



Lela Lyon

LELA RACHEL LYON was born in Pontiac, Michigan in 1996 to parents, Bill and Susan Lyon, and is the second of three children. As a child, Judaism played a major role in her life although her participation in synagogue declined after the family's move to Pawpaw, West Virginia during her middle school years. She chose to attend the University of Kentucky because of the academic opportunities it provides. *"...I'm a linguistics major, uh, and so that's not offered in West Virginia so I get like in state tuition here for coming and doing that."*

At UK, she joined Hillel—a Jewish student organization -- where she has developed her abilities as a student leader. After being a member for two years, Lela served as President from 2016-2017 and Vice President in 2017-2018 when Amy Groswald stepped in as President. As Vice President, Lyon worked closely with Groswald to recruit members, plan events, and increase social media presence in order to attract more first-year Jewish students. Lela emphasizes how the organization has grown from her freshman to her senior year (2014-2018), but tempers her enthusiasm by describing the struggles she and Groswald have faced when recruiting Jewish members for the organization. Lela has also lived in the Hillel House near campus.



Lela (pictured center-left) posing with Amy Groswald (center-right), Alex Rosenzweig (right), and Zachary Parise (left)

One of the challenges Lela faced as a Hillel leader was how to allay the fears that spread among Jewish students across campus due to the rise in anti-Semitic discourse after the 2016 Presidential election. Although she recognizes the possibility that White Supremacists may come to Lexington or campus, as they did in Charlottesville, VA, Lela expresses confidence that UK would protect its most vulnerable students from possible harm. On a lighter note, Lyon explains how her experiences on a Birthright trip to Israel in the summer of 2016 allowed her to create new friendships and renew her commitment to Jewish student life.

"...I learned a lot about myself on the trip. I don't know that it was religion specific, but it definitely opened my mind to what type of people I like and what type of people I don't. Um, so I think it's a good experience regardless..."

In addition to her leadership with UK Hillel, Lyon has also gained valuable professional experience working at UK Libraries. She will complete her Bachelor's degree in May 2018 and her Master's degree in 2019, and then hopes to continue for doctoral studies. She advises future UK students to attend many basketball games, go to class, and do the best as they possibly can.



A game board for University of Kentucky's Hillel fall recruitment