

Jewish Life at Brooklyn College

David Betesh

Higher education greatly expands a person's opportunities for a successful and rewarding future. There is a direct correlation between an individual's level of education and his achievements in life. As the world becomes more competitive in all fields, starting a career without a college degree puts one at an automatic disadvantage. This holds true for those who have family businesses, as well.

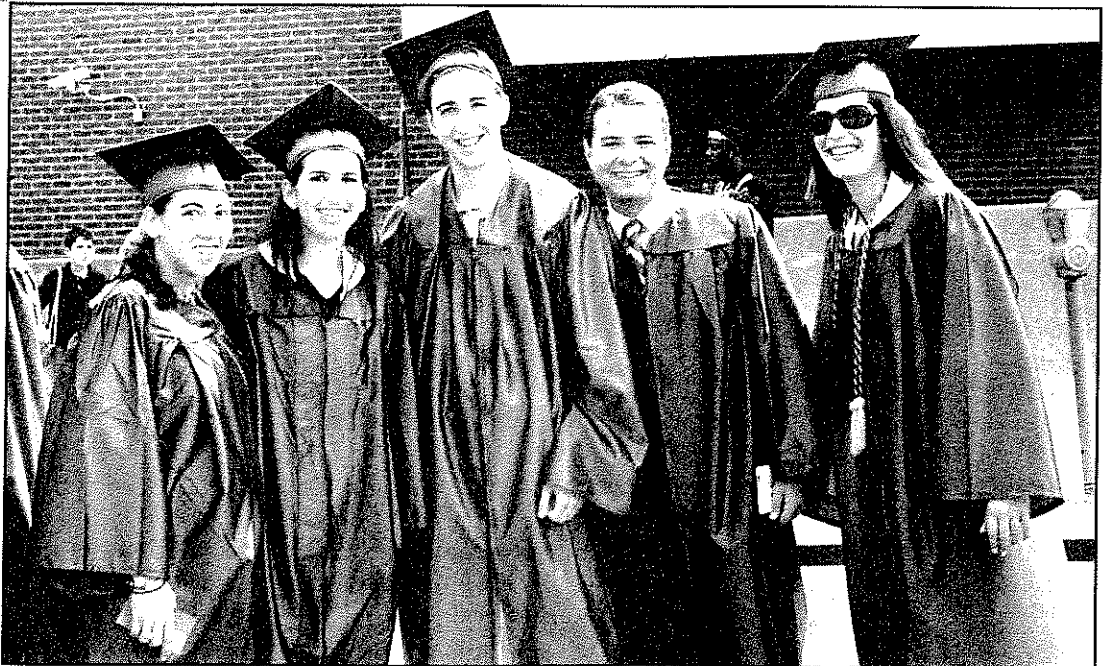
On the other hand, the pursuit of higher education may come with an expensive price-tag and significant risk factors. The chief concerns our community has about college education include sky-high tuition bills (generally triple the amount of yeshiva bills), alienation from traditional Orthodox Jewish values, and moving away from home (which, some believe, can lead to assimilation and intermarriage). Having personally been faced with making this momentous decision regarding college four years ago, I found it necessary to balance all of the above factors in my mind, and I chose Brooklyn College for my undergraduate studies. It was a great decision!

Brooklyn College, also known as

Brooklyn College of the City University of New York (CUNY), was established in 1930. It became the first public coeducational liberal arts college in New York City. The campus, located at 2900 Bedford Avenue at Avenue H, recently received official recognition as "the most beautiful campus in the country." For the most part, the school specializes in liberal arts, pre-med, psychology, speech, education, and health. Tuition at the college is quite affordable and offers good value for each dollar spent. An Honors Academy within the college will subsidize tuition on condition that the student takes accelerated courses and keeps up with a 3.0 Cumulative GPA. For those who cannot get into the Honors Academy, there are a number of scholarship opportunities available, such as the Presidential Scholarship and the Peter Vallone Scholarship.

When looking at demographics, Brooklyn College represents a microcosm of Brooklyn as a whole. Percentages of nationalities enrolled at the college corre-

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Vicky Azar Kairey, Vicky Ades, Haim Cohen, David Betesh, Doreen David

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spond to percentages of those nationalities in Brooklyn as a whole. It is estimated that Brooklyn College is roughly 30% Jewish. Of that number, about half are Sephardic Jews. The age of the student body also reflects Brooklyn's demographics, as more and more adults, in a growing trend, are returning to college to complete their degrees. I am proud to say that my own mother and all of her friends belong to this category, having returned to college after many years to complete their degrees.

Fortunately for the Syrian Sephardic Community in Brooklyn, and the greater Jewish community at large, Brooklyn College is located just a few blocks from home. Brooklyn College provides a top-notch education, with the added bonus that one does not have to leave home and dorm in order to attend the institution. During a recent discussion I had with President Christopher Kimmich, he told me that the college makes every attempt to accommodate those who can only attend part-time, as they must continue working in order to finance their educational goals. Brooklyn College conveniently offers a wide-spectrum of night classes to assist those who need to work full-time during the day.

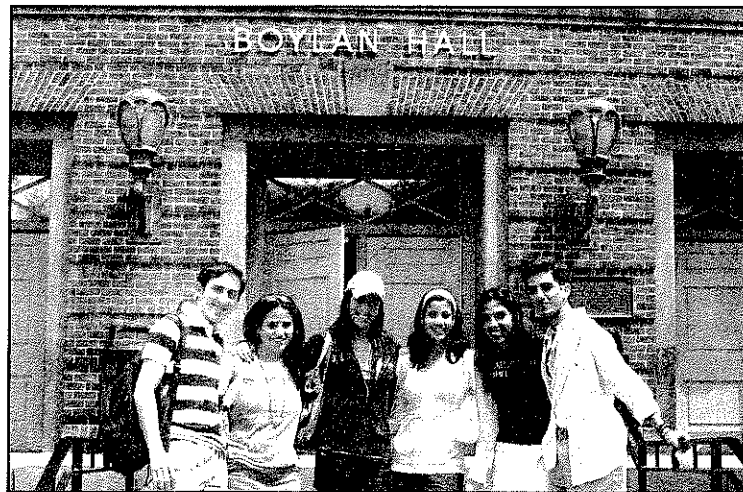
Brooklyn College is Jewish-friendly. Aside from Yeshiva University, located in Upper Manhattan, it is the only school I know of that suspends all classes on all Jewish *Yom Tov* holidays. I have never come across a situation where I was faced with a scheduling conflict due to my religious observances. This is never the case for students at NYU, Yale, and Columbia, who have midterms on many of the Jewish holidays and are constantly faced with challenging scenarios, according to my friends who are students at these schools.

Brooklyn College makes every attempt to accommodate the needs of its Jewish students. In fact, the Kosher Cafeteria, located on the lower level of Boylan Hall, is far more popular than the non-Kosher cafeteria. It is the place where most people hang out to have pizza or other dairy lunches after or even during class hours. Moe Harary, a Sephardic Jew from our community, and owner of the Kosher Cafeteria, organizes a large daily *minha minyan* each day at 1:30 PM, in the

area next to the cafeteria. Some of my friends rightfully commented that the cafeteria is like "a Flatbush-Magen David reunion" each weekday during lunch hours and for a while after that.

Once high school is over, it is important for Jewish students to maintain connections to Jewish institutions. For some, Torah classes at the synagogue fill this niche, and for others volunteering at Sephardic Bikur Holim does the same. At Brooklyn College, many Jewish programs take place at Hillel House, located across the street from the campus gate on Hillel Place. Hillel House offers many informative lectures on how to support

Israel and how to learn more about Judaism. The people at Hillel House, which consists of Jews from many different backgrounds, are involved in outreach and making social connections with other Jews on campus. The Hillel House organization is affiliated with the larger Hillel Association of North America, and many programs are subsidized by Brooklyn College, as well. The work that Hillel House



(left to right) Jimmy Mishaan, Lauren Betesh, Daniella Ballas, Raquel Yedid, Natasha Frija, Solomon Abadis

does helps Jewish students maintain the connection to their Jewish identity.

A year of study in Israel, post-high school, has long been a goal of yeshiva students. Many people believe that a year in Israel strengthens an individual's foundation and his/her Jewish identity, in addition to providing a unique opportunity to become independent, self-sufficient and mature. In the past, taking this path cost one a year of college. This, however, is no longer a valid excuse, for under the guidance of Professor Mervin Verbit, former Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College and current director of Israel studies programs at the CUNY Graduate Center, many programs in Israel are now accredited by the CUNY system. College credits can be accrued while attending many yeshivot or universities in Israel (such as Birkat Moshe in Ma'aleh Adumim, Gush Etzion, Yeshivat HaKotel, Bar Ilan University and many other institutions). Thanks to this program, one does not have to worry about losing a year of college. Many more students have opted to spend a year in Israel since Professor Verbit started this program.

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Pier Village...

fraction of Pier Village's attractions. After only a 15-minute drive or so, you will find yourself amongst a variety of stores in what seems a quaint, little town of its own. There's something for everyone, and it's all conveniently located in one area.

The Avenue Beach Club is a hip place that recently opened a couple of months ago. A "Saint Tropez-esque" club during the day, Avenue transforms into an upscale lounge at night. Overlooking the ocean, the scene is breathtaking and worth seeing.

If you're a book lover and always looking for a good read, TP News and Cafe will cater to you. You can sip a latte while browsing through the cafe's selection of newspapers, magazines, and books. Or if you'd rather purchase a specific book, you can head over to Atlantic Books before going down to the beach. "Pier Village is the only place you can go buy coffee, take four steps, and be on the beach," said community member Charles Azrak. "It's great."

Since everyone could always use more clothes, particularly jeans, there are a couple of clothing stores designed to suit different needs. In The Bee you can find clothing for any occasion: trendy and hip, or elegant for a formal affair. Nirvana specializes in denim and sells all types of jeans from True Religion, to Rock and Republic, to Citizens of Humanity. If you go to the movies or Seaside every Saturday night in Deal, those jeans will come in handy.

Summer is a time for fun and to let loose. The Stone Hut, Anna, and Arrivee are all great stores for that creative, artistic side in you. It's like being in a smaller version of SoHo without actually having to go to Manhattan.

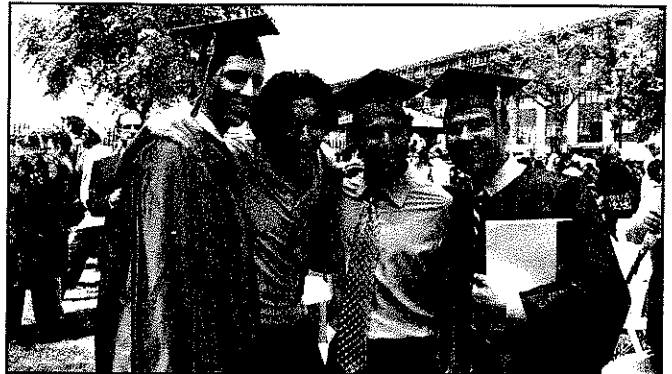
Kidegories is a child's dream store. They sell unique gifts, clothing, and even furniture. So while the kids are busy playing with every toy and gadget in sight, Mommy could have fun redecorating the kids' rooms. Then she could move on to Space Interiors and just refurnish the entire house while she's at it.

Not only are there over 30 shops, but events are constantly constantly scheduled at Pier Village. Wednesday night is a free movie night for the family. Movies like *Shrek*, *Madagascar*, and *Free Willy* begin at sundown on the Center Lawn. It should be an entertaining night for everyone. If the older kids aren't in the mood for *Shark Tales*, they can attend the free concerts that are performed there, too.

With its beach, shops, events, and more, all located in a cute neighborhood, Pier Village is the up-and-coming place to go. Check it out anytime, day or night. You're guaranteed to enjoy yourself. There's bound to be something going on; and if not, you'll bump into some community members and have a good time anyway. □

Yvonne Harari is a junior at Brooklyn College.

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Steven Haim, Daniel Levenson, David Safdiah, David Betesh

For those who choose not to spend a year in Israel but still wish to expand their knowledge on various Jewish topics, the faculty of the Judaic Studies Department, which includes many respectable and reliable Orthodox Jewish professors, offers excellent Judaic Studies courses. Some of the more interesting ones include the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Land of Israel and its Culture, Apocrypha, The Book of Job and the Problem of Evil, the Holocaust, Business Ethics and *Halacha*, and History of Jews in America. Sara Reguer is the chairperson of the growing Judaic Studies department at Brooklyn College.

Over the past four years, Brooklyn College, in collaboration with Merkaz, started a new program that offers Jewish students the opportunity to receive college credits for Jewish courses off campus (usually at a local synagogue). This program has been extremely successful over the past four years, with roughly 40 students in each class per semester. Some of the courses previously offered by Merkaz were the Book of Deuteronomy, the Book of Psalms, Maimonides, Introduction to Talmud, and Jewish Ethics. All of these courses are unique in that they offer both a scholarly modern approach to subjects in addition to the classical, traditional approach, in an effective, meaningful, and responsible way. Rabbi Ricky Hidary is head of the organization, and is doing a superb job.

Brooklyn College is a great place to pursue all your career aspirations while still maintaining a close connection to home, community life and the Jewish world of New York City. It would be a shame to waste the opportunities and the benefits of Brooklyn College.

I trust that this article has accomplished its goal of informing high school students and entering college freshmen about the institution and all it has to offer. Brooklyn College is a great choice and I wish lots of good luck to all entering freshmen. □

David Betesh was a student at Brooklyn Honors College and the Yeshivah of Flatbush.