
Challenges of the Third Year: An Evaluation of Limmud NY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
Limmud NY 2007.....	5
Limmud NY: the Research	9
THE CHALLENGE OF GROWTH.....	11
Continuity of the Limmud NY Community	11
Creating Limmudnyks.....	16
THE CHALLENGE OF SUCCESS.....	22
A Fun and Meaningful Experience	23
Learning for All Levels.....	28
A Satisfying Volunteer Experience.....	31
Presenters and Performers.....	35
THE CHALLENGE OF COMMITMENT	37
New Jewish Involvement	37
Coming Back to Limmud NY	40
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	43
Conclusions.....	43
Recommendations	45
REFERENCES.....	48
Appendix A: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH INSTUMENTS	49
The Survey.....	50
Interview Protocol.....	60
Appendix B: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE	62
Appendix C: STUDENTS AND FINANCIAL AID.....	64

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Participants by Age.....	12
Table 2: Percent Female by Age.....	12
Table 3: Marital Status of Participants 25 years of age and older	13
Table 4: Denomination of Limmud NY Participants.....	14
Table 5: Synagogue, Minyan and Havurah Membership	15
Table 6: Geographic Distribution	16
Figure 1: Jewish Educational Background of Limmud NY Participants.....	14
Figure 2: Percentage of Participants Who Had Attended a Previous Limmud NY	17
Figure 3: Characteristics of Limmudnyks.....	18
Figure 4: Characteristics of Limmudnyks.....	18
Figure 5: Limmud NY 2007 Volunteers.....	19
Figure 6: Limmudnyks and First Timers – Responses to Limmud NY	20
Figure 7: Overall Satisfaction	23
Figure 8: Fun and Personally Meaningful Experiences.....	24
Figure 9: Community Experience at Limmud NY	25
Figure 10: Participant Responses to Limmud NY	26
Figure 11: Children and Family Programming.....	27
Figure 12: Learning Experiences.....	29
Figure 13: Aspects of Learning.....	30
Figure 14: Intellectual Challenge.....	30
Figure 15: Volunteer Age Groups.....	32
Figure 16: Volunteer Planning Hours	32
Figure 17: Volunteer Satisfaction	33
Figure 18: Volunteer Experience.....	34
Figure 19: Experience of Presenters and Performers.....	35
Figure 20: Plans to Attend Limmud NY in the Future—All Attendees	40
Figure 21: Plans to Attend Limmud NY 2008—Limmudnyks and First Timers	41
Figure 22: Plans for Limmud NY in the Future.....	41
Figure A 1: Other Holiday Weekends for Limmud NY	62
Figure A 2: Price Elasticity of Limmud NY 2008.....	63

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2007, as in 2005 and 2006, Limmud NY created an exciting celebration of Jewish life and learning. Participants of all ages and diverse backgrounds spent four days immersed in Jewish experiences—some new and some familiar. Many (a little more than a third) returned to the event after attending Limmud NY in 2006 or 2007 or both years. They reconnected with participants from previous years, and they participated in activities both familiar and fresh to them. Two-thirds of the participants were new to Limmud NY. They had heard the buzz and came eager to expand their knowledge and to experience the unique community that is Limmud NY. Together with returning “Limmudnyks,” they agreed that Limmud NY was a high quality learning event and felt satisfied with the overall experience.

Despite that satisfaction, not all participants were happy with all aspects of the program. After two years of growth and success, Limmud NY’s reputation may have exceeded its ability to please or challenge many of its constituents. Those returning to the event had established community at Limmud NY, but for those attending for the first time, becoming part of that community was difficult. Growth in the number and diversity of participants put stress on physical facilities and on the ability of volunteer planners to satisfy the wide-ranging expectations of all attendees. Although most participants felt that Limmud NY’s learning opportunities met their needs, fewer found it intellectually challenging; and while two-thirds of returning participants said they considered Limmud NY a more meaningful Jewish experience than other organized Jewish events, less than half of the first time attendees agreed with that statement. Past success and growth have produced challenges for Limmud NY. Limmud NY planners continue to grapple with the question of how to create learning experiences that are new and challenging for returning participants and those with extensive Jewish backgrounds while offering accessible, comfortable opportunities for those with less Jewish education and for those who may be experimenting with Jewish study and practice that are new to them.

As an organization now three years old—nearing the end of its incubation with *Bikkurim*, Limmud NY also confronts the challenge of commitment: how to build on the strength of Jewish commitment among those already deeply involved while opening new avenues of involvement to participants less committed to Limmud NY or to Jewish life and learning. As well, Limmud NY must work to bring in new volunteers with new energy and excitement while maintaining the enthusiasm of the experienced volunteer planners and making use of their acquired knowledge and skills.

This report paints a picture of Limmud NY and its participants and details the challenges of growth, success, and commitment. Despite the issues the event’s planners confront, the picture reveals a vibrant and vital Jewish experience for New Yorkers—an experience that continues to enrich and expand the Jewish lives of participants.

INTRODUCTION

Limmud NY held its first conference in the Catskill Mountains on Martin Luther King Day weekend in 2005. That year, the event attracted over 650 people who spent three days at the Hudson Valley Resort. Participants arrived Friday afternoon and stayed until Monday afternoon. They left charged and excited by the experience. Limmud NY created a buzz, and as that buzz grew, the number of registrations increased as well. In 2006, the program expanded to four days, and over 750 participants gathered at Kutshers Resort. In 2007, over 800 people attended the event at the Friar Tuck Convention Center in Catskill, NY and despite moving the event to a larger venue, lack of room prevented more than 60 registrants from attending.

This year, 2007, also marks the third year that the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University evaluated Limmud NY. Research in the two previous years found that the event drew participants from diverse Jewish backgrounds. Most enjoyed Limmud NY, found the experience fun and meaningful, and were eager to return. Participants explained that the event met their needs for Jewish learning; other than some dissatisfaction with accommodations and logistics, they enjoyed the social ambience. Participants appreciated the presenters and performers and the wide variety of sessions and activities. The research also discussed emergent issues: reconciling the desire for diversity with respect for the traditions and observances of all attendees, and creating community in a place where many people—especially those from the Upper West Side—already knew each other while others came alone or knew very few other participants. Limmud NY planners, open to change, studied these issues and initiated alternative strategies.

The theme of Limmud NY 2007 differed from the previous years. In 2005, the cover of the program read “Think, listen, discover, celebrate, experience.” Publicity in 2006 featured a pink and green zebra with the tag line: “experience the many stripes of your community.” In 2007, “Jewfusion” was the theme, and the word was followed by a question mark. Pictures on the cover of the program book suggested the influence of Eastern religion. Diversity seemed less easy—almost as if the designer sought to convey the challenge of celebrating the many differences participants would find at Limmud NY. The program book described “Jewfusion” as a desired goal rather than a given of the event.

We celebrate one another’s perspectives and are challenged by them...we recognize that the richness of our community lies in our coming together based on a very simple principle of learning. We all have something to learn from one another and to teach one another.

The form and content of Limmud NY changed as well. The first year had 48 invited presenters and the second year 53; 2007 had only 50 presenters for many more people. The number of sessions offered decreased from 2005 and 2006. Instead the 2007 event offered a film festival and devoted more resources to children’s and family programming. Two *Tzedakah* initiatives gave participants opportunities to help others while attending Limmud

NY. The first asked for used cell phones, PDAs, and Blackberries to enable DOROT a social service agency, to provide the devices to homebound elderly in the New York area. Limmud NY also held a bone marrow screening for the Gift of Life Bone Marrow Registry. Activities on Sunday featured a silent auction.

There was, of course, continuity as well. Again in 2007, dedicated volunteers made Limmud NY happen. They invited presenters; reached out to populations across the UJA-Federation of New York catchment area; planned for the rooms, meals, and the environment of the event; and handled registration, scholarships, and all manner of logistical support. Volunteers again created an event that celebrated Jewish life and offered numerous opportunities for study, creative expression, and worship.

Limmud NY 2007

Jews from the five boroughs, Westchester, Long Island, and beyond gathered in Catskill, New York for the third annual Limmud NY event. The passageways, dining room, lobby, and café were replete with Israeli and British accents, squealing children, and extensive games of Jewish geography. For five days in January, the Friar Tuck Convention Center, a sprawling, meandering Robin Hood themed hotel, was transformed into a nexus of Jewish learning.

The first participants arrived Thursday evening and joined the volunteers as the first to explore the hotel complex and settle in for the annual learning festival. The lobby served as central destination for the evening and became home base for participants who waited for others to arrive. They checked their email and conversed with one another. Most of Thursday's participants arrived on a bus from the JCC in Manhattan after 10 p.m. Though the buses were more than an hour late, the conference pushed the evening sessions back to accommodate the new arrivals. The evening's offerings included sessions on the Yiddish Radio Project, gender confusion in the Talmud, and a screening of "My Grandfather Dances." The bar opened, and the smaller scale of the evening provided an opportunity for people to get to know one another.

Friday began with breakfast or yoga in the dining room, subdivided by a large curtain. At the same time, participants chose from sessions on a wide range of topics including fundraising, Israel's summer war against Hezbollah, Indian-Jewish Passover traditions, pseudo-messianic figures in Jewish history, and *challah* baking. Throughout the morning on Friday, participants continued to arrive at the Friar Tuck, with the majority arriving on several buses from Manhattan only an hour or so before Shabbat. Because the bus departures from Manhattan were not staggered, the lobby was a hectic scene as several buses arrived at once. Participants lined up to register and receive the room keys and program materials while trying not to trip over each other or their suitcases. The noise level was intense as old friends reunited, leaving those who came to the event to make new friends a little bewildered and overwhelmed. Many participants hoped to settle in quickly and prepare for Shabbat, and a few were overhead expressing concern over meeting their

roommates, getting ready for the Sabbath, and learning their way around the hotel complex before orientation.

The timing of the bus arrival from Manhattan resulted in low turnout at the orientation sessions. Orientation also started late because of the delayed buses. Perhaps returning “Limmudnyks”¹ did not feel the need to attend orientation sessions for a second or third time or to be reminded to wear their name tags at all times and to “take a break” from the “intense schedule” every now and then. People walked in and out of the orientation sessions, before leaving to prepare for Shabbat or to greet familiar faces. There were several orientations scheduled to meet the diverse needs of the more than 800 participants. There were orientation sessions for families, high school and college students, volunteers, and general orientation—even an orientation session for those who needed to pray *Mincha*, the afternoon service, at the appropriate time. The information shared at the orientation session clearly worked, as Limmudnyks of all ages were seen wearing their nametags throughout the conference, even before yoga in the morning and at the bar well after midnight.

A welcoming program followed the orientation sessions. It started late and had poor turnout, and although its leaders conveyed their own enthusiasm, the program created little excitement. It was held in a large, cavernous auditorium which was hardly at capacity. When the program finally began, one of the facilitators decided to warm up the crowd by calling out statistics that reflected the diversity of Limmud NY 2007. The other facilitator seeking to underscore Limmud’s more geographically diverse participant base asked, “Who isn’t from the Upper West Side?” She then celebrated that fewer than half of participants this year were from that particular area of Manhattan. While this may be a great stride for Limmud NY, it came from an insider’s view of the conference.

As Shabbat evening services began, participants wandered the corridors in search of new and different or tried and true prayer opportunities. Perhaps the most spirited service of the evening was the Ecstatic Kabbalat Shabbat Service, where the standing room only crowd sang traditional and Carlebach melodies to the beat of drums. Volunteers also conducted six other prayer services: Learners’ Empowerment, Traditional Egalitarian, Traditional Sephardic, etc., and two discussion/lecture options. Following worship services, participants gathered in the main dining room for Shabbat dinner. All but a few tables were full before dinner officially started at 6:30 p.m. Seating was assigned by color—participants had one of four colors on their nametag, and the dining room was festively divided and decorated to delineate the different sections. Each table performed the Sabbath rituals—*Kiddush*, *netilat yadayim*, and *motzi*—on its own. People sat down and began when their tablemates arrived, or sometimes even before, especially if they were not at the opening program to receive instructions. Though color assignments helped new people find a place to sit, many participants saved seats at their tables, and those who did not come with a group or family had to scramble for single seats at the edge of the room. Planners intended Shabbat dinner to serve as an ice breaker, but the noise level made it difficult to communicate.

¹ The term Limmudnyk is used to refer only to those people who have attended Limmud NY more than once.

Dinner was followed by more learning opportunities, including popular sessions led by Yitz and Blu Greenberg, and Arthur Green, respectively. Participants who wanted a break from “frontal” learning could attend sessions devoted to learning traditional Shabbat melodies, kabalistic chanting, or modern Israeli songs. The learning continued well into the night, as participants dispersed throughout the Friar Tuck to explore “Jewfusion,” sing *niggunim* (wordless melodies), or participate in “The Hip Hop Tisch.” The tisch featured Hasidic rapper Y-Love and beat boxer Uri Lane offering modern expressions of traditional Shabbat melodies.

On Shabbat morning, participants again had six options for worship services. They could attend one of the many sessions which were offered in various time slots. The Shabbat morning family service attracted parents and their children, as well as participants who just enjoyed the enthusiastic and spirited expression of Shabbat prayer. Next door, Saul Kaiserman, Chana Rothman, and Drew Cohen led a musical service with Hebrew and English rock and folk music. The two sessions joined together at the end and the room was filled with people and Shabbat song. Another popular Shabbat morning experience was the “Mechitza Service led by Men and Women.” Its leaders used Hebrew-only prayer books, without English translation, and did not call out page numbers. This is typical practice for a traditional or Orthodox service, but the spirit of Limmud NY is experimentation. Perhaps individuals responsible for the service could have taken steps to make the experience more welcoming for newcomers without affecting the *davening* (prayer).

Limmud NY reunited on Saturday evening to mark the end of Shabbat and the beginning of the new week. The *Havdallah* leaders, Nigel Savage, Saul Kaiserman, and Shira Kline, asked participants to speak to a new person sitting near them and share their favorite part of Shabbat. This appeared to be an effective ice breaker, but it did not occur until Saturday evening. Lively music, singing, and dancing transformed the Buckingham Palace Room into a spirited celebration of Jewish life.

Some of the most talked about sessions happened after Havdalah on Saturday evening. David Solomon led a session on Kabbalah, and Blu Greenberg shared the seven texts she would bring with her if she was shipwrecked on a deserted island. Also on Saturday night, participants filled the room for comedy writer Rob Kutner’s session, “Southern Jews & Fake News ‘Daily Show’ Writer Tells Some!” Limmud participants stood in the doorways and sat in the aisles to hear Kutner describe how his Jewish upbringing in Atlanta led him to comedy and an Emmy Award for his work on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

Sunday brought another day of learning opportunities. Participants had a choice of more than 80 sessions throughout the day, including a film festival, wine tasting, beat boxing, and paper cutting. In a panel discussion, “Denominationalism or Post-Denominationalism,” four rabbis spoke about their backgrounds and current understanding of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, time ran out just as the panelists began to answer audience questions. Some participants said that Limmud NY should have planned longer session blocks to allow time for more discussion and debate.

The Friar Tuck presented logistical difficulties. Acoustics were poor in some presentation spaces. Several sessions took place in the rear of the dining room near a hallway leading to another wing of the hotel. People had to walk through this area to get to their hotel rooms and sessions, and staff had to reset the dining room between meals. During several sessions, presenters were forced to compete with vacuum cleaners. On Sunday, this space contained the session featuring Ralph Goldman, the 92 year old legendary leader of the Joint Distribution Committee. Participants had difficulty hearing Goldman, especially those sitting in the back of the space.

The layout of the hotel was confusing. Sometimes even the help desk volunteers had trouble describing how to get to certain rooms. A few sessions were held in a small, former guest room with poor lighting. Another space provided ample room but its location across from the auditorium made it difficult to hear the speaker, particularly when the bands rehearsed for the mega event. Meeting rooms were often dark, poorly lit, and without windows.

Throughout Sunday, the Limmud Café provided a central space for participants to take a break from the non-stop sessions and connect with old or new friends. The café was especially busy between sessions, as participants stopped for coffee, water, or a snack on their way from one end of the hotel to the other. As sessions began, the café emptied out, leaving new and old friends a quiet relaxed place to catch up and discuss the day's offerings.

The Mega Event, much better attended than the kick off, began late due to technical issues. A slide show of pictures taken at the conference preceded a comedy show, "The Chosen People's Choice Awards." The latter may have only been funny to those Limmud insiders who could follow the jokes. For example, the idea of a group of British participants threatening to "reclaim Limmud for the Brits" is amusing only if you understand the history of Limmud NY and its relationship to Limmud UK. Several Limmud NY 2007 presenters took part in the show, including Rob Kutner, Judith Helfand, and Ruth Messenger. Following the comedy show, the conference co-chairs thanked over 100 volunteer planners individually. They then "made the ask" for financial contributions to Limmud NY. Several participants found the mega event disappointing. In her response to the survey one woman suggested that it should have been "the time to bring in a great speaker, performer—someone to inspire and motivate. An amateur performance with jokes only the 'insiders' understood was silly and boring."

The Mega Event continued with a performance by the Amazing Frozen String Quartet. While some stayed and listened to the band, others headed to the bar, a popular late night hangout throughout the weekend, or to their rooms. So many people gathered in the bar on Sunday evening, it ran out of beer by 11 p.m.

Sunday evening's Mega Event had the feel of the closing program for Limmud NY, though the conference was scheduled through Monday afternoon. Several people left on Sunday evening, and others left throughout the morning on Monday. The weather was predicted to

be icy, and some who left on Sunday said they just were not interested in Monday's offerings. The event closed "softly" as people boarded buses to take them back to the city

Limmud NY: the Research

CMJS conducted surveys of all Limmud NY participants—attendees, volunteers, presenters, and organizers—in 2005, 2006, and 2007. In 2005, the research team interviewed 60 participants. In 2006, CMJS interviewed 15 volunteer planners, and in 2007, CMJS conducted twelve interviews with people who had become regular attendees of the event. (The 2007 survey and protocol for the interviews may be found in Appendix A.) With three years of data, the research explores changes in the population of Limmud NY and in participants' responses to their experiences. The data reveal three challenges the Limmud NY planning team will face in the future:

- Balancing the needs of returning "Limmudnyks" and the in-group of planners and volunteers with those of new attendees in order to build community and enable all participants to feel comfortable
- Maintaining the excitement and "buzz" about Limmud NY now that the "newness" has worn off
- Ensuring consistently high levels of learning while maintaining the inclusive nature of the program

The first challenge has been discussed in previous research but needs to be revisited in light of three years of experience: how can Limmud NY continue to attract and satisfy the needs of new people from various backgrounds and degrees of Jewish involvement while continuing to grow the base of committed volunteers and returning participants? To some extent, this represents, in perhaps a magnified form, the larger question of engagement versus entrenchment with which the Jewish community is often concerned. Should Limmud NY reach out to try to engage Jews who are less involved in the Jewish community, or should it focus on building and energizing the base of committed Jews who may view Limmud NY as a way to recharge their Jewish batteries? Three years of data help illuminate the differences between the energized base that some of Limmud NY's founders had hoped to create and the people who come for the first time. The first section of the report describes those who come to Limmud NY and their respective responses to the program.

The second section of the report treats the question of maintaining the momentum of an event that is no longer new. At three years, it is difficult to maintain the same buzz and excitement about an event. Limmud, as a concept, is recognized as something new in the area of Jewish learning and celebration. Although it continues to spread to other communities in North America and around the world, it is three years old in New York—a place in which the phrase "new and exciting" has a short life-span. Limmud NY faces the challenge of providing high quality learning opportunities that can meet the needs and expectations of a diverse group of learners. How can volunteer planners create the same "buzz" about the program when they may have exhausted the supply of top level educators who can come to the event? How can Limmud NY provide content that is intellectually

challenging and personally meaningful while being accessible to all? How can planners increase the quality of programming without jeopardizing the democratic, empowerment strategy—providing a teaching venue for whomever wants to lead sessions—on which Limmud NY is based? And to what extent can its planners hope for Limmud NY, a relatively short but intensive four day period of Jewish learning, to create change in the Jewish lives of participants?

The report also explores the challenge of accomplishing all of these perhaps contradictory goals while creating affordable yet comfortable conditions for building community. What opportunities exist for offering an atmosphere conducive to forming new friendships? How can Limmud NY continue to expand while offering more intimate and comfortable settings for learning and socializing?

Finally, a section of conclusions and recommendations summarizes the report's findings and suggests ideas for moving forward.

THE CHALLENGE OF GROWTH

Eli is a graduate student in his twenties and lives on the Upper West Side. He chose to move to the neighborhood to be close to his university, but also because he was interested in Jewish life. He attended Jewish summer camp, joined a youth group in high school, and lived in Israel. Eli volunteered for Limmud NY because he knew other planners from his involvement in the Upper West Side Jewish community. He participated in all three Limmud NY conferences, each time serving in a volunteer capacity. He says, "Limmud is local and interesting. Many people in my crowd attend." Additionally, "Limmud is a chance to reconnect with people who you don't always get to see at home; a chance to connect to people who live on the West Side in different ways...It's nice to see people over and over." At the same time, Eli recognizes the difficulty in growing Limmud NY: "It's important to reach out to other communities."

Michelle is also a graduate student in her twenties. She recently moved to New York and lives in a trendy Brooklyn neighborhood. Having grown up in an active Reform household in the Northeast, she was always been interested in Jewish learning and at one time even considered going to rabbinical school. She attended Limmud NY because she wanted to meet more Jewish people in her age cohort. But Michelle found her peers at Limmud cliquy and uninterested in meeting people outside their existing social group. She felt out of place on Shabbat: to her people appeared to be "more Jewish" than she was. Reflecting on her first conference, Michelle says, "Overall, it was a fun, positive experience, but I would have liked to meet other Jews with similar religious backgrounds and social interests." Michelle hoped to find connection to the Jewish community through Limmud NY but could not find common ground with other participants.

Limmud NY has grown steadily over its first three years. To some extent, this reflects people returning year after year, but at the same time, new people ("first timers") continue to make up the majority of people attending the event. Limmud NY organizers see success in the growing numbers of both new participants and returnees. However, this growth also presents a challenge to the organization, as it must serve the different needs of both groups.

In most ways, the groups are very similar. Despite the growing numbers of returning participants, the composition of the whole community from year to year remains largely the same. In the next section, we examine the similarities across time.

Continuity of the Limmud NY Community

Limmud NY 2007 planners continued their practice of reaching out to different audiences. Though no longer advertising the theme "many stripes of your community," they continued to pursue a policy of increasing representation from various Jewish communities. As distinct from previous years, recruitment efforts in 2007 emphasized to some greater degree geographic diversity rather than outreach to specific target populations. In 2007, planners

promoted the theme of “Jewfusion,” with its emphasis on learning from diversity, sharing different ideas and practices of Judaism, and celebrating Jewish life. In terms of demographics and Jewish practice, the people attracted to this program resembled those who made up the cohorts from previous years. With a few exceptions, the Jews who attended Limmud 2007 looked very much like those from 2005 and 2006.

Age, Gender, and Marital Status

The age composition of the Limmud 2007 cohort, in terms of gender and marital status, is much the same as 2005 and 2006 (Table 1). In 2007, children comprised a slightly higher percent of the total, and the absolute number of children under 18 rose from 82 in 2005 to 123 in 2007—an increase of 50%. Again as in 2006, 18-24-year-olds made up a larger percent of participants than in 2005.

Table 1: Participants by Age
(Based on registration data for all participants)

<i>Age</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
under 18	12%	13%	15%
18-24	9%	13%	13%
25-34	22%	20%	20%
35-49	31%	28%	27%
50-64	19%	16%	17%
65-79	6%	7%	7%
80+	0%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The gender ratio is slightly less skewed, but almost 60% of participants are females (Table 2). Gender ratios by age have also changed somewhat with a slightly higher percent of women in the 18-24 age group and a slightly lower percent in the 25-34 age group, but again, the population is almost two-thirds female in both of these categories while the older population groups are less skewed.

Table 2: Percent Female by Age
(Based on registration data for all participants)

<i>Age</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
Under 18	59%	60%	53%
18-24	77%	64%	68%
25-34	67%	68%	64%
35-49	56%	60%	56%
50-64	61%	57%	56%
65-79	54%	65%	55%
80+	-	45%	47%
Total	61%	62%	59%

As seen in Table 3, the marital status of participants, based on survey data and calculated only for those 25 years of age and older, is also relatively unchanged.

Table 3: Marital Status of Participants 25 years of age and older

(Based on survey data)

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
Married	46%	48%	48%
Living together/partner	8%	4%	6%
Separated	1%	2%	2%
Divorced	8%	4%	8%
Widowed	1%	3%	2%
Never married (single)	37%	39%	35%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Participants have consistently spoken about the value they attribute to the age diversity of the program. In 2005, a college student spoke of how much he enjoyed talking to older people at during Limmud NY. This year, a person who came with children appreciated seeing younger people enjoying the event:

I love Limmud and think it is terrific, but it is definitely more geared towards young people in their 20s and early 30s as opposed to those of us in our 40s and up with kids. But that is ok too, because it is great to see so many young people connecting with the Jewish community in different and interesting ways.

Jewish Life

Limmud NY has had a relatively stable denominational composition, although in 2007 an even larger percent of participants than in previous years identified themselves as “other” (Table 4). Many of these people specified their denomination in ways that suggest that they would be most comfortable in Conservative worship, but did not feel comfortable with that or any other movement label. Of the 69 people who described what they meant by “other,” the plurality (17%) used variations on “Conservadox.” Nine used the term “post-denominational” and one identified as “post-denominational! (whatever that means).” Some identified as observant or noted a particular observance: “Sabbath observant,” “Post denominational, shomer shabbat and shomer kashrut,” or “Observant Egalitarian Conservative—at that point you might as well be post-denominational. Go figure.” Four said they were somewhere between Reform and Conservative. Six identified with the Jewish renewal movement—one said it should have been an option for answering the question. One person identified as a “Middle Eastern Jew (Iraqi),” another as “Reformorconservadox,” and a third specified denomination as “explorodox.”

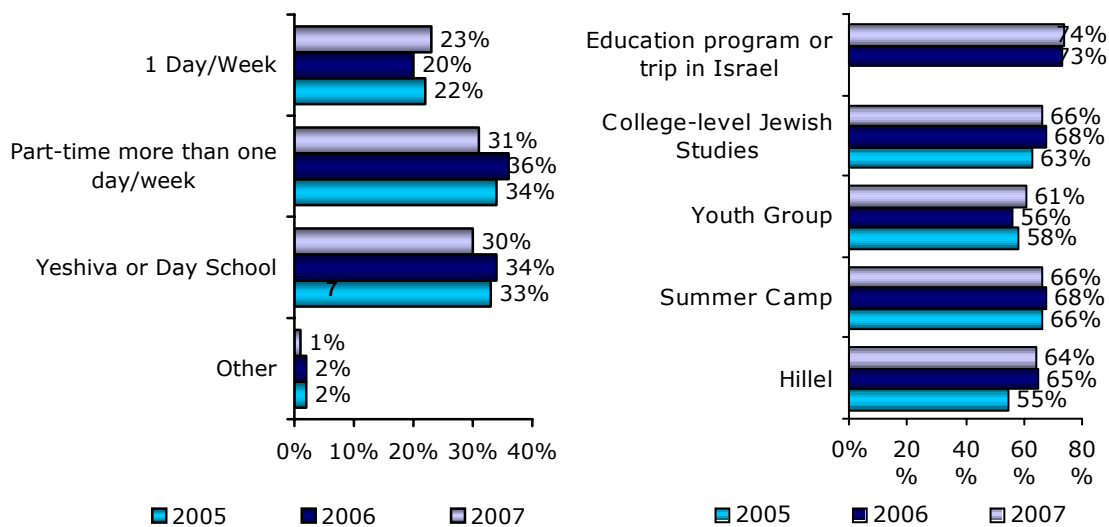
Table 4: Denomination of Limmud NY Participants
(Based on survey data)

Denomination	2005	2006	2007
Reform	10%	10%	10%
Orthodox	17%	14%	16%
Conservative	35%	38%	30%
Just Jewish	16%	17%	19%
Other	22%	21%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Similar to previous years, many of the Limmud NY participants (30%) work in the Jewish world as professionals: fundraisers, educators, program creators and coordinators, rabbis, artists, musicians, and an occasional researcher. This compares to 32% in 2005 and 2006. Jewish professionals contribute a certain slant to Limmud NY. A larger percentage of them typically identify with the “other” category denominationally. In 2007, for example, 30% of Jewish professionals at Limmud identified as “other.” This includes Reconstructionists and secular Jews as well as those who call themselves Conservadox or “Halachic egalitarian.”

Most Limmud NY participants received formal Jewish education growing up—about 87% in each year (Figure 1). Typically they received at least four years of such education in a variety of combinations. As in previous years, about a third of Limmud NY 2007 participants had spent time in part-time religious schools meeting more than one day per week. A similar proportion attended yeshivas or day schools, and 20-25% attended Sunday schools or other one day per week programs. Also consistent with earlier years, the majority of participants in 2007 had experience in Jewish summer camps, youth groups, Hillel or other campus organizations, college-level Jewish Studies programs, and Israel educational programs.

Figure 1: Jewish Educational Background of Limmud NY Participants



As in previous years, most participants (79%) are members of a synagogue and/or a *minyan*, or *havurah* (prayer group), though the percentage reporting membership in the latter worship groups is down from previous years, and both the 2006 and 2007 events had smaller percentages of synagogue members than 2005 (Table 5). Some of the non-members are college students, and others belong to JCCs or other Jewish organizations. Still others are “non-joiners” who, nonetheless, participate in worship services regularly or attend Jewish learning or cultural events. Almost all Limmud NY participants have at least some attachment to the Jewish world through religious, cultural, political, or social institutions or events.

Table 5: Synagogue, Minyan and Havurah Membership

(Based on survey data)

<i>Organization</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
Synagogue	77%	65%	66%
Minyan or Havurah	52%	49%	40%
Either or Both	89%	80%	79%
Neither	11%	20%	21%

Geographical Distribution

Limmud NY planners have worked hard to move the composition away from its early concentration of Upper West Side participants, and they have had some clear success (Table 6). In a June meeting, the Steering Committee discussed its own diversity and its goals for bringing in more participants from the outer boroughs, Long Island, and Westchester. The Steering Committee for 2007 included people from the Bronx, New Jersey, Brooklyn, and Connecticut, as well as Manhattan. And at least one Steering Committee meeting was held in Brooklyn. The new chairs of Limmud NY for 2008 are from White Plains and New Jersey, respectively.

In 2006, over one-third of all attendees came from the Upper West Side. In 2007, Upper West Siders comprised a little less than one-quarter of participants. The percentage from the Upper East Side has remained steady. The percentage from other parts of Manhattan has grown steadily, but overall, the percentage from Manhattan has declined: 52% in 2005, 45% in 2006, and 42% in 2007. The difference has been made up for by increases in participants from Brooklyn. Although Queens sent only seven participants in 2005 and 2006, 24 people from that borough attended in 2007. The growth in the percentage coming from beyond the Northeast reflects most notably the recruitment of ambassadors from other cities interested in establishing their own version of Limmud, and the increase in college student participants (103). Most of the college students came from New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Others came from New Jersey, and other places within the United States, Israel and Canada. One student came from Australia. (See Appendix C for a discussion of students).

Table 6: Geographic Distribution

(Based on registration data—all participants)

<i>Area</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
Upper West Side	35%	28%	24%
Upper East Side	7%	7%	6%
Other Manhattan	9%	10%	12%
Brooklyn	7%	7%	13%
Bronx	4%	3%	3%
Queens	1%	1%	3%
Nassau	4%	3%	4%
Suffolk	3%	1%	1%
Westchester	5%	4%	5%
Other NYS	1%	3%	3%
NJ	7%	9%	7%
MA & CT	5%	7%	4%
Other US	8%	12%	11%
UK	2%	2%	1%
Israel	2%	1%	1%
Other Countries	0%	1%	2%

With the exception of this shift in geographic distribution, Limmud NY participants continue to look remarkably similar to one another: overwhelmingly white, Ashkenazi (90%), heterosexual (94%), and English speaking. Four percent of participants said they are Sephardic, and 7% said they are other—mainly mixed Ashkenazi and Sephardic heritage. Consistently across 2006 and 2007, 2% of participants identified themselves as bisexual, 3% as gay or lesbian, and 2% as uncertain about their sexual identity. Of the 15% in 2007 who speak a language other than English at home, most said they speak Hebrew, although for some of them this means they use Hebrew at the Shabbat table. Only 2% speak Russian at home. Although planners in 2006 and 2007 had sought greater percentages of Sephardic Jews, Jews of color, and Jews with various sexual orientations, the composition of the group remained the same. The 2007 Marketing Team found that such segments were too small or insular, or simply too difficult to reach. While remaining welcoming to all, planners focused on increasing geographic diversity—a goal they successfully achieved.

Creating Limmudnyks

Limmud NY 2005 was a completely new event for all participants. Even for those who attended Limmud in England, the particulars of the setting in a resort nestled in the Catskill Mountains made the experience something unique. In 2007, a third of the attendees had previously attended Limmud NY—either in 2005 or 2006 or both. For these individuals, their prior experience generated a commitment to returning.

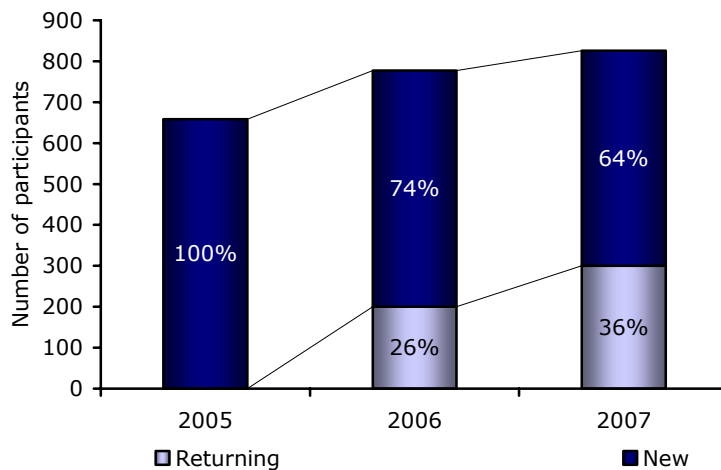
Limmudnyks are the people who return to the event year after year. They represent a subset of the whole, forming perhaps their own community as time passes. And they comprise an “energized base”—an entrenchment of Jewish celebration within the larger community. Is it the goal of Limmud NY to build such a base, and what percentage of involvement would

suggest success? Limmud NY is a unique event in the Jewish world; its closest counterpart, Limmud UK, has not been studied systematically and no comparative data exists. Other retreats in the United States—the National Havurah Committee Summer Institute, and CAJE (Conference for Alternatives in Jewish Education) conference, for example, offer retreat-like opportunities to live Jewishly and study together. The former is based on involvement in the Havurah movement, and the latter is based on work as a Jewish educator. In contrast, Limmud NY is open to all Jews. Its marketing efforts target all Jews in the greater New York area. It deliberately seeks out Jews from all movements and age groups—families and singles, students, synagogue members and the unaffiliated—from all walks of life. There is no way of comparing the return rate for Limmud NY to return rates for other events.

Limmud UK boasts of its ability to attract participants year after year, and planners of Limmud NY from its inception sought to emulate the success of its model in Great Britain. But the phenomenon raises questions. How should planners balance the allocation of resources to attracting returnees versus new participants? What would the ideal mix of the two be? What is a reasonable goal for the ratio of “Limmudnyks” to first timers? What are the programmatic implications of having such a mix? To begin the discussion, this section describes the Limmudnyks and those who attended Limmud NY for the first time. It then compares the responses of Limmudnyks and first timers to the event itself.

Since 2005, 1,761 people of all ages have attended one or more Limmud NY events. In 2006, 26% of participants were people who attended Limmud NY 2005. In 2007, 37% of attendees participated in 2005, 2006, or both (Figure 2). Another way to look at this: 37% of 2005 participants came back in either 2006 or 2007 or both, and 33% of 2006 participants came back in 2007. This is the “rate of return” for Limmud NY.

Figure 2: Percentage of Participants Who Had Attended a Previous Limmud NY
(Based on registration data—all participants)

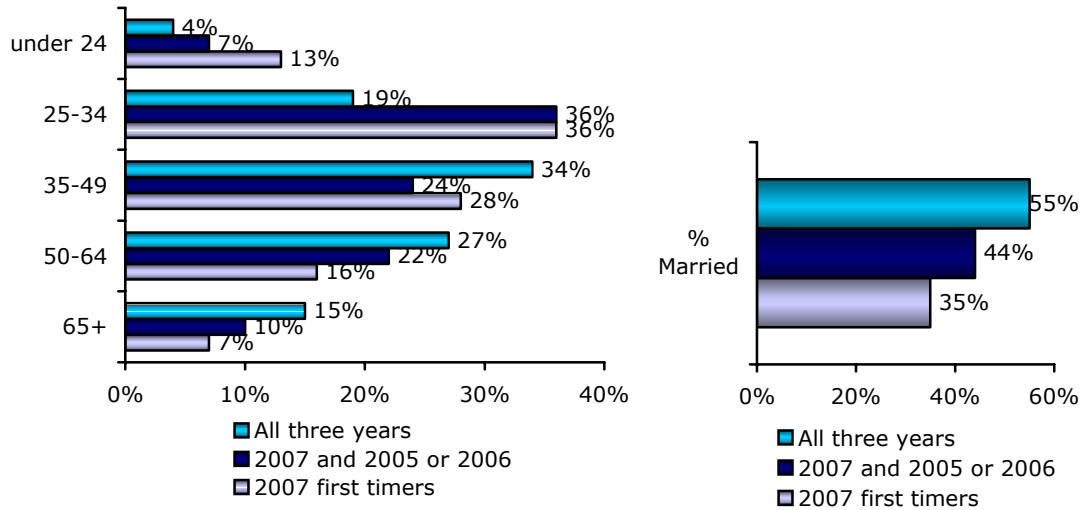


Characteristics of Limmudnyks and “first timers”

As seen in Figure 3, Limmudnyks look very similar to the first timers, but more of them are married and a larger percentage of them are 35 years or older.

Figure 3: Characteristics of Limmudnyks

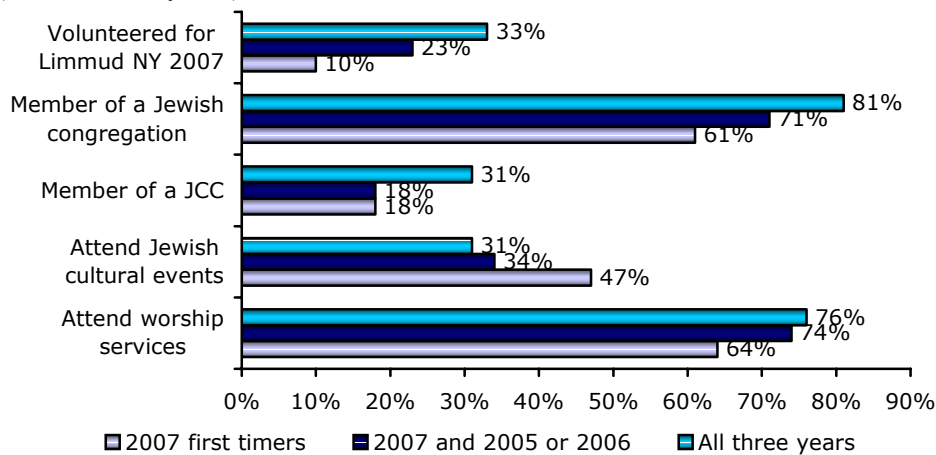
(Based on survey data)



As compared to first timers, Limmudnyks are more frequently members of traditional Jewish institutions, synagogues and Jewish community centers, and more likely to express their Jewishness in more traditional ways. Three-quarters of Limmudnyks attend worship services several times a month or more often, in contrast to only two-thirds of first timers. On the other hand, a smaller percent of Limmudnyks attend Jewish cultural events compared to first timers (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Characteristics of Limmudnyks

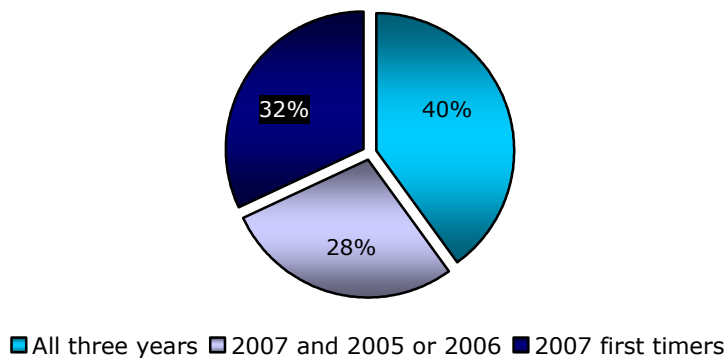
(Based on survey data)



Limmudnyks among the Planners

A third of the “threepeaters” volunteered in the Limmud NY 2007 planning effort, and of the 2007 volunteer planners, 40%, the plurality, attended all three years, and 28% attended in either 2005 or 2006 (Figure 5). More than half of the Limmudnyks, as opposed to 17% of first timers, among the volunteer planners felt very much part of the decision making process, and Limmudnyks typically said they spent more time volunteering, both for the planning and during the weekend, than did the first timers. But these were the only areas in which Limmudnyks and first timers had significant differences in their volunteer experiences. On the overall question of satisfaction with their planning experiences, Limmudnyks and first timers did not differ significantly.

Figure 5: Limmud NY 2007 Volunteers



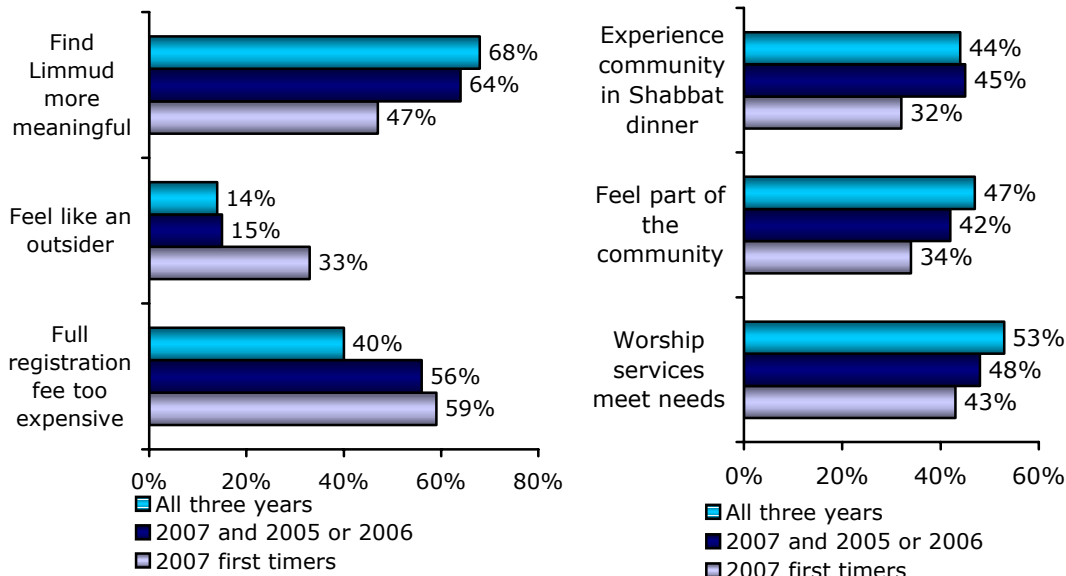
Among the volunteers, Limmudnyks demonstrate a deep commitment to the event and the organization itself. They bring with them the learning from their prior service, an understanding of how the system works, and an identity with the community formed by volunteers. It is important to understand, however, that a third of the volunteers were new to Limmud NY in 2007. These people have the potential to infuse the event and the organization with new ideas and fresh energy. The question for planners in the future is whether the 68% retention rate among volunteers is adequate to maintain the sense of continuity, and whether the 32% recruitment of new Limmudnyks in the volunteer program is adequate to spark change and growth.

Limmudnyk Responses to Limmud NY 2007

Not surprisingly, given their dedication and contributions to Limmud NY, returning Limmudnyks tend to engage more with the community and find greater satisfaction with worship services. Perhaps more surprising is the lack of significant differences between them and the first timers in certain key responses e.g., to what extent they found the event personally meaningful or even “fun” (Figure 6). They differed not at all in regard to their assessment of the quality of learning at Limmud NY. The overall satisfaction with the event was not significantly higher among Limmudnyks than it was among first timers. But to a greater extent than the first timers, Limmudnyks felt a part of the community created by Limmud NY. Whereas only a third of first timers said they had “very much” or “to a

great extent” a sense of community at the Shabbat dinner in 2007, almost half of the Limmudnyks felt that way. And although they did not differ on the extent to which they found the event personally meaningful, Limmudnyks were much more inclined to say that the event was *more* meaningful than most other organized Jewish programs.

Figure 6: Limmudnyks and First Timers – Responses to Limmud NY



The Limmudnyks plan to return in 2008 as well (see page 41). Few have looked into new volunteering or learning opportunities since the event in January. That is probably because they view Limmud NY as their primary location for volunteering and learning. In a sense, their “new” is still Limmud NY. Compared to first timers, more of them are willing to pay more for Limmud NY. This may be due, in part, to the fact that as a group they are somewhat older, but most of them do not find the current pricing structure too expensive. It is also probable that their willingness to pay more rests more on the value they place on Limmud NY than simply on their ability to pay.

The contribution of Limmudnyks to Limmud NY goes beyond their volunteer role, although that has obvious importance. They also bring their enthusiasm and commitment to the event itself. In some sense they create the backbone on which the program rests, but their presence also brings challenges:

- how to keep the program fresh and stimulating to people who have been there since the inception and remember the excitement of the first years;
- how to enable new participants to become part of the community that Limmudnyks have been building through events and planning over several years;

- how to modify the program and satisfy the needs of new people without alienating those who have already established their stake in Limmud NY.

Limmudnyks make a substantial contribution to the continuity of Limmud NY, and that stability has resonance for them. As active members of the planning community and as experienced idea generators, they most assuredly will help address these challenges and continue to serve as a source of energy for Limmud NY.

THE CHALLENGE OF SUCCESS

Fern is in her forties and lives on the Upper West Side. She is a well-educated professional and a married mother of children attending Jewish day school in Manhattan. Her family is involved in Jewish life in her neighborhood and attends synagogue regularly. She keeps a kosher home and observes Shabbat. Fern attends Limmud NY because she sees it as an important social experience for her husband and children, and she is personally committed to Jewish learning. Fern regularly attends classes on Jewish subjects and was originally drawn to Limmud NY by its educational component. She was disappointed, however, by the sessions offered at subsequent conferences. Fern says, "I have been less interested in the programming in the past two years. This year I felt there was less and less rigor available in the class options in comparison to other years...Classes were more touchy feely, less academic, and less intellectual." Fern adds that she is "interested in serious text study and history, serious learning," but is not sure that Limmud NY will be a place to go for that type of intellectual discourse in the future.

In 2005, Limmud NY was new. The location offered comfort and intimacy. The Programming Team brought in prominent scholars, artists, entertainers, and teachers. Promotion on the internet, in the Jewish press, and—most successfully—by word of mouth proclaimed that Limmud NY would be something other than “your grandmother’s Judaism.” The buzz following the event attracted increased registrations for 2006. In order to accommodate all the people who wanted to come the second year, planners had to find a larger site. Unfortunately, what Limmud NY gained in facility size, it lost—to some extent—in intimacy. In its third year, planners had to scramble to find a place when Kutshers proved unavailable, and the new space at the Friar Tuck contributed to the difficulty of creating a sense of community and comfort.

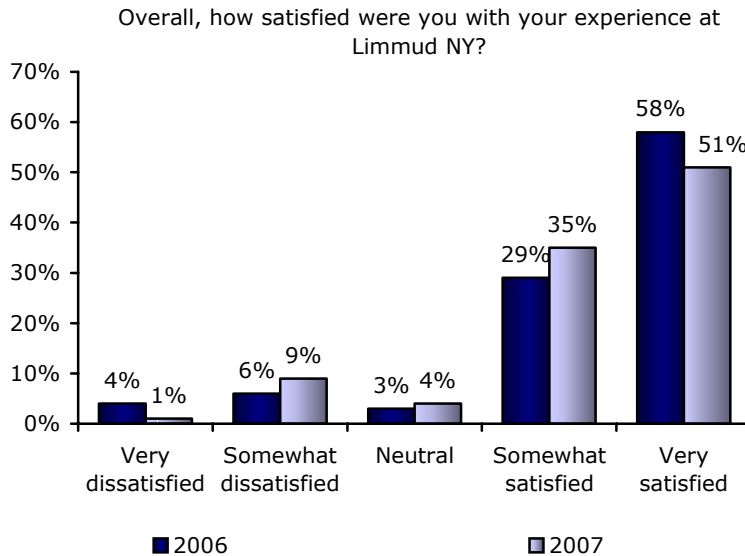
In addition to questions concerning physical space, Limmud NY 2007 confronted new issues regarding the program. Which presenters could provide the same level of learning, discussion, and provocation? Who could provide the same excitement? When enthusiastic participants returned home and told their friends to register for the next year, whose praises did they sing? To what extent did Limmud NY’s successes create unmatchable expectations?

It seems that both of these phenomenon—issues of space and rising expectations—and probably a slight decline in satisfaction that one might expect in the third year of any program, led to a noticeable and significant decrease in enthusiasm for Limmud NY 2007 as compared to Limmud NY 2005 and 2006.

A Fun and Meaningful Experience

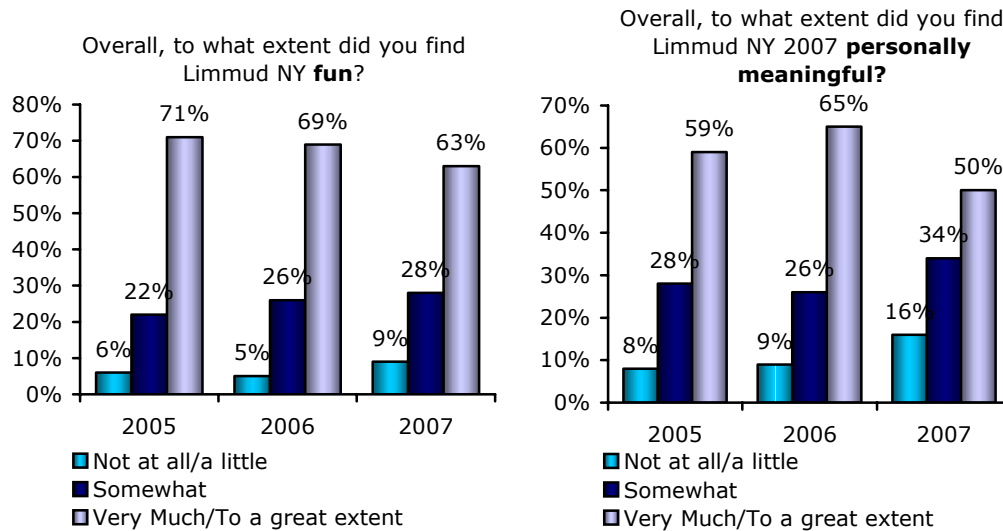
As seen in Figure 7, the number of people satisfied with the overall experience remained high (86% in 2007 versus 87% in 2006), but these numbers belie a shift in the degree of satisfaction. The percentage who said they were very satisfied fell between 2006 and 2007 (from 58% to 51%), while the percent who were somewhat satisfied rose (from 29% to 35%).

Figure 7: Overall Satisfaction



Taken by itself, this shift might not be cause for alarm, but many of the measures of enjoyment, learning, and community declined between 2006 and 2007. The consistent, if not necessarily significant, differences suggest a decline in enthusiasm and a need for some rethinking of policy.

Two changes of note are the extent to which participants found Limmud NY “fun” and “personally meaningful” (Figure 8). In 2006, 69% of Limmud participants found the program “fun,” and 65% found it “personally meaningful.” These percentages declined in 2007.

Figure 8: Fun and Personally Meaningful Experiences

Community

Building community at Limmud NY has always posed a challenge. In 2005, participants complained of a lack of time to socialize. A small group (17%) agreed with the statement “I felt like an outsider.” In 2007 almost 25% of participants agreed with that statement. As one first timer said, “In some ways, it felt like a big ‘insider’s club’ and I was on the outside. I did not think that there was a lot of diversity among participants.” In 2005, the CMJS research findings suggested that perhaps the preponderance of attendees from the Upper West Side contributed to an insider-outsider tension. In 2006 and 2007 as well, people coming from that area, members of congregations B’nai Jeshurun (38 participants), Hadar (29), and Ansche Chesed (14) for example, had ready-made groups of friends acquaintances. The community seemed cliquish to some, although this attitude is expressed by only 11% of respondents. The insider experience manifested itself in several instances throughout the weekend. In one session, presenters dropped names of different Jewish philanthropies and organizations using acronyms without stopping to define the terms. After the session, participants told a member of the research team that they felt uncomfortable—that the session was very much addressed to Jewish professionals and insiders. Limmud NY planners face two challenges: creating the feeling of *amcha*, of belonging within the group, and conveying to presenters and all volunteers the importance of being part of that effort. Less than half of Limmud NY participants (40%) said they felt very much “part of the community” created by Limmud NY. Two respondents who felt left out wrote:

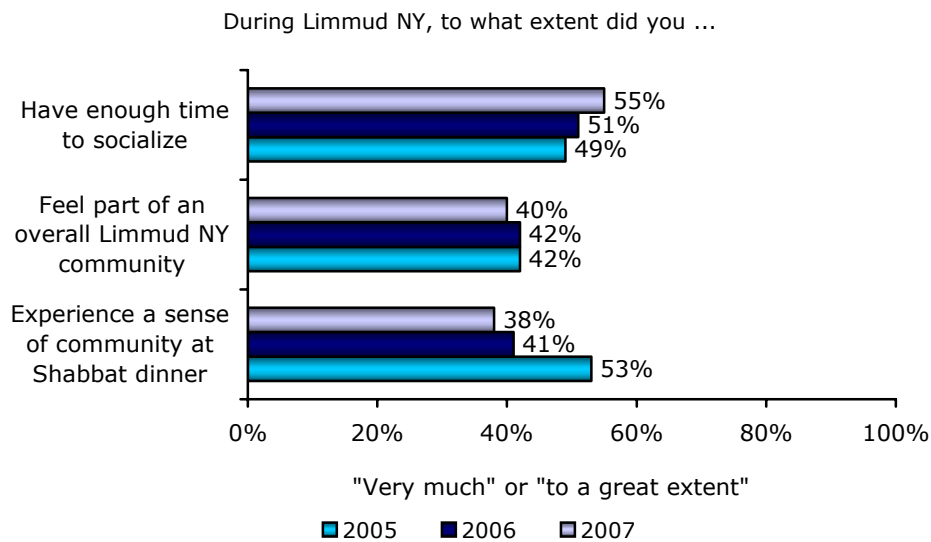
The community felt very insular and Jewishly-affiliated, Upper West Side style. I expected the type of open and creative community that Limmud UK is rumored to have. [It was] way too conservative and square.

I had actually hoped to meet people who were involved in various new minyanim in NYC, with whom I might feel an affinity. There didn't seem to be opportunities for that to happen.

While the percentage of overall Limmud conference attendees from the Upper West Side has declined, the actual number of participants from that area has grown slightly. Additionally, Limmudnyks come back to communities they have already established, and many, as volunteers, spend time with their fellow planners year-round. It is probably not surprising that building a sense of community became more challenging in the third year.

More participants may have felt that they had more time to socialize at Limmud NY 2007 (Figure 9), but there was no increase in the extent to which people felt part of the community.

Figure 9: Community Experience at Limmud NY

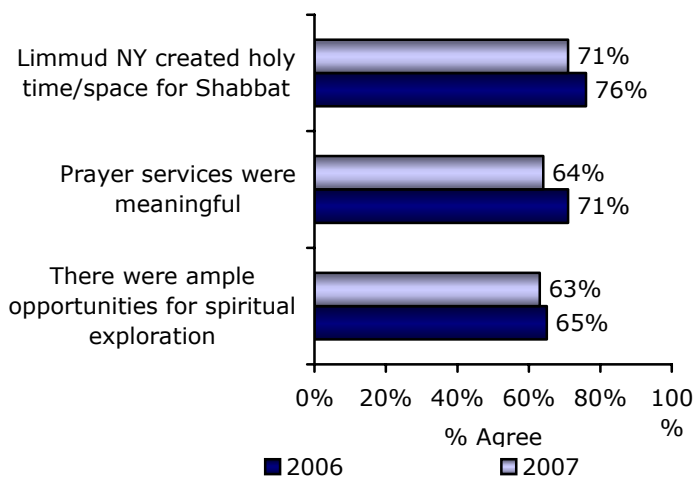


Building community involves, to some extent a reciprocal relationship. One way for participants to help build and become part of the Limmud NY community is to volunteer in the planning of Limmud NY or as part of the event. Part of the celebration of Limmud NY is an appreciation of volunteer efforts. In 2005, Limmud NY tried to follow the Limmud UK model and involve all participants in the volunteer process. Through volunteering, participants gain ownership of the event and a vested interest in the celebration. In 2006 and 2007, less effort seemed to be devoted to recruiting day-to-day volunteers. One participant who attended all three conferences said that he “appreciates” the volunteers’ efforts in coordinating and running the weekend, but he rejects the idea of volunteering himself: “I’m going away and paying for this. I’m not going to stand around and direct people. I’m selfish that way. It’s a vacation weekend not a working weekend.” It would probably be difficult to change his mind, but for other Limmud NY participants, volunteering could be the path to community.

Spiritual Exploration

Most people who attended Limmud NY say they came for the educational experience the event offers. Not quite half as many say they came for the opportunity for spiritual exploration. Nonetheless, they found spirituality at the event—in individual sessions, in prayer services, and in the atmosphere around Shabbat. About two-thirds of participants agreed that there were ample opportunities for spiritual exploration, and despite the difficulties with Kabbalat Shabbat services or Shabbat dinner, more than 70% agreed that Limmud NY created a holy time/space for Shabbat. Given the diversity of Jewish affiliation and practice of Limmud NY participants, this level of agreement is impressive, however, the negative direction of the trend from 2006 to 2007 (Figure 10) is not encouraging.

Figure 10: Participant Responses to Limmud NY



Worship services provide an atmosphere for spiritual exploration and creation community, but they can also serve as the location for various types of religious and political struggles. Two respondents complained about the traditional *mechitzah* (partition separating men from women) service offered on Friday night. The mechitzah was placed in such a way that men stood in the front of the makeshift prayer space, while women stood in the back behind the tall curtain. Participants discussed the situation and decided to rearrange the mechitzah so that the male and female sections were side by side. As they moved the divider, a volunteer planner explained the process of determining the original arrangement. He said that those who wanted the “side by side” arrangement were overruled by others who argued “They’re Orthodox; they don’t care if the women are in the back.” The respondent wrote,

I found this to be very, very surprising coming from Limmud. As a pluralistic program which welcomes Jews from every background, I was dismayed to see such a stereotypical view expressed and actually implemented! I expected more sensitivity and quite frankly, more

understanding of Modern Orthodox communities today, at least with respect to prayer arrangements.

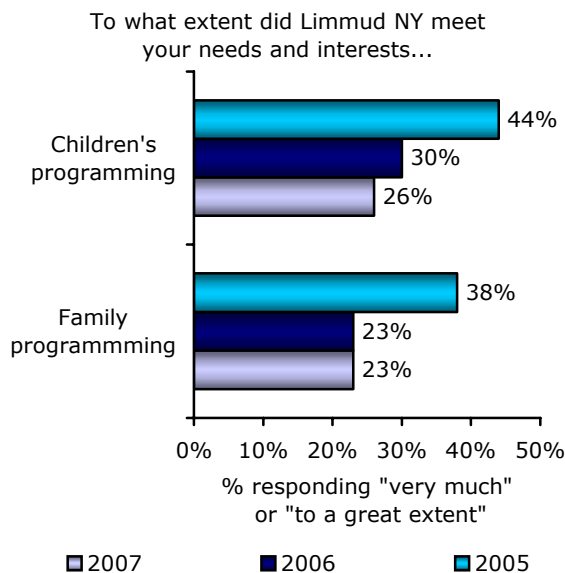
Limmud NY created an uncomfortable situation, but collectively the worshipers felt empowered to make the changes that allowed them to pray together.

Children and Family Programming

In the areas of children’s and family programming, Limmud NY 2007 participants rated the event much higher than their counterparts in 2006 (Figure 11). Planners devoted planning time and additional resources towards creating a more enjoyable and fulfilling experience for children and families. The Children and Family Programming Team specifically invited three presenters for sessions of interest to families and children. The volunteer team also hired one head counselor and twenty *madrachim* (counselors) to staff the daily activities for children, known as Camp Limmud. Team members, committed to offering a quality learning experience, recruited and interviewed *madrachim*. They also conducted three training sessions with them in New York during the fall. The team created safety and emergency procedures, consulting with experienced professionals. They also tapped at least one planner from the National Havurah Committee’s Summer Institute for information about that organization’s program for children. In both children and family programming, the data indicate that these efforts met with considerable success. “I appreciated the thoughtfulness and inclusiveness of the family and children's programming,” one participant said.

Complaints regarding the programming still existed, but the balance of comments was more favorable than last year. The majority of comments were positive, some were negative, and others were mixed or offered suggestions. Several respondents commented that the group for older children was less successful than they would have liked, a fact that was recognized by the Children and Family Programming Team.

Figure 11: Children and Family Programming



Parents offered suggestions in two areas relating to Children and Family Programming: content and staffing. While some parents advocated for more intellectual content in the activities arranged for kids, others argued for more “fun” or “interactive” activities and opportunities for movement (dance, sports, and time outside the hotel). Several respondents noted that the madrichim seemed “too strict” or “inexperienced,” while one affirmed that the counselors were “nice and dedicated.” One mother expressed serious concerns about the facilities, noting that Camp Limmud “was in a basement room that was moldy” and her child became sick at the end of the conference.

But most parents appreciated the effort. Parents who had been at Limmud NY in previous years recognized the improvement:

The family and children’s programming was a huge improvement over the past year. My kids enjoyed the programs they stayed for, and the toddler program was a big help. The kids also felt free to attend and welcomed at events from film to writing workshops that interested them (particularly my 5th grader). The ability to learn and study and find artistic expression and watch films all together, in different configurations as appropriate for our family is a major reason why we come.

While components of Children and Family programming still need adjustment for Limmud 2008, the creation of a formal program in Camp Limmud in 2007 demonstrates Limmud NY’s dedication to meet the needs of their constituency. Limmud NY promotes itself as an event for Jews of all ages and has worked hard to ensure that the needs of children of all ages are met during the conference.

Learning for All Levels

In 2001 and 2002, the Mandel Foundation Jerusalem Fellows completed two separate Educational Policy Projects studying Limmud UK. The first group (Bahbout, et al. 2001, p. 3) focused on the educational content of the program and concluded:

As Limmud has grown in stature both nationally and internationally, more and more ‘stars’ attend the conference... With so many people attending Limmud, the need for an ever-increasing number of teachers and sessions has meant that many of the presentations (particularly by new or occasional teachers) are significantly less successful than those of the ‘stars.’

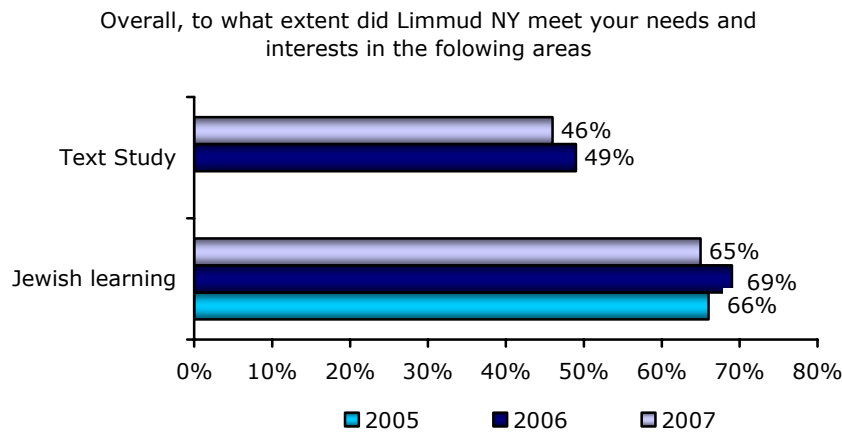
That lack of success, the authors said, was demonstrated in three areas:

1. Limited knowledge of subject material and/or textual sources;
2. Lack of andragogic (adult education) skills;
3. Unclear educational goals of individual presenters.

Their assessments, based on their own observations rather than on research with participants, judged the quality of sessions rather than participant learning or changes in attitudes and behaviors. They quoted the original mission statement of Limmud UK: “Limmud strives for excellence in creating both an experience for educators and an educational experience for Am Yisrael.” The Jerusalem Fellows thought the broadness of the goal had led to “mediocrity in many of the presentations.” They questioned how it would be possible for Limmud to “achieve educational excellence” while preserving its “democratic nature.”

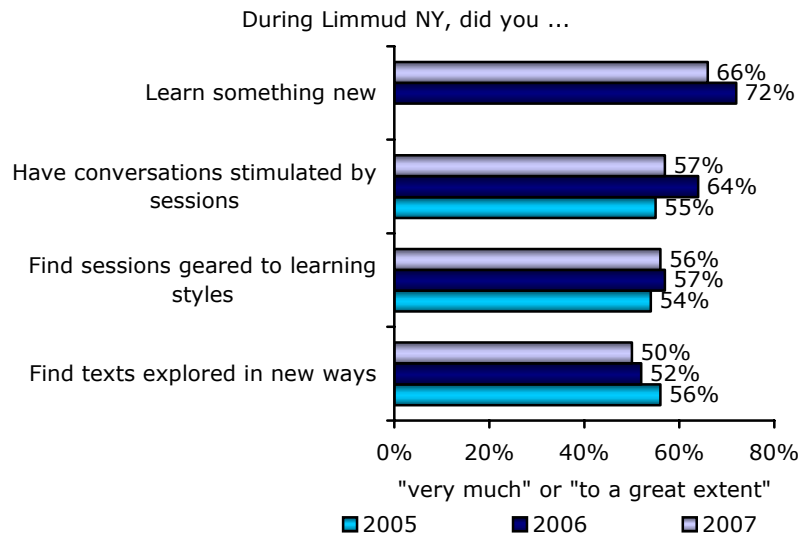
Today Limmud NY has reached a similar juncture. One should stress that most people (65%) still assert that Limmud NY meets their needs for Jewish learning very much” or “to a great extent” (Figure 12). They enjoy the event, the speakers, and the discussions. But the data from 2007, compared with 2005 and 2006, on almost every other measure, suggest an erosion of enthusiasm for the level and quality of learning at Limmud NY.

Figure 12: Learning Experiences



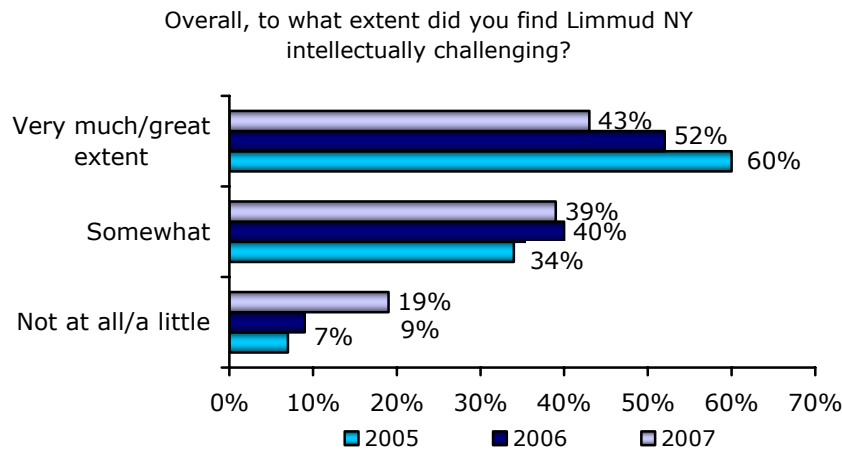
Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that respondents see areas for improvement. Of the 129 people who explained why they will not come back to Limmud NY next year, 17% expressed dissatisfaction with the selection of presenters or the level of learning. Some said they were “disappointed” in the intellectual quality in 2007 and would not decide whether to attend in 2008 again until they knew who would present or perform. One woman who attended all three years said, “I felt the program was a little thin—there were slots where nothing ‘spoke’ to me, and it was less intellectually challenging than prior years.” Another female Limmudnyk said she found the classes “much less compelling this year and would need to see who the presenters were next year” before committing to attend Limmud NY 2008. Survey responses on a range of learning experiences confirm that this participant was not alone in her opinion (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Aspects of Learning



The trend toward lower rates of satisfaction with the level of learning at Limmud NY is most strongly demonstrated in responses to the question on intellectual challenge (Figure 14). In its first year, 60% of Limmud NY participants found the learning “very much” or “to a great extent” intellectually challenging. This year less than half (43%) shared that opinion, and the percentage is roughly the same for both Limmudnyks and first timers.

Figure 14: Intellectual Challenge



Most Limmudnyks found sessions “geared to their needs” and had conversations stimulated by the sessions they attended. The survey also asked whether the level of learning at Limmud NY was too easy or too difficult. Few participants were willing to say that it could be too difficult, but one respondent said she felt lost. She attended the learner’s service on Friday night to find that most of the participants were people who facilitate learners services themselves and came only to learn how to do it more effectively. “Limmud assumes a high level of Jewish knowledge (about history, text, ritual) that makes it

exclusionary,” she said. While the service was intended for learners, its goal was co-opted by the majority of Limmud attendees who come with higher levels of Jewish education.

Of the 495 participants who responded to the survey, almost half (240) had suggestions for Limmud NY’s future programming. Almost fifty respondents requested more text study for Limmud 2008. Suggested topics include Proverbs, Talmud, and Kabbalah. In addition to text study, Limmud NY participants desired more dynamic learning sessions. The Limmud concept is based on active participation in volunteering and the learning process. Although the number of sessions should have provided adequate opportunities for interactive learning and movement, many participants suggested that Limmud NY offer more hands-on, participatory sessions in the future. While many adults enjoy performances and may learn best in a frontal setting, others do not. Participants noted the difficulty of sitting through multiple lecture-style sessions each day. As one respondent wrote, “[We need] more art workshops, more meditation yoga-type programs, perhaps longer [time blocks]...maybe some how-to sessions, more hands on, movement orientated stuff—for those who find it difficult to sit still for 4 days straight.” Other participants agreed. They suggested adding Israeli dancing, cooking, music, handicraft, and other arts programs for adults. The Limmud 2007 program offered only one handicraft (paper cutting) session and one cooking experience (challah baking). A few respondents advocated more opportunities for outdoor activities, since only one hike was scheduled during the conference. At the same time, these respondents acknowledged the reality of planning around winter weather in the Catskills. In addition to text study and more interactive programming, respondents offered other suggestions for future conferences: *chevruta* (paired) study, sessions on diverse Jewish populations (including world Jewry, Chabad, and gays), Israeli culture, and the Jewish family.

Limmud NY planners can use these findings to develop strategies for Limmud NY 2008. But in changing the model, they will have to keep in mind the overall success of the program thus far, and the considerable appreciation for both the diversity of offerings and the democratic, empowering philosophy of Limmud NY.

A Satisfying Volunteer Experience

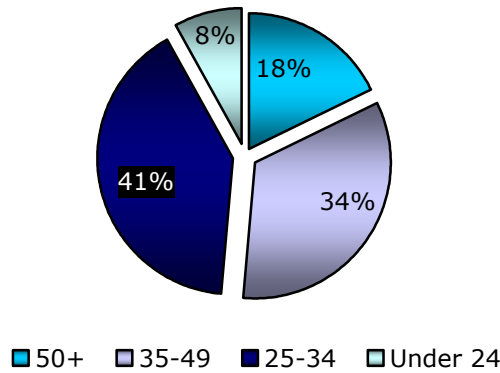
Limmud NY consists of two equally important elements. The first is the event itself—four days of all things Jewish. The other, the volunteer planning experience, engages a distinct subset of participants (81 in 2005, 86 in 2006, and 90² in 2007). Volunteers have a year-round involvement with Limmud NY that starts immediately at the close of the previous year’s event. This year, as the year before, only two paid staff members helped plan Limmud NY. Almost all of the planning, decision making, implementation—everything from designing the web site and the registration system to inviting presenters, assigning roommates, hiring caterers, and choosing the location—are the responsibility of volunteers.

² This number, based on data from the Limmud NY organizers, does not include “inactive” planners, those who volunteered but did not participate in the actual planning process. Eighty-five survey respondents said they had been involved in planning the event.

Their respective experiences are crucial to building the core of Limmudnyks since they come back year after year and bring their friends as well.

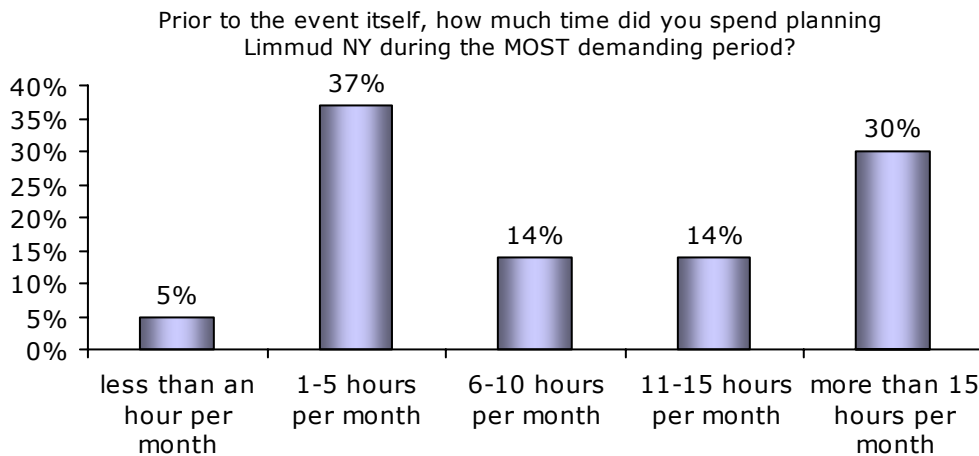
The volunteer planners come from the same geographic areas and have a demographic profile similar to all participants. The gender disparity found in previous years among Limmud NY volunteers is, in 2007, even greater for the cohort of 2007 planners. In fact, 72% of the 90 somewhat to very active planners in 2007 were female. As in previous years, most volunteers (75% in 2007) were people ranging in age from 25-49 (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Volunteer Age Groups



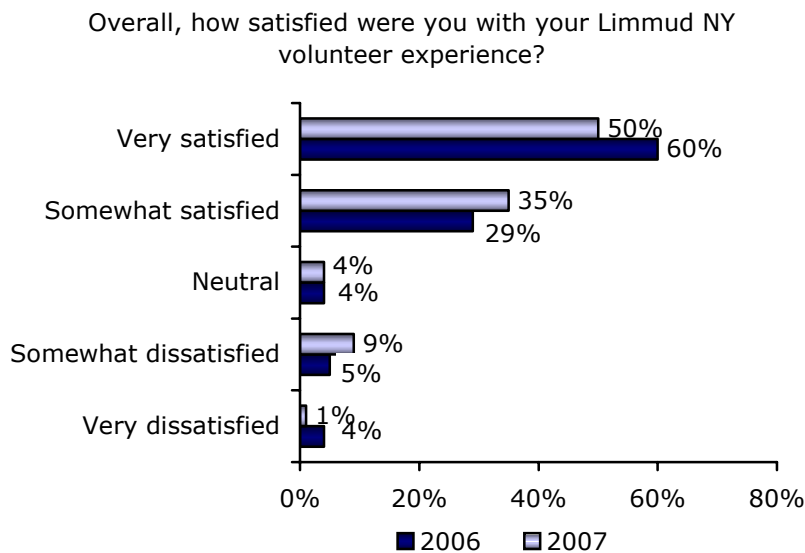
Almost half of the volunteer planners (44%) report devoting eleven or more hours per month to Limmud NY during the most demanding period leading up to the event. Although the planners get additional volunteer labor from participants during the Limmud NY weekend, the planners continue to work many hours at that time as well. As in previous years, some volunteers complained that they work much more than others. Their responses to these questions, as seen in Figure 16, suggest that this is, indeed, the case.

Figure 16: Volunteer Planning Hours



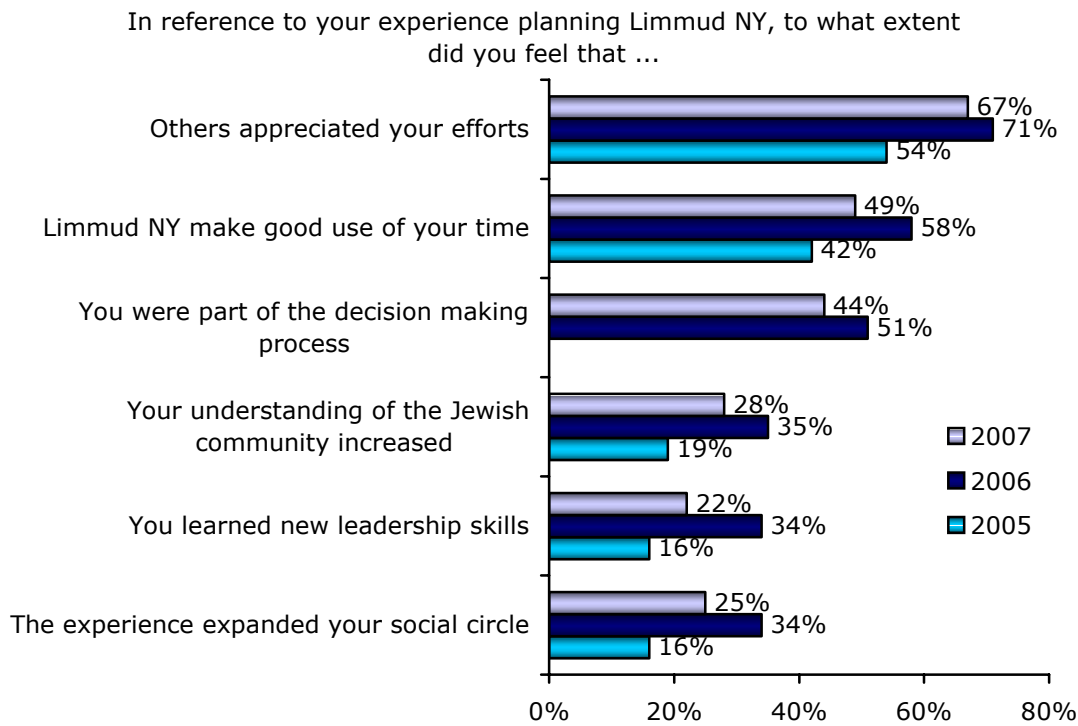
In 2006, the research found that “most Limmud NY volunteers came away excited and enthusiastic about the program and their role in the planning effort,” but the planners that year also raised issues about communication and interpersonal relations among team members. Despite those issues, reactions were mainly positive as they were again from 2007 planners. One volunteer wrote, “Through volunteering, I was able to make a big difference in the quality of the programs offered.” Most (85%) volunteers said they were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied with their volunteer experience, but the breakdown of that number has changed. The percentage reporting that they are “very satisfied” has dropped ten points from 2007 (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Volunteer Satisfaction



In 2006, volunteer planners reported “more gratification and a greater sense of appreciation in their volunteer roles than did their counterparts in 2005” (Koren & Androphy, 2006, p. 22). Limmud NY continues to convey its appreciation of volunteer efforts. Again in 2007, more than two-thirds of the volunteer planners reported feeling that others appreciated their efforts. Nonetheless, there is cause for concern about the direction of most areas of their responses about the volunteer experience. Some of the differences shown in Figure 18 are not statistically significant, but the trend from 2006 to 2007 suggests that the change in overall satisfaction (Figure 17) can be linked to these specific factors. In 2007 fewer than half of the volunteer planners felt “very much” or “to a great extent” part of decision making. Only half felt that the organization made good use of its time “very much” or “to a great extent.” Those who reported that they gained an increased understanding of the Jewish community, new leadership skills, and an expanded social circle as a result of the volunteer experience were fewer compared to 2006. The only area of increase in positive response from the volunteers is in reference to their feeling informed about the overall vision for Limmud NY (from 58% to 76%). The individual numbers might not be significant, but the consistency of the trend is cause for concern.

Figure 18: Volunteer Experience



The source of greatest dissatisfaction for planners, as revealed in their open-ended survey responses, is difficult personal relationships with other volunteers. Several volunteers mentioned issues with committee chairs or other leaders. A woman whose overall evaluation of her experience was positive said, “Sometimes it felt that I was a bit of a puppet—being told what to do by the leadership rather than shaping what was being done.” Another volunteer, a first timer, characterized the leadership of her team as “very controlling,” but she, too, viewed Limmud NY overall “very positively.” Others complained of lack of assistance, long meetings, or difficulties traveling to meetings from anywhere outside Manhattan. Although they may have had their differences with the way the planning system functioned, the event raised their spirits and helped them feel that their efforts had been worthwhile. One volunteer acknowledged, “Though I put in a lot of time in planning Limmud and I did not think it would be worth it, once I saw my efforts pay off at the conference it felt amazing, and it was definitely worth the work I put in.”

In 2006, 70% of volunteer planners said they were very or extremely likely to participate in planning for 2007. This year, despite the fact that most of their comments about their volunteer experiences were positive, the percentage of volunteers intending to return in 2008 was 54%. This decline may be attributed to the issues already described: difficult interpersonal relations, the organization, the heavy and often seemingly unequal time requirements, or “burnout” as many of the same people head into a fourth year. One volunteer wrote, “I think that there is a problem in the system somewhere—overworking the “core” volunteers while so many of the others fall away during the year, leaving more work for the committed.” Limmud NY may pick up fresh volunteer enthusiasm and new skills

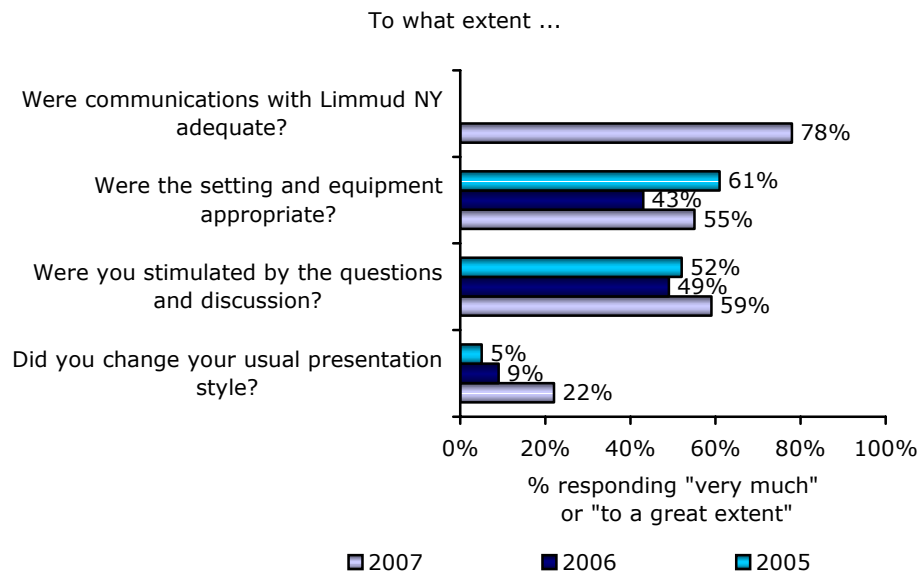
from among the 28 first timers who said they are very or extremely likely to volunteer next year, but the 2008 steering committee will have to find a way to keep volunteers energized and enthusiastic.

Presenters and Performers

The programming team invited new presenters and performers in 2007, but the composition in terms of age and gender was very similar to 2006. As in 2005 and 2006, the gender ratio among presenters was much closer to even than it was among the rest of the population, and the age distribution was older.

Presenters and performers shared both positive and negative responses to their experience at Limmud NY in roughly equal numbers. In response to specific questions, presenters and performers indicated that the setting and equipment had improved from last year. Over half (55%) said the setting and equipment were very or to a great extent appropriate in 2007. Most of them also reported having satisfactory communication channels with Limmud NY, and the percentage who felt stimulated by the questions and discussions in their sessions increased by 10% from 2006. (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Experience of Presenters and Performers



Most of the negative comments from presenters and performers concerned scheduling and logistics issues, primarily space constraints. Scheduling frustrations included running a session at the same time as “big name” presenter or presenting on Monday when people had already left the event to return home. Several presenters complained about rooms that were noisy, dark, the wrong size, or just inappropriate for their session. Though Limmud NY planners were well aware of the challenges of the learning environment at the Friar Tuck, the responses of presenters indicate the difficulty of working with their assigned space. One presenter wrote,

The rooms in which I presented were uncomfortably cold, and...did not have an appropriate atmosphere. Also, the sound system was inadequate. Fortunately, we were able to improvise...The attendees were fantastic. For many of them they had never experienced anything like what I was presenting, and they were very moved and excited about it. It felt good to be able to offer a new experience to people who would otherwise not have access to it.

Despite challenges within her assigned session space, this presenter succeeded in bringing her ideas to Limmud participants.

Presenters also commended volunteers for a job well done and recognized that volunteers deserved credit for the organization and execution of the four day event. One presenter wrote, "I was very much impressed by the perfect organization of this conference." A performer complimented both the professional and voluntary coordinators, saying "I was very impressed with the way the staff and volunteers dealt with us prior to and during the conference." The majority of presenters and performers responded positively to the Limmud NY experience in spite of difficulties with logistics and scheduling. They believe that Limmud NY gives them a unique opportunity to communicate with an audience of learners they might not otherwise reach. Limmud NY should continue to strive to find a physical location that will enable presenters and performers to do their work comfortably and effectively so that a high quality learning experience will be available to all.

THE CHALLENGE OF COMMITMENT

Robert is in his forties and recently moved with his wife from Manhattan to a suburb. He heard about Limmud NY in 2005 and “decided to check it out” with his wife because her friends were volunteer planners. They attended both subsequent years. Robert grew up in Brooklyn and attended yeshiva day school. His school experience turned him off to Judaism beyond attending synagogue on High Holidays. Limmud NY engaged Robert in meaningful Jewish learning for the first time since his childhood. “The first year was dramatic for me personally.” In contrast to his experience in day school, “Limmud presented Jewish education from people who were passionate about learning.” As a result of Limmud NY, Robert is “motivated to learn more about religion and philosophy in general. Learning about other religions makes Judaism more relevant to me.” Though Robert expressed his interest in deeper learning, he has not committed to Jewish learning or community involvement since attending Limmud NY. He said he has no interest in volunteering for Limmud NY or participating in any other aspects of Jewish life beyond Limmud NY.

The survey and interview data offer an opportunity to understand how participants interpret the Limmud NY experience and incorporate it into their lives. Planners of Limmud NY see the conference primarily as a festival of learning but promote broader goals as well: Participants should have an enjoyable experience but should also come away with a new or renewed commitment to Jewish life and learning—to exploring new ideas, perhaps taking on new Jewish practice or pursuing a spiritual quest, and incorporating the spirit of *limmud* (learning) and Limmud NY into the rest of the year. Ideally, their commitment will take any or all of three forms: a search for new, preferably on-going study; religious practice, or spiritual seeking; active participation in the Jewish community, whether in support of its institutions or in pursuit of *tikkun olam*; and active participation in Limmud NY as a Limmudnyk, presenter, or volunteer. This section provides a glimpse of the event’s potential to affect the attitudes and behaviors of participants by tracing new explorations and commitments to Judaism and Limmud NY.

New Jewish Involvement

As in 2005 and 2006, the 2007 survey asked participants about new activities they have pursued as a result of Limmud NY. Their answers fall into three categories: prayer or spirituality, learning, and volunteerism.

Ritual, Prayer and Spirituality

Twenty-one percent of survey respondents (99 individuals) said that they currently are or plan to engage in new learning activity as a result of their participation in Limmud NY 2007, a reduction from 28% last year.

Thirty individuals said they were exploring Jewish education through participation in synagogues or independent *minyanim*. Several participants said they attended prayer services similar to those offered at Limmud NY. Both Kehillat Roememu and Kol Zimrah, independent, unaffiliated communities on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, were mentioned several times as new places of exploration. Leaders of both communities offered Friday night prayer services at Limmud NY. Following the conference, a participant recalled attending the Kol Zimrah service and reflected on her longing for such a spirited prayer in her community on suburban Long Island. Other respondents also reported attending worship services since Limmud NY, but did not specify where or what type. One respondent said that she is now more comfortable leading services since attending Limmud NY. However, not all increased participation was the result of positive experiences at Limmud NY. One participant explained that she “hated Saturday morning services” at Limmud NY and “went to some the following week, which is not my usual practice, because they had left me wanting something better.”

Limmud NY was also an opportunity to learn about new models of worship communities. Six participants reported attending “independent minyanim” for the first time because of Limmud NY. One participant said she was planning to start her own independent worship community as a result of attending the session “Creating Your Own Grassroots Jewish Community” at Limmud.

Seeking Opportunities to Learn

Limmud NY participants also sought out new learning opportunities as a result of their experience at the conference. Several respondents mentioned formal learning programs, while others explored different aspects of Jewish tradition independently. More than half of the respondents who said they are engaged in new educational efforts as a result of Limmud NY named educational institutions in New York and Israel as places selected for further exploration. Several of these institutions, including Yeshivat Hadar, Pardes Institute, Me’ah, Skirball Beit Midrash, JCC in Manhattan, and Hillel’s Jewish Learning Fellowship, were represented at Limmud NY, either by presenters or through the program tables on Sunday afternoon. One participant, referring to the impact from Limmud NY 2006 said “I learned about the Me’ah program offered by Hebrew College in satellite locations.” She is now enrolled. Another is looking into Me’ah this year.

While some conference attendees sought out established educational institutions, others studied independently. One participant said he set up several traditional, chevruta-style learning sessions while another purchased books written by Limmud NY presenters. Other respondents reported less formal ways of learning, such as web searches on different topics presented at the conference. In an interview, a three-time Limmud NY attendee explained that though he was not engaged in Jewish learning, Limmud “motivated me to learn more about religion and philosophy in general.”

The rate of participants seeking new learning opportunities may seem small, but survey data reveal that Limmud NY participants are already more engaged in formal Jewish study.

However, some fill their need for Jewish learning with the annual conference itself rather than through weekly or monthly learning sessions.

Only seven participants who said they are planning new Jewish activities are not now currently involved. One respondent said that Limmud NY “helped open the door to being more active.” Another explained that she was not currently involved in Jewish learning, but “as soon as my kids are in school in the fall, I’m planning on learning Torah troupe, and I’m interested in taking a *parshat hashavua* (weekly Torah portion) class.” Two said they had not yet looked into new learning but plan to do so. Although many of the participants may not have invested in formal learning in the few months since the conference, Limmud NY clearly planted the seeds of interest for future Jewish learning. One individual said “I’ve met privately with a Rabbi to try and make sense of what I experienced at Limmud,” while another explained, “through someone I met while planning Limmud, I got involved in planning a Purim program, something I’d never done before.” One simply described his experience as “personal growth” while yet another is contemplating a career in Jewish education.

Volunteerism

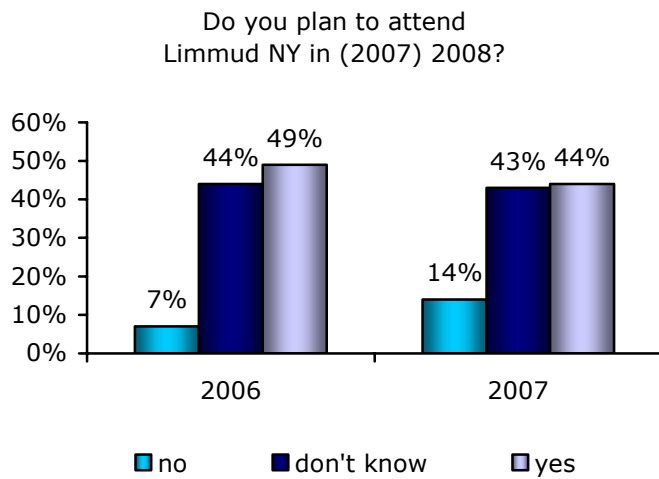
Over fifty participants described new volunteer activity that they hoped to become involved in over the coming year. Some participants were already involved in volunteer pursuits. Ten respondents said they were interested in Hazon or participating in the organization’s Jewish Environmental Bike Ride. Eight said they have looked into or volunteered with Limmud NY or potential Limmuds in other locations. Four participants said they want to volunteer for American Jewish World Service and another for “Students Take Action in Darfur.” One participant said that he “was involved with a Legislative Day in Albany as a result of hearing Ruth Messenger speak.”

Seven respondents said they plan to volunteer with their local synagogue or minyan. Some said their volunteer efforts will center on efforts to bring new worship services to their congregation, and one plans to volunteer at a homeless shelter with their synagogue. Respondents described new involvement in JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance), New Israel Fund, Seeds of Peace, and UJA-Federation of New York. Additionally, some participants said they have looked into “options” and “new organizations” but haven’t yet volunteered. Still, Limmud NY instilled the desire for volunteer activity. Several respondents mentioned the program tables set up in the dining room on Sunday of the conference. One participant said he wanted to become involved in “everything,” or all the organizations represented at Sunday’s tabling. Another participant said, “The tables at lunch with information on organizations—that was excellent!” Though Limmud NY does not have formal partnership organizations or co-sponsors, it provides an entry point to other learning and volunteer opportunities in Jewish life.

Coming Back to Limmud NY

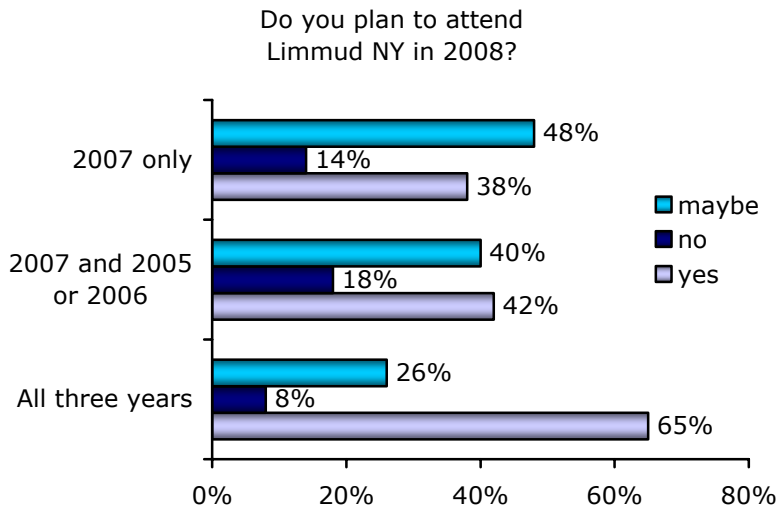
The extent to which participants increase their Jewish involvement as a result of their participation in Limmud NY is an important outcome measure for the program. The most obvious measures of its success however are whether people plan to come back in the future, and, if so, whether they plan to become more deeply involved as planners. In a sense, Limmud NY’s volunteer structure is an incubator for new and future leaders, professional and lay, for New York’s Jewish community. We have already seen that the intent to return as a planner in 2007 has decreased by 16 percentage points since last year (see page 34). For participants as a whole the intent to return, as a percentage, is also down, although the actual number of people who say they intend to return in 2008 remains stable at about 206 (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Plans to Attend Limmud NY in the Future—All Attendees



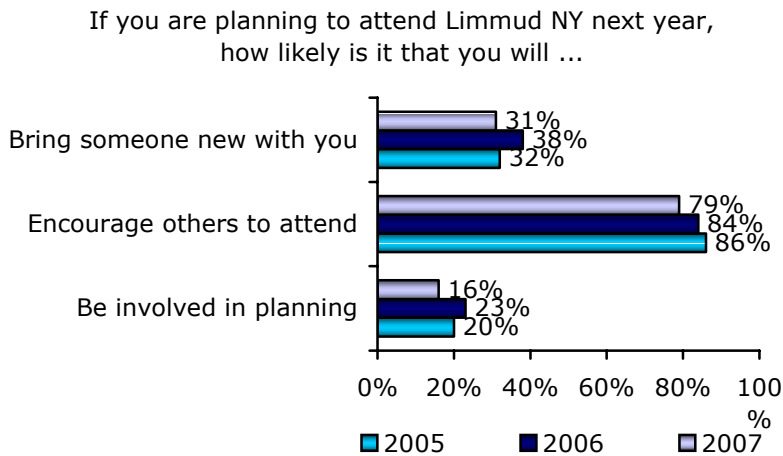
Limmudnyks, those who have already attended more than one Limmud NY weekend, are more likely than first timers to come back (Figure 21). Two-thirds of those who have attended all three years—the “hard-core” Limmudnyks—reported that they will come back in 2008. The percentage is the same for the Limmudnyks who were volunteer planners. The best predictor of a participants’ decision to return to Limmud NY is whether they have attend the event more than once, making them part of the energized base of Limmudnyks.

Figure 21: Plans to Attend Limmud NY 2008—Limmudnyks and First Timers



In addition to questions about the intent to return, the survey asked whether participants would encourage others to attend or bring someone new with them to Limmud NY next year. Differences between 2006 and 2007 are not significant, but the downward trend that appears in much of the data also appears here (Figure 22). The percentage of respondents who plan to bring someone new with them decreased as did the percentage who say they will encourage others to attend (however, this number is still high at 79%). Additionally, the percentage who say they will come back and volunteer next year declined from 23% to 16%.

Figure 22: Plans for Limmud NY in the Future



Limmud NY has grown and flourished since its inception, but the data suggest that continued growth is not assured. The program continually confronts the challenge of creating commitment among Limmud NY participants. Instilling a dedication to the pursuit of Jewish paths and Jewish causes is work that occurs over time and involves setbacks as well as successes. Despite the difficulties of uncomfortable facilities and the letdown of the

third year, perhaps inevitable with a new program whose first two years created such a sense of excitement, many participants came away with a commitment to exploring new forms of rituals or spirituality and learning. Others became volunteers in the Jewish community, and many have said they will return to Limmud NY in 2008. But if these are measures of success, then Limmud NY planners must also consider the downward direction of many of these trends since 2005 and 2006. This fact underscores the continuing need to create a sense of commitment among future Limmud NY participants.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report offers a profile of the participants in 2005, 2006, and 2007. It compares and contrasts the three cohorts to each other and analyzes characteristics of people returning to Limmud NY for a second or third time with those who came in 2007 for the first time. The research also provides evidence of a shift in the responses of the different cohorts and subgroups—and the volunteer planners—to Limmud NY and raises questions about the future of Limmud NY and its participants. The report's findings suggest five questions for future discussion:

- To what extent is it possible to reach out to less active Jews while still providing sufficiently high level involvement opportunities necessary to maintaining an energized base?
- How can organizers and planners continue to generate the excitement and buzz about Limmud NY now that it is no longer new?
- How can the program enhance the quality of offerings while maintaining accessibility and broad participation?
- How can Limmud NY offer the same variety of programs in a comfortable environment while maintaining affordability?
- What can Limmud NY planners do to increase the commitment of participants to their own year-round Jewish growth and their involvement in Limmud NY?

Conclusions

Although these are the questions that Limmud NY's planners and organizers will have to address, they should also keep in mind that Limmud NY is a successful event, enjoyed and appreciated by most participants, and consistently growing. We have learned in the three years of Limmud NY evaluation that the event should not expect, at least not at this stage, to bring in marginal, uninvolved Jews and transform them into them passionate learners and seekers for a Jewish path. But Limmud NY does offer new forms of learning, creative expression, worship services, and Jewish community to people who already have a Jewish identity and enjoy Jewish pursuits. It stimulates at least some of the involved to seek out more and different ways to engage and experiment both at Limmud NY and beyond.

In addition, Limmud NY has built more than an event of celebration and learning, it has built a community of Limmudnyks for whom Limmud NY has become an established part of their lives, whether through multiple years of attendance or year-round volunteer planning. As Limmud NY expands beyond its base constituency from the Upper West Side, it pulls in more participants from the outer boroughs and Westchester. But Limmud NY will have to confront the issues generated by its own growth. It will have to find new ways to build community as the event gets even larger. Some participants complained about the

“mega events.” A gathering of 800 people in one enormous room, with fundraising appeals surrounded by loud music, is not conducive to individuals meeting one another. Different groups of participants may have dissimilar needs in this respect. Limmudnyks may want to celebrate once more being surrounded by their friends from previous years and spend time with people they already know and like. Participants who are volunteers may want to bask in much deserved appreciation for their efforts and share their satisfaction with their teammates.

First timers, on the other hand, need opportunities to meet each other and the Limmudnyks. They need to feel a sense of community during Shabbat dinner and become comfortable in the Limmud NY setting. All of these needs are valid and compelling. The data suggest that balancing the needs of these two groups has already posed challenges. Organizers and planners will have to think creatively about the volunteer planning system. How can Limmudnyk volunteers bring first timers into the planning process? How can they empower them to work on an equal level with those who have already accomplished so much? How can organizers assure that new ideas are welcome without appearing to be overly willing to dismiss the ideas of the dedicated, founding Limmudnyks?

Perhaps the more innovative the program, the more difficult it is to keep it growing and open to change. The very success of Limmud NY poses a challenge. Limmud NY has created rising expectations for consistently high quality and varied programming. At the same time, planners have committed themselves to maintaining a democratic, non-hierarchical, and participatory program—a program open to new presenters without impressive credentials or long resumes of Jewish professional involvement. How can planners juggle the demand for quality and popular sessions without repeating the same lists of invited presenters and putting undo strain on certain “stars” to present over and over?

Some participants will always complain about facilities, amenities, and logistics. Perhaps this year’s cohort voiced more vocal criticism of these features because many of them have had experienced Limmud NY in more hospitable settings. Funding changes and the need for more amenable space require looking for a new facility or facilities while being mindful of affordability.³

Finally, the letdown of 2007—the decline in the percentage of people who found the conference fun or personally meaningful and the decline in the percentage seeking new Jewish opportunities as a result of Limmud—must be addressed in future planning. In the following section, we discuss a number recommendations inspired by the survey responses and interviews.

³ A discussion of the data on locations and affordability appears in Appendix B.

Recommendations

Building Community

Building a community at Limmud NY is still problematic. Creating a warm and comfortable environment conducive to individuals meeting one another, while simultaneously orchestrating a Shabbat dinner for over 800 people, is an immense and complicated undertaking. Planners have sought larger more attractive venues, but such places are expensive. One possible way to address the problem is to locate in a town with several smaller hotels. Shuttle buses could run people to and from whatever sessions and events they want to attend in other facilities. At the same time, Shabbat dinners could be arranged in the individual hotels, giving them a smaller, more intimate feel. It might be possible to assign different themes to different hotels and let registrants choose on a first-come, first-served basis. This model would depend, to some extent, on weather conditions, but would have the added advantage in good weather of getting people outside—an opportunity several participants indicated they would like.

Whether or not this option proves feasible, the Friday night dinner concept needs to be reexamined. Kicking off Limmud NY before Shabbat was problematic. Because the welcoming event was poorly attended, the first shared experience for all Limmudnyks was Shabbat dinner. Limmud NY needs to structure the Friday afternoon schedule to allow participants enough time to settle into the hotel, prepare for Shabbat, and meet and greet other participants before Shabbat worship services. Although this year no survey respondents complained about the Shabbat dinner, the room was noisy and the event felt chaotic. Perhaps the Shabbat dinner could be held in smaller, quieter rooms with some thematic design for each. Modeling the various options for worship services, Limmud NY could offer different styles for Shabbat dinner, smaller tables, perhaps even tables specifically set aside for individuals who want to meet new people.

Whatever facility or facilities Limmud NY selects for 2008, it should have comfortable, open spaces for sitting and schmoozing—for continuing conversations started in the sessions, for meeting new people and renewing ties to old friends. Participants want to know that they can find a cozy corner to “hang with friends” or just stop and think.

Limmud NY could also build community within the context of learning sessions. For example, using the registration system, Limmud NY could assign a chevruta partner to each participant who desired that option for study. Rather than denominational affiliation or observance level, qualifications for matching people could include a willingness to mentor a new learner, an expressed need for a mentor, or a preference for a partner with similar learning levels or interests. Matches could be made on the basis of desire to study particular tracks or the opportunity to converse in Hebrew.

Limmud NY could also offer “seminar series” on a particular theme over a few hours during the first or second day. These sessions could be fairly small with time for presenters and participants to get to know each other. Sessions with Limmud NY “star” presenters could have follow-up discussion sessions facilitated by volunteers. These could also be

small, to give participants the opportunity to pursue ideas presented in the main session as well as to get to know each other better.

Planners should also consider inviting performers with universal appeal so that mega events can be enjoyed by all participants. As evening activities are often the only time when everyone gathers in the same place, it is important to create balance by looking for performers that have appeal to all age groups. Perhaps planners should reconsider the conference's "soft" closing and move the mega event to the end the weekend. A conference-wide closing program with a key speaker or performer on Monday could also help deter people from leaving early on Sunday evening or choosing to sleep through sessions on Monday morning. This arrangement might also give people a more structured opportunity to say goodbye and arrange to keep in contact with new friends.

Learning Levels

Limmud NY continues to face the challenge of meeting the needs of relatively new learners while offering high level learning for participants with more extensive Jewish educational backgrounds. This question has been raised about Limmud NY since its inception. Limmud could develop a system for noting the level of certain sessions: for example "requires 'only interest' in the subject, 'experience in *chevruta* style text study required,' 'knowledge of Hebrew,' 'some knowledge of Hebrew.'" As one participant recalled in her response to the survey, some of these steps have been taken already, with significant success:

At Limmud 2006 there were some sessions designated as advanced text study. Only one session I attended with that designation had a lower turn out, and that was a Kabbalah session on the morning of departure. I wish that track still existed, and would like to see it brought back.

Presenters could suggest prerequisite sessions to assure a certain level of knowledge on specific topics. Additionally, presenters could specify required readings, texts and commentaries, in order to attend their sessions. Such advanced readings could be posted on the Limmud NY web site with the opportunity for participants to download them in advance. For sessions scheduled later in the program, hard copies could be available at Limmud NY. Again, some sessions could be offered as part of a series to enable the presenter to pursue the topic in greater depth. As one respondent suggested:

I recommend an opportunity for three to four sessions of an actual curriculum, a period of Jewish history or periods, an exploration of the various genre of Jewish texts...so that someone could come away with something focused and substantial.

Another offered a myriad of suggestions:

I think that it would benefit many Limmudnyks if there were more basic text classes that dealt with 'hard core' material like studying a Biblical character or act and how that influenced law/societal values, Talmud—its view on some relevant issue, Midrash, philosophy, etc. A few people who have little

background told me that would have liked that. Indeed even for me who has a good Judaica background, more moderate level text classes (Talmud, Bible, Philosophy, etc) would be nice...I would suggest offering a schedule of classes for beginners that would cover these basic aspects (Talmud, Torah, History, Literature, Philosophy, etc.) and let them deviate if they want. But beginners do need a guide since they don't know what they don't know.

Some sessions could be offered in Hebrew, others could suggest that participants bring with them their *Tanakh* (Jewish Bible) and prepare specific chapters or verses before the session. This could both add to the depth of sessions and also help participants find the sessions most appropriate for their level of learning.

On the subject of Hebrew, Limmud NY could combine its zeal for learning with Hebrew advocacy. The programming team could invite educators to conduct sample *ulpan* (conversational Hebrew instruction) sessions. Limmud NY could offer discussions of current events in a "Hebrew Café" to give participants with some Hebrew knowledge the opportunity to practice, or "Hebrew While Standing on One Foot" programs to introduce basic prayer book literacy.

Creating the Balance

Limmud NY has grown and changed in the past three years. Planners are aware that Limmud NY cannot be Limmud UK; it has to develop a strategy that is responsive to the New York community it serves. Perhaps this is the year to rethink the goals of Limmud NY and invite a larger constituency into the discussion. The questions outlined above all suggest the importance of finding the right balance for potentially conflicting objectives:

- bringing in new people while building the core and energizing the base;
- continuing the programs and activities that have generated such excitement and enjoyment while being open to change and avoiding redundancy;
- inviting ever higher quality presenters and deeper study opportunities while preserving accessibility to all participants and providing opportunities to lead for all who desire that option;
- finding comfortable, pleasant space conducive to building community while maintaining affordability and a non-hierarchical environment;
- providing participants with the impetus to pursue new learning opportunities beyond Limmud NY while asking them to commit to continued involvement in the planning, implementation, and celebration of Limmud.

The work of the future lies in prioritizing program goals and establishing an optimal balance around the competing needs of the constituents. Fortunately, Limmud NY has a dedicated core of leaders capable of taking the program forward and facing these challenges with excitement and energy. Those efforts will no doubt ensure that the celebration of Jewish life and learning that has defined Limmud NY in past years will continue to grow and develop in Limmud NY 2008.

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Appendix A: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

This year's research is based on 12 interviews with people who attended Limmud NY each of the three years it has been offered. The research also relies on a Web-based survey of participants, conducted between February 20 and March 30, 2007. Over 70% of participants responded to the survey. Most took the opportunity of open-ended questions to express their feelings, as well as their opinions, about Limmud NY.

The Survey

Welcome to your Limmud NY 2007 survey!

Your input is important to us and we thank you for your participation..

The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies is conducting this survey for Limmud NY. It is completely confidential and only the research team will see your answers.

The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Nicole Samuel via e-mail or telephone (Limmud07Survey@cmjs.org; 781-736-3951).

Please return the survey no later than Tuesday, March 20. Completed surveys should be mailed to:

Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University
415 South Street
MS 014
Waltham, MA 02454
Attn: Limmud NY Survey

Thank you,

Nicole Samuel, M.A. and Annette Koren, Ph.D.
Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University

Directions:

This survey was designed to be taken over the internet. Once you complete the paper survey, your initial link is no longer active. To complete the survey, mark your answer to each question by checking the box that best represents your response. Please do not complete sections that do not pertain you (there are specific sections for presenters, volunteers, and Jewish educators).

HOPES AND ATTRACTIONS

This section asks about what attracted you to Limmud NY 2007 and what you hoped to get out of it.

Did you attend

	Yes	No
...Limmud NY 2005?		
...Limmud NY 2006?		
...a Taste of Limmud in June 2006?		
...Taste Too — A Taste of Limmud in October 2006?		
...any other Limmud NY events in 2005 or 2006?		

Please specify: _____

Did you come to Limmud NY 2007... (Check all that apply.)

- ...on your own?
- ...with friend(s)?
- ...with your spouse/partner?
- ...with your child(ren)?
- ...with other family members?

**How important were each of the following in your decision to attend Limmud NY ?
The opportunity for...**

	Not at all important	Only a little important	Some what important	Very important	Extremely important
a. educational experiences					
b. artistic expression					
c. spiritual exploration (e.g. prayer, meditation, mysticism)					
d. being part of a community					
e. meeting new people					
f. exposure to different kinds of Judaism					
g. volunteerism					
h. developing a new personal connection to Judaism					
i. finding a Jewish partner					
j. getting away for a long weekend					

ABOUT YOU

Did you lead or moderate any sessions and/or perform at Limmud NY in?

	Yes	No
...2005?		
...2006?		
...2007?		

Were you involved in planning for Limmud NY in ...?

	Yes	No
...2005?		
...2006?		
...2007?		

Are you a paid employee of any Jewish organization?

- Yes
- No

JEWISH PROFESSIONAL WORK

Please complete these questions only if you are a paid employee of a Jewish organization.

Are you employed as a Jewish educator?

- Yes
- No

Was your attendance at Limmud NY this year ... (Check all that apply.)

- ...a requirement of your employer?
- ...because you presented?
- ...a form of professional development?
- ...an opportunity to network professionally?
- ...a chance to interact with colleagues in an informal setting?
- Other? _____

GENERAL REACTIONS

Overall, to what extent did you find Limmud NY 2007 ...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely
a. ...fun?					
b. ...personally meaningful?					
c. ...clique-ish?					
d. ...intellectually challenging?					
e. ...intimidating?					

How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about you and Limmud NY?

	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Strongly agree
a. The full registration fee (\$495/double occupancy, 3 nights) is too expensive for me.					
b. It was a high quality learning experience for me.					
c. I felt like an outsider.					
d. I met people I will keep in touch with.					
e. The program welcomed diverse beliefs and practices.					
f. Presenters were the same people I see all the time.					
g. Participants were the same people I see all the time.					

Overall, to what extent did Limmud NY meet your needs and interests in the following areas?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	To a great extent	Not applicable
a. Jewish learning?						
b. text study?						
c. volunteerism?						
d. spirituality?						
e. social action?						
f. creative expression?						
g. worship services?						
h. meeting new people?						
i. options for college students?						
j. family programming?						
k. children's programming?						

Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience at Limmud NY?

- Very Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

Please use the space below to share feedback you may have on family and children's programming this year and suggestions for next year.

PRESENTERS AND PERFORMERS

Please complete these questions only if you presented or performed at Limmud NY 2007.

In how many sessions did you present or perform?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

To what extent...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	To a great extent
a. ...did you present material or ideas you had not presented before?					
b. ...did you change your usual presentation style?					
c. ...were you stimulated by the questions and discussion?					
d. ...were the setting and equipment appropriate?					
e. ...were communications with Limmud NY adequate?					
f. ...did you meet other people who may be helpful to you professionally?					

Use this space for additional comments about your experience as a presenter or performer at Limmud NY.

LIMMUD NY VOLUNTEERS

Please complete these questions only if you served as a Limmud NY 2007 Planning Volunteer.

Which planning team(s) were you on? (Check all that apply.)

- Programming
- Marketing & Outreach
- Web/Technology
- Participant Care
- Children & Youth Programming
- Catering and Facilities
- Volunteer Development
- College & High School
- Steering Committee
- Limmud NY Board
- Other, please specify _____

Prior to the event itself, how much time did you spend planning Limmud NY during the MOST demanding period?

- less than an hour per month
- 1-5 hours per month
- 6-10 hours per month
- 11-15 hours per month
- more than 15 hours per month

During Limmud NY, how many hours did you spend working as a volunteer?

- none
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- more than 15 hours

In reference to your experience planning Limmud NY, to what extent did you feel that...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	To a great extent
a. ... you were informed about the overall vision for Limmud NY?					
b. ... you were part of the decision making process?					
c. ... others appreciated your efforts?					
d. ... Limmud NY made good use of your time?					
e. ... your understanding of the Jewish community increased as a result of your volunteer effort?					
f. ... you learned new leadership skills?					
g. ... the experience expanded your social circle?					
i. ... you had to miss Limmud NY sessions or activities because of your volunteer responsibilities?					

How likely are you to ...

	Not at all likely	A little likely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Extremely likely
a. ... encourage others to volunteer for next year?					
b. ... stay involved with people you met through the planning experience?					
c. ... volunteer your time for other Jewish community activities?					

Overall, how satisfied were you with your Limmud NY volunteer experience?

- Very Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied

Please explain:

Please share any additional comments about your experience as a volunteer with Limmud NY:

YOUR LIMMUD NY EXPERIENCE

During Limmud NY, to what extent did you...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	To a great extent
a. ...have enough time to socialize?					
b. ...get to know people whose Jewish practices and beliefs differ from your own?					
c. ...feel part of an overall Limmud NY community?					
d. ...experience a sense of community at the Shabbat dinner?					

During Limmud NY, did you...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	To a great extent
a. ...find sessions geared to your learning style?					
b. ...find texts or ideas explored in new ways?					
c. ...have conversations stimulated by the sessions you attended?					
d. ...learn something new?					
e. ...find that sessions included diverse strands of Jewish thought?					

For you personally, would you say the level of learning at Limmud NY was...

- Much too easy
- Too easy
- Just about right
- Too advanced
- Much too advanced

How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about Limmud NY?

	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Strongly agree
a. There were ample opportunities for spiritual exploration.					
b. Limmud NY created a holy time/space for Shabbat.					
c. Prayer services were meaningful					
d. Limmud NY was more intellectual than spiritual.					
e. Limmud NY created a more meaningful Jewish experience than most other organized programs.					

For you personally, would you say the level of religious observance at Limmud NY was...

- Much too liberal
- Too liberal
- Just about right
- Too observant
- Much too observant

Think about the number of sessions offered in each time slot. Do you think there were...

- ...too few
- ...just the right number
- ...too many

What kind of session topics or activities would you like to see at Limmud NY next year?

LIFE AFTER LIMMUD NY 2007

As a result of Limmud NY 2007, have you looked into or tried any Jewish learning or activity that is new to you?

- No
- Yes. Please describe _____

If yes, in what type of setting? (Check all that apply)

- JCC/YMHA/YWHA
- synagogue
- minyan/havurah
- school or university
- Hillel or other campus organization
- Jewish service organization
- Jewish political organization
- Other. Please specify _____

As a result of Limmud NY 2007, have you *looked into or volunteered* for any organization you were not involved with in the past?

- No
- Yes. Please describe _____

To what extent have you spent time with friends you made at Limmud NY?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Very much
- To a great extent

Use the space below to describe any other impact--positive or negative--that Limmud NY may have had on you.

PLANS FOR LIMMUD NY 2008

Do you plan to attend Limmud NY in 2008?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, don't know

Will you encourage others to attend Limmud NY in 2008?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, don't know

If you are planning to attend Limmud NY next year, HOW LIKELY is it that you will ...

	<i>Not at all likely</i>	<i>A little likely</i>	<i>Somewhat likely</i>	<i>Very likely</i>	<i>Extremely likely</i>
a. ... be involved in planning Limmud NY?					
b. ... volunteer during Limmud NY?					
c. ... present and/or perform?					
d. ... bring someone who did not attend this year?					

How likely would you be to attend Limmud NY 2008 if it took place over ...

	<i>Not at all likely</i>	<i>A little likely</i>	<i>Somewhat likely</i>	<i>Very likely</i>	<i>Extremely likely</i>
a. ... Memorial Day weekend?					
b. ... Christmas weekend?					
c. ... New Year's weekend?					
d. ... Presidents' Day weekend?					

If you are not planning to attend next year, why not?

Limmud NY is heavily subsidized. Generous grants from the Picower Foundation, UJA Federation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and other donors enable the program to take place. To inform Limmud NY's planning for 2008 and beyond, would you be willing to answer a few short questions about pricing?

If you answer "yes," please answer the following questions. If you answer "no," please continue with the standard survey on page 14.

- Yes
- No

The current price of 3 NIGHTS/DOUBLE OCCUPANCY is \$495. Would you be willing to pay the following registration fees for 3 NIGHTS/DOUBLE OCCUPANCY?

	Yes	No
\$550		
\$650		
\$750		
\$850		

Are you aware that Limmud NY offers need-based scholarships to make the Conference affordable to those for whom cost is an issue?

- Yes
- No

Limmud NY subsidizes registration fees for children 2-12. The current price of 3 NIGHTS/DOUBLE OCCUPANCY for children 2-12 sharing a room with their parents is \$110. Would you be willing to pay the following registration fees for 3 NIGHTS/DOUBLE OCCUPANCY for your child(ren)?

	Yes	No
\$150		
\$200		
\$250		
\$300		

Not applicable. I do not have children or my children do not attend Limmud NY.

YOUR JEWISH LIFE

Are you currently a member of a...

	Yes	No
a. ...Jewish synagogue or congregation?		
b. ...Minyan or havurah?		
c. ...Jewish fraternity or sorority?		
d. ...Jewish Youth Group (USY, NFTY, NCSY, BBYO, etc.)?		
e. ...Jewish or Israel political group (AIPAC, ADL)?		
f. ...Jewish service organization (AJWS, Hazon, Hadassah, etc.)?		
g. ...Jewish Community Center, YMHA, or YWHA?		

How active are you currently in a...

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Extremely	Not applicable
a. ...Jewish synagogue or congregation?						
b. ...Minyan or havurah?						
c. ...Hillel or Jewish association at your college or university?						
d. ...Jewish fraternity or sorority?						
e. ...Jewish Youth Group (USY, NFTY, NCSY, BBYO, etc.)?						
f. ...Jewish or Israel political group (AIPAC, ADL)?						
g. ...Jewish service organization (AJWS, Hazon, Hadassah, etc.)?						
h. ...Jewish community center, YMHA, or YWHA?						
i. ...Jewish Federation or agency?						
j. ...Other? Please specify: _____						

In what synagogue, minyan, or spiritual community, if any, do you usually participate?

Name _____

City, State _____

Over the past year, how often have you...

	Never	Every few months	Once a month	Several times a month	Weekly or more often
a. ...shared Shabbat or holiday meals with friends?					
b. ...attended Jewish cultural events?					
c. ...participated in Jewish education programs?					
d. ...attended any type of Jewish worship service?					
e. ...volunteered for any Jewish organization or cause other than Limmud NY?					

Referring to religious denomination, do you consider yourself...?

- Conservative
- Orthodox
- Reform
- Reconstructionist
- Secular Jewish
- No denomination — Just Jewish
- Not Jewish
- Other, please specify: _____

Do you consider your family background to be predominantly...

- Ashkenazic
- Sephardic
- Other _____

Did you receive Jewish education growing up? (grades 1-12)

- No
- Yes

If yes, how many years (grade 1 through grade 12) did you attend the following types of Jewish education?

- Sunday school or other one day a week after-school religious school _____
- Part-time religious school that met more than once a week _____
- Yeshiva or day school _____
- Private tutoring _____
- Other, Please specify: _____

Did you ever...

	Yes	No
a. ...attend a college-level Jewish Studies course?		
b. ...attend or work at a summer camp with Jewish content?		
c. ...belong to a Jewish or Zionist youth group (USY, NCSY, NFTY, BBYO, etc.)?		
d. ...participate in a Hillel or any other Jewish organization on campus?		
e. ...participate in an educational trip or program in Israel?		

How many times have you been to Israel?

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- Three or more times

MORE ABOUT YOU

The following information is needed solely for the purpose of analysis. Diversity is an important goal for Limmud NY and we want to assess the extent to which it is being met. All responses will be held in strict confidentiality, and you may skip any question you choose not to answer.

In what year were you born?

19 ____

Are you currently...?

- Married
- Living together, have a partner
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never married (single)

Are you?

- Female
- Male

What is your sexual identity?

- Bisexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Heterosexual
- Uncertain

Do you speak a language other than English at home?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is this language?

ANYTHING ELSE?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your Limmud NY experience and how it has affected you?

Interview Protocol

Interviewee:

Date:

Background

Tell me a bit about yourself.

- Probe: Background information: where live now, where grew up, professional or academic situation

How do you see yourself Jewishly?

- Probe: Jewish path *before* Limmud; Formative Jewish experiences, if any, turn-offs and turn-ons; Jewish education growing up; Jewish memories.

What other Limmud-like activities have you participated in over the years?

Reflection on Limmud Experiences

What drew you to Limmud NY?

- Probes: How did you hear about it? Why did that sound interesting? Why Limmud and not something else secular or Jewish? What did you expect to get out of it?

Tell me about your experiences at Limmud NY - the high points and the low; the exciting and the less exciting from the three events. (probe for learning, community, spirituality, fun ...)

[For people with children] One of the things Limmud NY has struggled with is children's programming. What changes have you seen over the three years? How have your children responded to the events?

What keeps you coming back to Limmud NY?

- Probe: Sense of community, volunteer opportunities, Shabbat programming, intellectual pursuits

If never a planning volunteer: Many of the Limmud participants have become active in the year-round planning for the event, what, if anything, has prevented you from becoming involved?

Have you ever presented or been involved in volunteering at Limmud NY? And how has that worked for you? (If not, have you had any interest? What, if anything, has stood in the way?)

Tell me about the impact of Limmud on you and your Jewish life. Do you feel you've changed or that Limmud NY has had any lasting impact? (*If yes,*) tell me about that. (*If no,*) how do you feel about that?

- Probe: Lasting social/professional connections, educational involvement/programs/programming, social action activities, cultural events, new ways of exploring your Jewishness, changes in Jewish practice/observance, or with whom you practice and observe etc.

Just a few other questions

What would you like to see Limmud look like in the future? (probes: demographic composition, length of the event, kinds of programs and activities, way of building community ...) What do you think would make Limmud NY more attractive to other people like you? What do you think Limmud NY can do to have a greater effect on year-round Jewish lives of participants?

- Probe: Other events throughout the year, more social and/or learning opportunities, greater diversity, more outreach to new people? More work building community among those who come back. etc.

For some people, Limmud NY is very costly both in time and money. What, if anything, have you had to sacrifice to be able to come to Limmud NY – other activities, programs, etc.

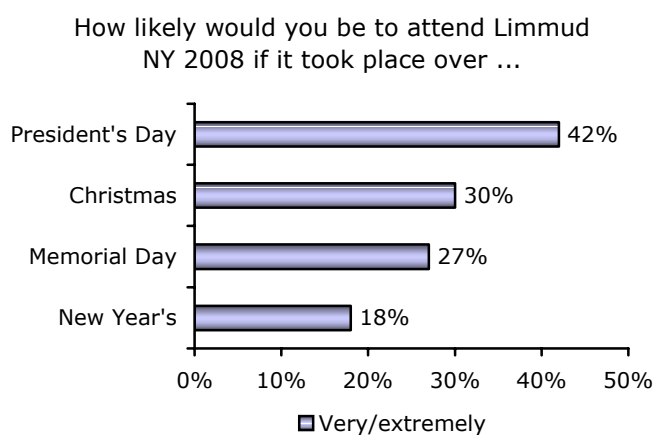
Is there anything I didn't ask but you feel I should know to understand you and your experience at Limmud, the effect it's had on you, or your hopes for the future of Limmud NY?

Thank you!

Appendix B: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Limmud NY has two new conference co-chairs and will have a new professional director this summer. In planning for 2008, volunteers have already grappled with the issue of finding an appropriate venue for a reasonable price. In order to determine participant flexibility regarding price and date, Limmud NY staff asked the research team to include additional questions in the 2007 post-conference survey. As seen in Figure A1, of the four options for conference timing: Presidents' Day, Christmas, Memorial Day and New Year's, only the first had a substantial percent of people who said they would be "very" or "extremely likely" to attend if the event were held over those weekends.

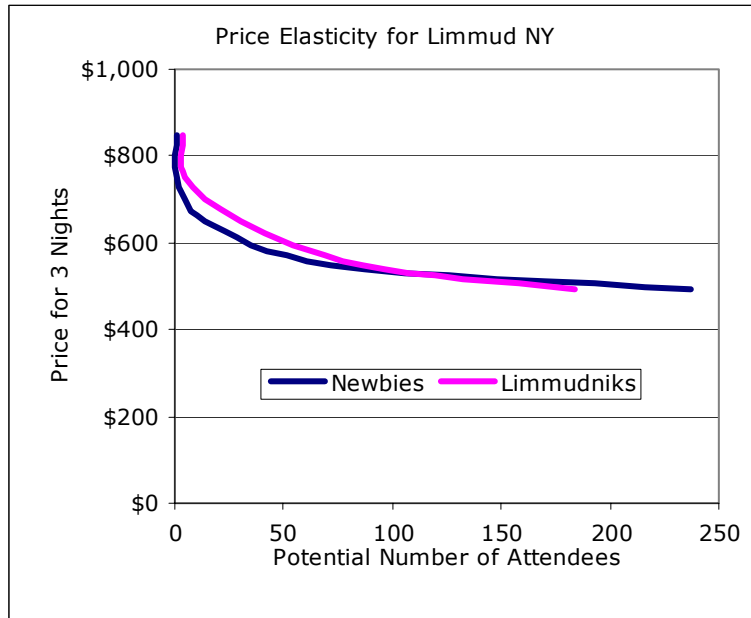
Figure A 1: Other Holiday Weekends for Limmud NY



The survey also gave participants the opportunity to answer some questions about potential price increases. Only 340 of the survey's 495 respondents agreed to answer those questions. Respondents were reminded that the base rate for an adult attending Limmud NY in 2007 was \$495 for three nights. They were then asked whether they would be willing to pay higher amounts: \$550, \$650, \$750, and \$850. These price intervals may have been too wide, but 50% said they would be willing to pay \$550, and 15% said they would be willing to pay \$650. Only 5% were willing to pay more than \$650. The research team also considered price sensitivity for children's registration fees. Parents were asked if they would be willing to pay more than the \$110 charge for a child aged 2-12 for three nights. Most respondents (70%) said they would pay \$150; 28% would pay \$200; and 15% said they would pay \$250 or \$300.

These results indicate some elasticity and provide direction for Limmud NY planners. However, it is important to note that what respondents say they are willing to pay for an event (particularly if they think it will affect the amount they will be charged in the future) may not be a perfect indicator of their real willingness to pay. As noted earlier (see page 21) more Limmudnyks (people who have attended Limmud NY two or three years) are willing to spend more for Limmud NY, likely because they recognize its worth. They would not return to Limmud NY if they did not enjoy and value the experience.

Figure A 2: Price Elasticity of Limmud NY 2008



These results suggest that Limmud NY has some options for planning Limmud NY for the future.

Appendix C: STUDENTS AND FINANCIAL AID

Of the 103 university students who attended Limmud NY 2007, 71 were “fellows.” An additional eight received financial aid although they were not fellows. Eight were conference staff. Of the fellows, 28 were not New Yorkers, and one of the financial aid recipients was not from New York. Four of the New Yorkers who were fellows entered addresses from outside New York—Georgia, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Fellows and financial aid recipients from outside New York came from Massachusetts (8), Pennsylvania (9), Quebec and New Jersey (2 each), Rhode Island, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee and as far away as Israel, and Victoria, Australia.