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Chabad Reaches Jewish Students at Commuter Colleges




Rabbi Adam Stein engages commuter students at Stonybrook.

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by **R. C. Berman** - Stony Brook, NY

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FEBRUARY 26, 2008

When **Dan Mendelson's** finance classes end for the day at Baruch College, he hops on a subway and heads to his apartment. Hanging out after class with friends - a mainstay of campus life - is something he has little time for as he juggles class work and his job.

Many students at commuter colleges have little time if any at all, for extracurricular clubs. In this spare atmosphere there are no - or few - dorms, frat life consists of twice-weekly club hours. Students are older, already working, and many have families of their own.




But Chabad representatives at campus centers have discovered innovative ways to reach Jewish students at commuter schools, and involve them in Jewish life.

"In a commuter school, you have to realize that every minimal contact you have with people should be planned to have the most impact possible," said **Pessi Stolik**, co-director of Chabad at Baruch College.

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This Purim, for instance, packages she and Rabbi **Levi Stolik** will distribute to students are a Purim-to-go. They're stocked with holiday food, Purim information, and guides to the most convenient megillah readings and celebrations close to Baruch. "We act as a liaison between students and the Chabad centers close to their home," Mrs. Stolik said.

Chabad centers at commuter colleges offer students something that's missing from their schooling - a taste of classic college life. Several times a semester, Chabad representatives from commuter schools arrange Shabbat getaways so their students can hang out with other Jewish students. Twenty students from Baruch caravanned up to SUNY Stony Brook to spend Shabbat together.

"We do not have a dorm, the trip is the greatest way to meet Jewish people," said Mendelson, who came to Baruch from Paraguay. "I live by myself in New York, and it is hard to keep Shabbat and cook for myself. This Shabbaton is a great opportunity enjoy Shabbat."

Up at Stony Brook, Chabad on campus has found a way to bring Shabbat to commuter school students. Rabbi Adam Stein is fond of calling SUNY Stony Brook a "suitcase school." Roughly two-thirds of students live off campus. Half of those who live in apartments around SUNY go home for the

Rabbinical students in Nigeria created a makeshift publishing house earlier this year, transporting paper and printers across six cities in the western African country. Often they flew from city to city.

Staff Writer | Monday, January 1

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weekend. Wherever they call home, students “crave a taste of college life, but everything basically shuts down on Friday afternoon,” said Rabbi Stein.

When Rabbi Stein and his wife **Esther Stein**, who co-direct the Chabad student center, arrived at Stony Brook several years ago, they tweaked their Friday night meal schedule to fit college nightlife. Though they light candles before sunset, their meals begin at 9 p.m. and last until 1 a.m. Starting late gives students a chance to unwind from their week, get ready for a night out in a warm Jewish environment.

Adam Kent, a chemistry major who lives in Stony Brook, plans his Friday nights around Chabad’s dinners. “It’s like going to a great meal with your friends, and we do Kiddush, sing and talk. It’s Judaism without the pressure,” Kent said.

Taking the action to the students instead of hoping they’ll find time to locate Chabad on their own is playing a growing role at Baruch College, too. During club hours twice a week, Chabad hosts a Baruch College Torah Center in a conference room in the central building on campus. Chabad rabbis in training on their lunch break from a post-graduate yeshiva nearby study Torah one-on-one with students.

Nathan Lustgarten, 23, stows his finance books beneath the table, picks up a slab of sushi rolls – provided by Chabad – and sits down to ask questions about Judaism he’s had on his mind. “I do not have a religious background. It is amazing to be here and learn a little bit of Torah.” BCTC has given Lustgarten some answers and has helped him score extra points on his papers for philosophy class.

More importantly, he said, it can get very lonely in a commuter school. “You don’t have people caring for you.” At Chabad he’s found a warm welcome, a way to make friends. “With Chabad you make friends stay with you beyond school. With Chabad, you have a lasting friendship that can go on and on, maybe forever.”

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VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Vienna's Jewish Renaissance

A European city, on the long road to repentance is blessed with burgeoning Jewish life p. 14

CHANGING THE WAY WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER p. 18

SPIRITUAL	SOCIAL	HUMANITARIAN
Oh, Barcelona! <i>500 years after the expulsion, Jewish life is alive in the Catalan capital</i>	Everyone's Birthright <i>A long overdue opportunity for a demographic long overlooked</i>	Powering the Network <i>Chabad vs. Harvey, Irma, et al.</i>
<small>While political tensions in Barcelona over calls for independence make headlines, a nascent Jewish experience is flowering in the city. Jewish residents and travelers are embracing new educational and cultural opportunities to connect to a heritage long silenced in Spain. STORY ON PAGE 4</small>	<small>A birthright trip is vital for individuals with special needs? The logistical hurdles made it seem too daunting a responsibility. But one local Friendship Circle took up the gauntlet, and a dream manifested. A special demographic gets its long overdue birthright. STORY ON PAGE 7</small>	<small>When hurricane season unleashed its fury, Chabad's emissaries mobilized methodically, delivering vital rescue and relief in Houston, Florida, and the Caribbean. A look at the university-integrated Chabad network that empowers seamless, spirited coordination of life-saving missions. STORY ON PAGE 8</small>

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