they welcomed all of us with open arms and quickly included us in their music, food, and activities. I came out of the trip with a new sense of connection to Israel.

Aiden Schiller GS/JTS'26

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## Israel

### TRIPS, PROGRAMS, EDUCATION

Columbia/Barnard Hillel engages hundreds of students in Israel-related programming both at the Kraft Center and in Israel.

- Students participate in an 8-week Israel-focused fellowship where they explore many aspects of Israeli society, history, and culture in a collaborative and diverse cohort.
- The Kraft Center hosts notable Israel policy experts, activists, and inspirational guests. Recently, the Kraft Center hosted politician and activist Natan Sharansky, Israeli stateswoman Tzipi Livni, author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi, and journalist Barak Ravid. These important speakers provide opportunities for students to learn, ask questions, and think critically.
- Over winter break, students and alumni connect with the Columbia/Barnard Hillel community at a Jerusalem meet-up. During winter and summer breaks, students have the opportunity to experience a free, 10-day Birthright trips to Israel alongside their Hillel peers.
- More than 500 students, faculty, staff and administrators gathered on the anniversary of October 7 to commemorate the horrific attacks of 10/7/23.







## Here4You

### RESOURCES, WELLNESS, GUIDANCE

Here4You is not an event or a series of programs – it's a reminder in this busy city and stressful campus that students aren't alone. Just like going to Shabbat dinners, traveling to Israel, and studying Jewish texts, having a caring and supportive space with trusted adults is a core aspect of what it means to be a part of the Columbia/Barnard Hillel community.

When we began strengthening our work in the mental health space in 2019, we had no idea how timely and important these efforts would be. By March 2020, we had established systems in place and were immediately able to assist students and families. Upon returning to campus in 2021, students knew mental health support was available through the Kraft Center.

Since then, we have remained dedicated to this important work, and when tragedy struck on October 7, we were ready to offer large-scale, ongoing assistance to students – including on-campus, Hebrew-speaking mental health professionals to support Israeli students.

**Guidance and Resources:** Students don't often have trusted adult figures in their lives who understand the campus environment while also being separate enough from their academics to simply be there for them. When students are having bad (or good!) days, Hillel professionals are here to offer support and guidance, as well as connect them with crucial mental health resources.

**Professional Counseling:** Using personal and professional networks, we curated a list of Jewish mental health practitioners in the area who take insurance or are otherwise financially accessible. In this way, we are able to advocate on behalf of students, providing more approachable and timely alternatives to the campus counseling centers and bringing students one step closer to making their first appointment.



## Get Connected

Visit The Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life when you tour campus - we suggest emailing or calling us ahead of time. Tell us a little bit about yourself and we can arrange some students to meet with you during your visit. You can also call or email us to join us for a Shabbat dinner, a truly special experience.

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[www.columbiabarnardhillel.org](http://www.columbiabarnardhillel.org)



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MORE INFO

