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Administration Proposes Damaging Cuts to Our College Education

By Yadin Teitz

The Yeshiva College Core Curriculum has been the subject of much consideration since its inception two years ago. To many students and faculty, the Core is a valuable asset to YU. Josh Tranen, a junior in Yeshiva College, claims that "The Core has offered me classes that center around different topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, allowing me to evaluate a given topic from multiple methodological approaches." Tranen credits the Core for having honed his critical thinking skills across multiple disciplines, topics, and time periods. Likewise, Professor Rachel Mesch, Director of the Core, asserts that "We have made great strides toward education in the past few years with the implementation of the Core."

On the other side of the spectrum are those students who dislike the full scope of Core classes. While some science majors may enjoy The Natural World (NAWO), they are puzzled as to why they are required to take First Year Writing (FYWR), considering that few of their courses require intensive academic writing. English majors, conversely, appreciate Interpreting the Creative (INTC), while bemoaning their Experimental and

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Quantitative Methods (EXQM) classes. This dichotomy is precisely the purpose of the Core. All students are invited to foray into worlds where they may be uncomfortable in order to broaden their horizons and become well-rounded, thoughtful individuals.

The recent rumor in the halls of Yeshiva College that the First Year Seminar (FYSM) requirement was likely to be terminated only



If We Cannot Win Here, We Cannot Win Anywhere: An Open Letter To The Student Body

By Michael Osborne

We attend Yeshiva University, the premier institution for a fusion of Torah study and higher education in the country and arguably the world. Our campus proudly flies the Israeli flag above our heads day in and day out. We are blessed to not be faced with anti-Semitism in any of its forms that you now

readily find on nearly every college campus around the country. We have an undergraduate student body of over 2,100 Zionists -- or so I thought. When I took on my role as head of the Israel Club at the beginning of the year I quickly realized our greatest challenge is Zionist apathy. This student body does not care about Zionism. At all.

Too many are unaware, uninvolved, and unengaged.

As a club we bring in all sorts of speakers and run all sorts of events that should cater to every single Zionist student of Yeshiva University. There are events about diverse topics such as Gaza, Aliyah, and AIPAC. We even bring in Members of Knesset. We ran a kumzitz in Times Square in solidarity with Israel. All this among so much more. Yet there is one constant throughout nearly every event we run. Small turnout. 20 here, 3 there. For a member of Knesset about 100 will turn out, unless it's Danny Danon, and then it's less than 50. Imagine that on a campus of 2,100+ Zionists less than 2% showed up to an event that students on a normal campus would be lining up for--the chance to hear and ask questions to a foreign dignitary. But not just a member of government from some random country, one from

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Israel Club** cont p. 16

Proposed Changes at YU Lack Focus on Education, Professors

By Etai Shuchatowitz

As Yeshiva University's financial difficulties continue, recently announced plans to cut costs on campus have left all adjunct, contract and non-tenure track faculty in fear for their jobs. These changes, which include cutting courses, faculty, and even departments, singularly focus on the financial strains on the University, paying little attention to how its effects on the university's academic standing. According to one source, "Since such lines are not evenly distributed across departments, the cuts [are] happening selectively and with no clear curricular objectives or planning."

Though illuminating articles from newly hired Provost Selma Botman's previous university reveal some of the details at her previ-



Provost Selma Botman

ous job, her history and role in the restructuring of YU has not yet been clarified, and this source was more than happy to fill in details.

According to the Yeshiva University website, "As the president of the University of Southern Maine, [Botman] inspired new academic programs, raised scholarship dollars for students who would have otherwise been unable to attend the university, and promoted technology assisted instruction." However, it does not mention she left her position at USM when over half the faculty gave her a vote of no-confidence. The vote did

not receive the requisite 2/3 majority to pass, but indicated strained faculty sentiments, as evidenced by a survey conducted of USM faculty union members, which found 77 percent

of the respondents disagreed with her management of the university. According to the Portland Press Herald, during her time at USM, "four [members] of Botman's administrative staff received raises of between 18 percent and 22 percent, while faculty salaries had been frozen for three years." Similarly, the same article reported that "the USM faculty released a list of grievances they had with Botman."

There are some very serious administrative concerns running throughout the faculty, and there seems to be very little trust of administrators due to the "lack of transparency." In a candid interview with The Commentator, one very distressed professor who wished to remain anonymous remarked on how little anybody was saying, and how, "emails just include euphemisms like 'increase student access to tenured faculty.' It doesn't take a genius to know that means firing as many non-tenured faculty as possible."

The professor continued, "The changes

YU will see in the next few years will completely change the entire structure of YU, particularly the 'Yeshiva' aspect and Jewish part of the curriculum." Current proposals include eliminating the Hebrew department entirely and replacing it with online placement exams, cutting the time allotted to Mazer Yeshiva Program shiurim, cutting the Judaic Studies department heavily, conflating Core courses with major requirements and slashing the English and writing departments significantly. As Liesl Schwab, a Lecturer in Writing, First Year Writing, and First Year Seminar explained, "We have developed a really strong, dynamic, and engaging writing program that will now be lost, more or less in its entirety."

On the whole the mentality seems to be, in the words of one anonymous professor, "decrease Judaics and increase enrollment." One professor noted that, "Yeshiva University has

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The EDITORIAL

Now What?

So, we've managed to get rid of Einstein, and with it two-thirds of our debt. Of an estimated \$150M annual deficit, we're now down to \$50M – Einstein supposedly accounted for \$100M. Which begs the question: how do we fill a \$50M hole? More specifically, how do we fill it with sustainable and increasing cash flows?

Arieh Levi
Editor-in-Chief

As always, it comes back to increasing revenues and decreasing costs. Let's start with the former.

In my conversations with President Joel, the President pointed to two specific revenue-raising initiatives: increased donations, and YU Global.

Obviously, fundraising is not a long-term plan. No university can survive on acts of generosity alone – no matter how generous. In 2006, YU received a \$100M gift from businessman Ronald Stanton. Of that \$100M, one must wonder how much is left, considering that \$250M of our valuable New York City real estate is currently collateralized against debt.

Nor is YU Global a real remedy. The grant-funded program hopes to cut costs by offering virtual “blended courses” across YU's campuses and raise revenues by granting on-line degrees to the East Asian market, a part of the globe that has long held a unique fascination with Judaism and its Jews (think Koreans studying Talmud). Whatever YU Global is – and I don't think the program's leadership has quite defined it yet – I cannot imagine that it is a sustainable solution. For one, it competes against much larger rivals, with deeper pockets, bigger faculties, and more robust online education platforms. Why get a degree from YU when you can get a degree from Harvard, MIT, or Princeton? Why use YU's fledgling platform when you can use Harvard's well-developed classroom forums? Further, what does it say about our brick-and-mortar education if YU's savior is an unproven online startup? Ultimately, such an initiative tarnishes YU's reputation in the murky waters of global e-commerce.

More realistically, short-term revenue will have to be raised by involving YU's real estate holdings. As mentioned, approximately \$250M of it is currently collateralized against debt, out of a total of approximately \$1B if we include Einstein's \$500M Resnick campus. This means that we can't sell a large portion of our real estate. However, we could raise revenue in other ways, perhaps via leasing. Still, though, artfully managing our real estate is not a long-term plan.

Then there's the other side of the equation: cutting costs. Alvarez and Marsal (A&M), the consulting firm hired by YU to turn around the institution (for an estimated \$9M – \$12M over the course of 14 months), believes the solution lies in cuts. While A&M stresses its focus to maintain the continued excellence of the undergraduate and graduate programs, there is no doubt that the YU of the future will be heavily stripped down.

For students, cuts mean a number of major changes. Class sizes will be larger, and the small student-to-faculty ratio that traditionally served as one of YU's major draws will increase, detracting from an intimate educational experience. Departments will be cut and merged, with smaller morning and afternoon offerings. Student leaders can expect less money to plan events, of which there will be fewer in total.

For faculty, the situation looks worse. Teaching loads

will increase, allowing less time for research. While tenured and tenure-tracked faculty will stay on, large numbers of contract faculty will be replaced by adjuncts that cost a fraction of the price and can only add a fraction of the value. To illustrate, adjuncts typically make between \$3,500 and \$6,500 per course. The average adjunct, then, must teach 12 courses to receive an income of \$60,000. The average New York City-based adjunct will therefore be teaching hundreds of students spread across 12 courses at – for example – Fordham, City College, Manhattan College, Columbia, and YU. Cutting contract faculty for adjuncts, then, can only mean a lower quality “fast food” education.

Further, using adjuncts might not prove as cost-efficient as hoped. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal highlighted the unionization of adjuncts at universities across the country, where adjuncts have increased from 43% of total US college instructors in 1975, to 70% in 2011. According to the article, the

National Labor Relations Board – the same board famously overruled by a 1980 Supreme Court ruling in NLRB vs. Yeshiva that allowed YU to deny its tenured faculty unionization – has pushed for more union action at private religious schools, among others. This means higher pay for potentially unionized adjuncts, reducing ultimate cost savings.

Granted, there seems to be no alternative at this late stage. We do have to cut costs, and personnel do make up a large per-

centage of our overall cost structure. However, shouldn't our teaching staff be the last to go? Instead, shouldn't we be taking a harder look at our top-heavy administrative body?

In writing this article, I found myself returning to one question raised often in my conversations with faculty, administration, and students: what exactly is Yeshiva University? More precisely, are we a small liberal arts college, a vocational school with Sy Syms at the fore, or a Yeshiva with some secular courses thrown into the mix? YU used to be the only real option for Modern Orthodox college students. It no longer is. Orthodox students looking for quality liberal arts or business educations can join strong Hillel communities at Columbia, Penn, and NYU. Less expensive yeshiva options exist at Landers and Queens College.

President Joel would say that our mission is to “ennoble and enable”, and President Emeritus Rabbi Norman Lamm might point to “Torah u'Madda”. However, neither gives an ironclad reason to attend or support YU, given its high price tag and the number of viable alternatives.

A recent article in the Observer quoted one unnamed faculty member at a recent meeting suggesting that YU “stop trying to be all things to all people [and choosing] between the Harvard and the Touro.” I would agree. Before YU Global, before sweeping cuts to our undergraduate education, let's figure out exactly who we are. Defining ourselves concretely will provide us a more accurate barometer by which to measure the difficult choices that lie ahead.

PRESIDENT JOEL WOULD SAY THAT OUR MISSION IS TO “ENABLE AND ENNOBLE”, AND PRESIDENT EMERITUS RABBI NORMAN LAMM MIGHT POINT TO “TORAH U'MADDA”. HOWEVER, NEITHER GIVES AN IRONCLAD REASON TO ATTEND OR SUPPORT YU, GIVEN ITS HIGH PRICE TAG AND THE NUMBER OF VIABLE ALTERNATIVES.

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The Commentator is the official student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 78 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.

The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.

We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah u-Maddah, and commitment to journalistic excellence.



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1 Warmth

It's a great time of year, when walking outside is, for some reason, no longer painful. We're still in that weird transitional period, though, when it's sixty degrees outside but there is snow all over the ground. Just to remind us of our dark, cold past.

2 Purim

It's really the best day of the year, and having it on a Thursday, with no school for three days afterwards, makes it easier to enjoy. Singing, dancing, feasting, jokes, dressing up in costumes—it doesn't get better than this.

3 Student Initiatives

Effective or ineffective, informed or uninformed, correct or simply speculated—it is always exciting to be involved, and to know that every once in a while the apathy wears off.

4 The Boys Next Door

YCDS's spring production opens March 21st, and we couldn't be more excited. They put on an excellent show last semester, as they always do, and we have high expectations for this performance.

5 Uptown Funk

Beyond the incredibly amazing and hilarious parody done in the YU Purim Shpiel, this song deserves its own "up" simply for being the catchiest song of all time. "Don't believe me just watch." (Be honest, you sang that line, and now can't stop yourself from singing the rest of the song.)

6 Snapchat Features

No, I'm not talking about the different filters to put on your duck-faced selfies (as much as I love those). I'm much more concerned about the new feature that uploads different clips from Comedy Central everyday. If you only have five minutes, it's the perfect way to catch up on last night's Daily Show, start watching Midnight, or, in general, spend an five extra minutes of your day watching TV—and honestly, isn't that what's most important?

7 Parks and Recreation

Its seven-season run of six amazing seasons has unfortunately come to an end. And their last season definitely stepped up their game, especially with "The Jonny Karate Super-Awesome-Musical-Explosion Show," which is probably the funniest and most creative episode of TV I've seen all year.

7 UP ⚡ 7 DOWN

1 Hillary Clinton's Email/Political Intrigue TV Shows

Between *House of Cards* and Shonda Rhimes' *Scandal*, my bar has been set very high for exciting political intrigue, usually involving lots of murder and crazy assassins. And Hillary Clinton's email account just seems really boring in comparison. I want to hear instead about how Hillary Clinton has secretly formed a super-spy torturing service, and has been using it to kill governors..

2 Midterms

I know we do this every time, but it seems easier than thinking of a new joke. Also, it saves us from having to complain about....

3 Faculty/Administration

There are two very different narratives being woven about the ongoing process of academic changes and/or budget cuts, but there is one point in which these two parties see eye to eye: that they don't see eye to eye. There is a rift growing between this married couple, and it definitely doesn't bode well for the students, the analogous children caught between fighting parents.

4 March Madness Brackets

People picking random teams based on names and laziness all of a sudden became college basketball geniuses when their picks happen to be correct. Also, I'm still annoyed because every year I pick a 16-seed to win their first-round game, and they never do

5 NBC Comedies

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. NBC Thursday nights used to include *Parks and Rec*, *30 Rock*, *The Office*, and *Community*, four of the most innovative and intelligent comedies of the last decade. And now they have *The Slap*, which, as ridiculous as it may sound, is actually supposed to be a drama.

6 Mishloach Manot Leftovers

By now, you've gone through all the high-quality candy and snacks you got during Purim day. All you have left are those gross candies that you specifically put off eating because of how un-tasty they look. But it would be unethical to throw food in the garbage, so you've got to eat it.

7 Climate Change

Bad.

Yeshiva Not to Sell Properties Despite Financial Hardship

By David Rubinstein

Despite a bout of financial turmoil, Yeshiva University will not sell any of its real estate, according to Robert Hershan, Managing Director of Alvarez & Marsal, the firm hired to find strategies to reduce expenses.

"There are no plans to sell any other real estate right now, other than what was sold almost a year ago last May, that was non-core residential real estate in Washington Heights," Hershan told the Commentator in an interview.

In May of last year, YU sold ten buildings near its Washington Heights Wilf Campus for \$72.5 million. As the University looks for ways to raise cash, an inquisitive glance was cast in the direction of YU's large real estate portfolio.

Speculation often circulates that YU should sell its Israel Henry Beren Campus in Murray Hill and build a new campus for Stern College in Washington Heights. Higher administration have admitted that moving Stern to the Heights would save a minimum of \$10 million a year. "Rumors are flying," Hershan responded to the allegations.

However, Hershan affirmed, "There are certainly no plans to sell any of the Stern Campus that I'm aware of." In fact, many of the YU Midtown buildings cannot be sold because they were collateralized as part of a restructuring that occurred last year. Additionally, President Richard Joel has often attested that such a move would destroy the very essence of the university.

According to its 2013 financial statements, Yeshiva University held upwards of, in book value, \$650 million in land, buildings, and equipment; the market value of these properties, far exceeds that. YU has real estate in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Jerusalem. More recent and detailed statements about YU's real estate are not yet available.

Hershan said he was working together with Rabbi Josh Joseph, YU Senior Vice President, on a number of initiatives, including reviewing YU's space. "We're looking at what the utilization of that space is," Hershan explained, "to maximize efficiency of YU's real estate, to see what can be done to maximize efficiency of that space."

March 5 marked the one-year anniversary of Moody's downgrading YU's credit rating from B3 to B1. In December 2014, the investors' service outlook on YU remained negative because of "the risk of liquidity depletion." The credit rating remained negative even though "significant real estate holdings in Manhattan and the Bronx" were considered. These properties "would provide for a full recovery for bondholders, should the University default. Moody's cited as one of YU's strengths that in the 2014 fiscal year, "Yeshiva monetized parts of its real estate holdings to generate liquidity," referring to the sale of Washington Heights buildings mentioned above.

"An upgrade or stable outlook is unlikely in the near-term given the magnitude of financial challenges faced by the university," Moody's found. If the rating were to improve, it would likely result from a "substantial improvement in unrestricted liquidity through the monetization of real estate or sizeable gifts combined with execution of a fiscally sustainable business plan, without damaging the university's market position."



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News Briefs

BY COMMENTATOR STAFF

JONATHAN SCHWAB JOINS HOUSING STAFF

The Office of Housing and Residence Life currently has no Director, but it recently found a new Associate Director in Mr. Jonathan Schwab. On March 2, the University announced that Mr. Sean Hirschhorn had stepped down from the position - according to one Resident Advisor, Hirschhorn simply got a better job offer elsewhere - and named Mr. Schwab his successor.

Mr. Schwab has a long and illustrious history here at YU: he graduated YC as Senior Editor of The Commentator in 2011 and soon joined the faculty, first serving as a Presidential Fellow, then joining the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, and finally being appointed an Enrollment and Admissions Associate at YU Global. He is renowned

at Stern College for his "Schwab-batons," having served as the male half of the Beren campus couple for the past two years, and he is currently enrolled in both the Revel and Azrieli graduate programs. During his years as a YU student, Mr. Schwab lived in all four YU dorms (including Strenger), though his stint in Muss lasted for only a few days. Morgenstern Hall is his favorite dormitory, even though he lived there before air conditioning was installed.

Mr. Schwab sees his new job as an opportunity to work directly with students, to "foster a safe environment of inclusion and fun that supports learning," and he has hit the ground running, with interviews for next year's twenty Resident Advisor positions already underway. While Mr. Schwab has no plans for a system overhaul, he will be in close

contact with the RA's to think critically about all aspects of residence life, from housing applications to hosting guests, to pinpoint the stronger elements of residence life and the areas that can use improvement. Mr. Schwab is particularly fond of his office's convenient location. "I'm really looking forward," said Mr. Schwab, "to now being officially allowed to utilize the passageway between Belfer and Rubin."

MEDICAL ETHICS SOCIETY SPENDS SHABBAT AT EINSTEIN

On February 20th, 32 YU and Stern students took the incredible opportunity to spend a Shabbat at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, a program that has been going on for nearly ten years. The program, organized by the Medical Ethics Society and AECOM Synagogue, allowed for students to experience

the Jewish community life at Einstein while also engaging in discussion about medical, ethical, and halachic issues. This year, instead of inviting a speaker to Einstein for the weekend, Einstein students were given the opportunity to lead the educational part of the programming and give shiurim throughout Shabbat in order to increase interaction between the undergraduates and medical students.

After Kabbalat Shabbat at the AECOM Synagogue, small groups of undergraduates were hosted by medical students for dinner, allowing for the former to get to speak with the latter in a more personal, relaxed setting. Following dinner, an oneg was held in the synagogue, at which MD student Matt Schalkewitz led an engaging discussion entitled "Brain Death in Halakha and American Law."

The program continued on Shabbat day, when after Mussaf and a community Kiddush, MD/PhD student Jerry Karp gave an extremely comprehensive and enlightening shiur on the halachic and hashkafic issues of residency programs that are not, what he called, "Shabbos-accommodating." The shiur also focused on several practical issues that Shabbat-observant medical students could find challenging when looking for a "Shabbos-accommodating" program, such as program location and specialty availability. After the shiur, undergraduates and medical students were invited to a group lunch where MES board member Mickey Abraham gave an inspiring speech. To close the program, Seudat Shelishit featured a discussion led by fourth year medical student Michael Kurin about the halachic perspective on abortion.

A Salute to Excellence in Academic Advising: Peter Knothe Leaves

By Ilan Swartz-Brownstein

Several weeks ago, Yeshiva College Academic Advisor Peter Knothe left his position at YU and took a position closer to his home in northern Westchester County. Looking back on the impact Knothe made on YU, both students and faculty agree that YU has lost more than just another staff member.



Peter Knothe

Knothe was no ordinary advisor. As he explains it, he chose the field of academic advising "because [he] loves working with students and really relates to the challenges they face." This determination to help students was clear from the very beginning of Knothe's arrival at YU. Shortly after Knothe joined the YU staff in the fall of 2009, the Advising Director resigned. Knothe essentially took over and ran the advising center only after a couple months into his new position. "I was left to fend for myself," Knothe remembers. However, thanks to an extremely helpful and supportive staff in the Dean's office, and other academic support faculty, Knothe felt very welcome.

Throughout his time at YU, Knothe was recognized as a person who went far beyond simply assisting students with arranging their schedules and picking classes. Rather, Knothe was notorious for the care and consideration he showed towards the students he worked with. Knothe explains that his mission was "doing anything I could to help YU students ease their stress." Dean Frederic Sugarman who arrived at YU around the same time as Knothe, worked closely with him and can testify to Knothe's unconditional dedication to his job. "Peter was the advisor that had more compassion than anyone else on campus," says Sugarman. Knothe saw his job of guiding students as a vital part of their academic growth and path to success. "I know that advisors can have as much of a positive impact on a student's personal development and education as their best teachers." It was this mindset that drove Knothe to make sure he created that positive impact.

As an academic advisor, Knothe often found himself in situations where students would not only explain to him their academic problems, but also their personal problems that were affecting their school work and grades. "There were many instances of students sharing with me some very personal and sometimes even traumatic situations in their lives,"

remembers Knothe. Even though he usually recommended students with personal struggles to the counseling center to seek proper help, Knothe would still meet with them as much as possible to monitor their daily or weekly progress. With Knothe's care for students, he built many strong relationships, and students genuinely valued his opinion and went to him with an academic issue they were having. As Knothe explains, "The most rewarding aspect of my job was gaining the trust of students and helping them."

Knothe's commitment to student's success was evident in many ways. When there were students who were particularly struggling with their major or class load, Knothe wouldn't just give them the normal 20 minute appointment. Rather, Knothe would sit down with these students for an hour and twenty minutes and thoroughly help them work through whatever issues they were having. There was often a line of students, drawn towards his sensitivity, waiting to see him. "He had a following," explains Sugarman. "That was Peter."

Nathaniel Ribner, a senior who had a close connection with Knothe, remembers how Knothe would drop everything to help him. "Whenever I had an issue and would pop my head into his office, even if it was his lunch break, he would interrupt in order to help me at the moment. And he would do it with a smile and a joke," Ribner says.

Knothe would constantly give up of his own time to help students. Junior Binyomin Barman remembers how "he cared about the students that walked in. He didn't work on a time clock. He would come in early and see students and stay after hours, unpaid, just to help us out." Knothe felt that this readiness to give up of himself was a necessary part to being a successful and supportive academic advisor. He explains his mission as an academic advisor was "to do all that was within my power to help students." Even if it meant putting in more time, energy and effort than he had to, or was paid to do, Knothe was ready and willing.

Being an academic, and someone who was passionate about reading, literature and his ideas, Knothe had a strong ability to discuss student's academic goals, and understand their course of study. He also recognizes that his healthy sense of humor was an attribute which enabled him to connect and relate to the students he worked with. Additionally, his in depth knowledge of YU gave him the capability to give students personalized and comprehensive guidance. "He knew everything about YU. His insights and knowledge of the classes and the professors that taught them, were amazing," remembers Barman.

One of Knothe's many strengths was to be able deal with students who were going through all types academic

difficulties. Whether a student was engaged or recently married and was having a hard time academically, or a if student was pressured to choose a certain major by their parents, or a major wasn't what a student expected it to be, Knothe was ready to work with them to set them on a path to success. He also dealt with the transfer students from different colleges and students coming to YU from Yeshivas in Israel, helping them become comfortable with the intense YU curriculum. Even after a student walked out of his office, Knothe would follow up with the student to see how they were doing.

Beyond his capacity to connect with students on an academic level, Knothe was able to recognize on how important Judaism was to YU students. He respected students' commitment to morning learning and the role which Torah played in students' lives. He was even able to pick up on some of the nuances of the various yeshivas in Israel. Within his ten years at YU "he came to understand that if a guy was from KBY, he had a certain hashkafa," remembers Sugarman.

Knothe's recent decision to leave YU and take a position at a different college was not based on salary or a desire to leave YU. Rather, Knothe decided that the close-to-an-hour commute to YU everyday was too much. "Almost twenty years coming and going to different jobs in NYC had become a real grind," he explains. Knothe recently joined Manhattanville College, in Purchase, NY, where he is also an Academic Advisor. "I am home in twenty minutes now," says Knothe.

Fortunately, just before Knothe left, YU hired a new Academic Advisor: Sara Wallshein, who has quickly grown to become an extremely helpful and insightful academic advisor as well. Although Knothe's specific way of working with students may not be able to be replaced, YU students will continue to be served and supported by the talented advising crew.

Knothe wanted his exit from YU to be a quiet one. However, his colleagues wanted to let him know how much he meant to them. "The outpouring of affection and gratitude I received from colleagues and the few students I was brave enough to tell was almost embarrassing to me," Knothe exclaims. "I still feel incredibly grateful!" Knothe recently called Sugarman to tell him that "he misses YU greatly". Students and faculty agree that the feeling goes both ways. He was special," says Sugarman.

President Joel, Provost Botman Hold Meetings with Students to Discuss Coming Changes

By Chaim Goldberg

Two days after Yeshiva College Students Association (YCSA) held an open meeting for students regarding proposed changes to the college's faculty and academic offerings, President Richard Joel and Provost Selma Botman held two meetings on Thursday, March 13th to discuss those same issues with the student body.

The meetings, which were attended by several dozen students, opened with President Joel giving a brief overview of the ebb and flow of Yeshiva University's finances over the last decade or so. Besides the well-known circumstances which caused YU to lose a lot of money before and after the stock market crashed, President Joel emphasized that YU also spent a considerable amount of money in efforts to improve the undergraduate experience. The number of full-time faculty has increased by over 50% in the last decade, tenured faculty has doubled during that time span, and a number of departments exist today which were simply not around not too long ago. Additionally, there have been noticeable improvements to our college experience as a whole, ranging from increased research to improved Shabbat programming.

However, the President was forthright in admitting that there was insufficient oversight of YU's finances during those years, due to both an outdated system as well as rare but costly administrative errors by members of the university's Finance department.

Whatever the circumstances that led to the current crisis, however, everyone agreed that the most relevant dilemma is how best to move forward while maintaining a strong undergraduate educational experience.

As the meetings opened up for students to speak, this question was echoed by several students. Much to their relief, President Joel emphasized his view on the key element underlying these concerns: holding a signed copy of the Declaration of Principles composed by the YCSA, he declared that he "embraced all of these principles," later stating that students and faculty are of utmost importance in considering the future of the university.

With regard to questions about faculty morale and whether they had been sufficiently consulted on potential department, staffing, and curricula changes, President Joel acknowledged that this is not an easy time to be a professor at YU, but pointed out that the faculty is in a position no different from that of the administration. Granted, the faculty has received only one raise in the last six years and has had the contributions to their pension reduced, but so has the administration, he claimed. Additionally, Provost Botman remarked that she has recently attended upwards of 60 meetings with department chairs, deans and other faculty members in attempts to achieve a collaborative, shared understanding of the University as it moves forward. She stressed that while she, the President, and the A&M consultants presented many different options, they were meant merely as suggestions; the faculty and department heads have been given full reign to determine curricula, with the simple caveat that they meet the budget.

What is notable, though, is that these sentiments do not

necessarily jive with the perspectives shared by faculty members in recent weeks. President Joel did submit that he feels it is possible the administration did not conduct its affairs regarding faculty in the best of ways. It is also possible, though, he noted, that while we hear from the professors who are particularly frustrated and driven to express their views, there is a considerable amount of the faculty which—though they would certainly wish for better financial times—are understanding of the difficulties of the situation, committed to YU's *raison d'être*, and appreciate the opportunity to teach in such an institution despite the challenging times.

Both the President and Provost Botman expressed regret that there are faculty members who feel belittled, encouraged the students and faculty to be in constant communication, and expressed hope that the future would hold smoother and more

the faculty at the beginning of the year informing them that the University might not hire them for the coming academic year. The President explained that, for legal reasons, the University is required to notify all contract faculty of their termination one year in advance. Thus, all faculty received letters so that the University would have the flexibility to choose which faculty members would remain, and which would not. Of course, he stressed, many faculty members who received those letters will have their contracts renewed.

Perhaps the most contentious issues under discussion were the proposed changes to the YC curriculum. In reply, Provost Botman assured students that there were no plans to close a single department in the school or eliminate any of the offered majors. Students were told that First Year Seminar (not First Year Writing) would be eliminated, to be replaced by more writing-

intensive classes in other sections of the Core. Regarding Jewish studies, it was acknowledged that Hebrew classes would transition to becoming either fully online or blended classes. President Joel affirmed his belief that requiring academic Jewish studies plays a crucial role in making YU a singular institution, yet stated that he feels students would benefit from fewer mandatory classes and more flexibility in choosing electives.

Provost Botman specified in the second meeting exactly how many contract faculty members would be cut from each school: three from Stern, four from Syms, and six from Yeshiva College. President Joel explained that the disproportionality reflects the larger number of tenured faculty at YC as compared to Stern and Syms. He added that historically speaking, YC has received a disproportionately larger budget than the other undergraduate schools, and would have to be "rightsized" in the coming years. He

suggested that the reason YC is in a state of flux, as it has been asked to cut faculty in addition to implementing two changes in the curriculum for the coming year.

Despite the overall collaborative and encouraging feel of the meetings, some students were left looking for clearer responses to their concerns. This author, for instance, suggested that if members of the administration are not able to take pay cuts, the student body should at least be given an explanation of why not; this idea, however, was passed over without further discussion. Other students felt that while we were reassured that faculty cuts from YC would be quite minimal—six being the number quoted—perhaps this didn't accurately reflect a rumored three-year plan in which a nearly triple that amount would be let go, a possibility which was not directly addressed.

As was noted by one student in the beginning of the meeting, in previous generations, President Dr. Belkin would not talk about such matters to students on principle. In light of that, students were grateful simply for the opportunity to have their voice heard and simultaneously, to hear about changes in the college straight from the top rather than underground rumors. One student explained afterwards that while the students and administration may have different perspectives, everyone shares the same goal of advancing a Yeshiva University which can offer a stellar education to its students for years to come.

PRESIDENT JOEL WAS FORTHRIGHT IN ADMITTING THAT THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT OVERSIGHT OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY'S FINANCES IN PAST YEARS. WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS, HOWEVER, EVERYONE PRESENT AGREED THAT THE MOST RELEVANT DILEMMA AT THIS POINT IS HOW BEST TO MOVE FORWARD WHILE MAINTAINING A STRONG UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.

constructive communication, with the President even offering to have more meetings with students.

On a different note, President Joel was asked multiple times about the future of scholarships. He was adamant about the fact that no student would be asked to reduce their scholarship and that no student would be turned away if unable to absorb the hefty cost of a Yeshiva University education. Nonetheless, the President did clarify that YU aims to add more efficiency to dispensing scholarships in the future. For example, students admitted to the honors programs will no longer receive full scholarships if an 85% scholarship will also attract honors students. He additionally pointed out that some students would be prepared to pay full tuition to a private secular university, yet expect to receive a scholarship from Yeshiva University- which is no longer something YU can provide indiscriminately.

President Joel rightfully called attention to the fact that Yeshiva University offers a singular hybrid of traditional learning together with a quality academic education which is of crucial importance to the centrist Orthodox community and, as such, people should feel privileged to support it rather than trying to find ways out of that opportunity.

In the days leading up to the meetings, rumors abounded as to the number of faculty that would be cut for next year. President Joel explained that the rumors of the University's plan to cut all contract faculty may have originated from a letter sent to

Proposed Changes at YU, cont from p. 1

one particularly amazing department: Jewish Studies, and they're trying to slash it down dramatically." According to one source, the Chairman of the Board, Dr. Henry Kressel has stated that the University is a business and that the number one priority must be to maintain the business.

This plan has obviously produced many changes amongst each individual department. For instance, the chemistry and biology departments seem to be fairly stable and any financial concerns are having little to no impact on class offerings or curricula. On the other hand, humanities departments with already miniscule rosters like philosophy, sociology, or political science could face terrible consequences.

In a lengthy letter that political science department chair Dr. Ruth Bevan wrote to The Commentator, she expressed how hard they have worked to make the political science department as successful as it currently is. She said, "I have written

to the Provost and to the Dean expressing not only my confidence in our Political Science faculty, full time and adjunct, but urging stability in the Department. I argued that it is not easy to find competent faculty beloved by students who work well as a team under very adverse conditions. We have found that faculty team. None of my colleagues in the Department are tenured or tenure track. If the present threats to fire adjuncts and contract faculty are put into effect, will Political Science be reduced to [its inferior] level of Spring 2012? If so, it seems unlikely that it will be rebuilt – yet again."

The most striking change though seems to not be educational but to the low levels of morale that pervade throughout departments. Even while the science departments will remain fairly intact, Barry Potvin, a professor of biology said, "It's my impression that morale has been significantly damaged." One anonymous professor recounted a story in which two tenured professors were having a conversation in an office when Provost Botman entered unannounced and proceeded to sit in

the office during the duration of the meeting. There have been accounts by faculty of "feeling intimidated," just like at USM, and one professor said that it feels "like a noose around our necks."

The general sentiment going around is that of uncertainty. When The Commentator asked faculty for their thoughts, the most common response was that they'd relate what they could, but unfortunately because of too much uncertainty, there isn't much to tell.

The financial troubles affect many different departments in many different areas. People are both being fired and leaving of their own volition. However, hope remains the only way to proceed. As Jiangfeng Jiang, professor of chemistry said, "I personally hope our university can solve all these financial problems asap so that I can concentrate on teaching and research." Ultimately, that's what most people believe a university is for.

Wilf Campus Departmental Moves

By Arel Levkovich

In the midst of keeping up with the university's heavy academic workload, students and faculty on the Wilf Campus are fortunate enough to be provided with several services stemming from various departments. While most of these departments have remained in the same locations for years, a few have undergone recent moves. Each time that a change was implemented, mass emails were sent to members of the university informing them of the relevant department's updated location.

The Career Center, for instance, which consists of many staff members who commit their time to assisting students in finding and obtaining careers that best fit their skills and desires, is one example of a department that switched its location at the start of the Spring semester. Marc Goldman, the Executive Director of the Career Center, explained: "The immediate reason for the move was that 90 Laurel Hill Terrace was one of the buildings sold by YU." He also pointed out that the move has offered some great opportunities, including "a more central campus location within the same building as many other vital YU departments including Admissions, Alumni Affairs, CJF, Communications, and Financial Aid to name a few. The new offices on the fourth floor of Furst provides us with spaces for staff and student interaction as well." Rebecca Weiler, Director of Counseling and Programming, added that the move had a "smooth transition" and that there has been "great feedback."

Avi Cohen (YC '17) and Shimmy Auman (Syms '16), students on the Wilf Campus, agree that the Career Center's move adds a level of convenience that did not previously exist. Because of the new location's proximity to their classes in Furst, they said "it reduces walking time when needing to go back and forth between classes. That can be very helpful when planning a daily schedule."

Similar to the Career Center, the Human Resources also moved its offices in January. The HR department, whose goal - according to its official website - is to "attract, develop, and retain an excellent faculty and staff," is now situated on the fourth floor of Belfer. This is in contrast to its past location,



alongside the Career Center on Laurel Hill Terrace. Just like the Career Center, HR was forced to move from the building due to YU's real estate transactions. As Karin Rosenthal, Director of HR Recruitment Services, pointed out: "The move now enables us to save on rental costs." Rosenthal also asserted that the move "is convenient and allows us to be closer and more available to the departments that we support." Yvonne Ramirez, YU's Chief HR Officer, had the same assessment.

In addition to both of the departments mentioned above,

the security department is another that had its headquarters undergo change within the past year. It should be noted, however, that just as it was prior to the fall semester, its offices are still located at the same address, 521 West 185th Street. Instead of a full-out location switch, security - which previously had offices on the first floor of the building - has simply expanded into the basement.

Many students, such as Yoseph Boniuk (YC '18), appreciate the expanded security offices. He specifically points to the "ever-increasing anti-Semitic attacks occurring worldwide" and the fact that Yeshiva University "can be seen as a target" as possible reasons that the campus has rightfully been putting extra focus on its security lately. In fact, just in the past few months, police officers could even be seen roaming the sidewalks in order for there to be extra eyes monitoring campus activity.

It is important to realize that the security expansion does not mean those on campus need to be worried in any way. In an article on campus security in the latest issue of The Commentator, Director of Communications, Paul Oestreicher, reassured that "the safety of our campuses isn't driven solely by episodes or threats of violence." Rather, it seems that the expansion was put into effect simply because, as Oestreicher continued, "safety and security are matters of paramount importance and are evaluated here on an ongoing basis."

Clearly, as semesters come and go in the academic calendar, university departments sometimes need to make adjustments - and office locations on campus are a part of that. But wherever various departmental offices reside, students and faculty alike are lucky to be provided with their excellent services. The needs of those on campus cannot be adequately cared for without them.

The Man Behind Mindfulness and Meditation

By Binyamin Goldman

How does an electrical engineer, who graduated from Polytechnic Institute of New York in 1980 go from working on radar jammers for the B-52 Bombers to teaching Jewish Mindfulness and Meditation at Yeshiva University? Len Moskowitz, who grew up going to regular Jewish day schools, said that despite being in the top shiurim and having great teachers, he felt like he had never found his calling in Torah in the traditional styles of learning. It wasn't until he was truly able to explore and learn the more mystical, or Kabbalistic side, of Torah, primarily the Arizal's teachings, that he felt he had found his portion of Torah.

He started his journey by learning Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's texts in the late 70's, and in the late 80's found a shiur in New York, given by Rav Gideon Lipovsky on the teachings of the Arizal. He stayed within the shiur for two and a half years and learnt b'chavrusa with other students of Rav Lipovsky for another 7 years. After receiving permission from Rav Lipovsky to begin teaching along the lines of such mystical topics, Moskowitz looked for a way to gain credentials in order to teach in Orthodox institutions; as he felt it was something they were lacking. "I realized that I had something to teach that nobody was teaching in our community. I had a background and awareness of texts that nobody else in our community could convey. The mitzvah is Lilmod Ulilamed - to learn for yourself, but also to teach others and I took that seriously." With that mission in mind Moskowitz, then in his mid-50's applied to the RIETS Semikha program and was accepted for the Fall 2008 semester.

During his time in RIETS, he completed his work on the first English translation of Rav Chaim Volozhin's Nefesh HaChaim, a sefer which had been introduced to him by a chavrusa in 1991, as the entryway for Litvish Jews into Kabbalah. While Moskowitz was in the Semikha program, Rabbi Hershel Reichman's students approached their rabbi looking for a more mystical class and Rabbi Reichman directed them towards Moskowitz. Subsequently, a Jewish Mindfulness and Meditation group was started in YC and the following year one was started in Stern as well. The next year Moskowitz began co-teaching with Rabbi Ely Allen, (his mentor for his RIETS teaching internship), in the JSS program and the year after began teaching his own class in JSS.



HOW DOES AN ELECTRICAL ENGINEER, WHO GRADUATED FROM THE POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK IN 1980, GO FROM WORKING ON RADAR JAMMERS FOR B-52 BOMBERS TO TEACHING JEWISH MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY?

The popularity for this "style" of learning seems to be growing as Moskowitz began teaching this semester in the IBC morning program in addition to JSS. "The choice of asking Rabbi Moskowitz to teach in IBC was a combination of a few factors, but mostly due to his popularity in JSS and our assumption that there would be a number of students in IBC who would also appreciate and gain from his teaching approach," says Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Assistant Dean in RIETS. Rabbi

Kalinsky also noted that Moskowitz's classes in IBC are more textually based using Nefesh HaChaim in order to compliment the meditation aspect of the course.

Professor Moskowitz feels while many are interested in Kabbalah, only about 5% of all Jews have the potential to develop a passion for Kabbalah and meditation, and then follow through with it. While Moskowitz acknowledges that it is not a mainstream part of Torah, he maintains it is unequivocally a part of it and feels it is a necessary style for some people. "It's a way of bringing Kedusha into your life and it should be understood as a path of Kedusha".

While Moskowitz is serious about the importance of such teachings what is possibly even more important he says, is making sure it is done in a Jewish way. Most of the popular culture meditation techniques come from Buddhism or Yoga he says; and most of the mindfulness instructors in the U.S. are Buddhist trained as well. Moskowitz asserts it is important to note that any regular meditation or mindfulness class will incorporate views from the Buddhist world and are not purely secular techniques. He maintains that exposing oneself to such views could cause them to become natural and acceptable ways of thinking, such ideas that would certainly not align with Jewish philosophy. An altogether intriguing man, Moskowitz now teaches in both the JSS and IBC program on the Wilf campus and continues to teach at the Jewish Mindfulness and Meditation Club every Thursday night on the Beren campus. The session is open to both Beren and Wilf campus students.



YC Students, Council Gather to Organize Response

By Avi Strauss

With rumors and reports swirling about how financial instability is rocking Yeshiva College's Core curriculum, student leaders and organizers have been working diligently to rally the student body to have their voice heard. Rumors and hearsay have created an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety amongst the student body, with many wondering what Yeshiva College will look like in the coming years. In efforts to quell some of the unrest and encourage student involvement during these formative and important times, student groups have started to take more concrete action.

The most significant action taken thus far has been by the Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA), whose leaders organized an unprecedented forum to inform and attempt to unify the student body. A Tuesday night meeting drew over seventy concerned students to hear from YCSA leaders, learn about some changes that are actually being proposed, offer their thoughts and join together for a united student voice.

As YCSA President Shai Berman put it, the meeting was organized "to effectively inform students as to the situation in which Yeshiva College currently finds itself. We thought it was important to address the proposed cuts as well as the deep-seated issues which underlie them. Much of the angst and concern revolves around the fact that the recommended changes for the YC Core originate strictly from the financial concerns of the administration and YU's financial consulting firm A&M and are not taking academics into account." Of course, it must be noted that the consulting firm, whose suggestions and advice are based strictly on numbers, often propose cuts that are intentionally blind to the academic ramifications.

The meeting began with Berman detailing the cuts rumored to be most likely. He explained that it appears the bulk of the cuts will target contract faculty - those who are not tenured and tenure-track faculty. More specifically, this means ending First Year Seminar, staffed mostly by contract faculty, and combining it with First Year Writing. Similarly, contract faculty cuts would result in the complete gutting of the Hebrew department, as well as the removal of professors that are integral to the functioning and success of the Philosophy, Political Science and Spanish departments.

Berman explained that he "unearthed [that] cuts weren't being initiated by faculty or the Dean; they were coming from proposals and decisions pushed through by A&M, [the] President's office and [the] Provost's office." This only solidified the fear that those making the cuts were not prioritizing education when considering the University's future.

Student Organization of Yeshiva President Jacob Bernstein then spoke specifically about the rumored downsizing of the academic Jewish Studies departments, which represent a hallmark of YU education and what he called "an important bridge between two parts of YU." He explained that academic Jewish Studies speak to what YU is all about, connecting our Judaic intellectual pursuits with our secular ones. "It is important everyone walks out of this university with an experience in [academic] Jewish studies," he said, while detailing the crucial value of studying Judaism outside of seder and shiur and approaching it from new angles, which truly exemplifies Torah U'Madda. He concluded by fervently asserting that "it would be a failure on the part of this institution for students to leave without a proper understanding of Jewish History, a failure if they couldn't understand and speak the Hebrew language and a failure if they didn't experience Jewish studies from the academic perspective."

The reduced morale of the faculty was also addressed. Berman, based on discussions with professors, described plummeting attitudes and spirits amongst YC professors, which he feared would translate to courses being harmed both individually and on a large scale. He recounted how professors have been told "your hiring was a costly mistake" and have been directed to accept job offers elsewhere. This would

cause YC to lose some of its best and brightest young professors which can breed a talent-drain as qualified professors would be replaced with overworked, less-qualified, adjuncts.

With faculty less excited to work on at YU, some may even opt to leave altogether. Berman cited the case of Dr. Gillian Steinberg, a longtime professor well-liked by the student body and faculty alike, making the abrupt decision to leave YU given the financial and academic turmoil. Dr. Steinberg carefully designed and crafted the First Year Writing program, one

tual growth.

However, there did seem to be some disagreement within the student body itself. One student openly wondered if it was reasonable for the students to comment on financial concerns before having a better understanding of the behind-the-scenes work being done by the administration and suggested meetings with Senior Vice President Josh Joseph or Vice President for Legal Affairs Avi Lauer to enhance transparency. Another suggested that not all the students were in agreement about the current Core requirements and that some would be open to changes and reduced requirements to enable them to choose more of their classes.

Berman, however, rejected the notion that fewer requirements would enhance YC education, countering that "we stand for synthesis; we stand for shleimut." He continued by reiterating the ideas expressed earlier in the meeting that academic Jewish Studies and Core classes were vital to expanding and enlightening students to the expanse of intellectual ideas meant to be pursued in any college and specifically here at YU.

The council then shifted the focus of the forum to discuss a more formalized presentation of the student body's perspective on changes and developments to the academics in YC. Berman presented a draft of a document which officially laid out the student body's fundamental beliefs when it comes to the curriculum and academics. Dubbed the "Statement of Principles," the document presents five main points the student body hopes will be taken

into account and addressed during these turbulent times.

Firstly, the document stresses the importance of high academic standards for an academic institution and highlights the need to maintain the character of Yeshiva College. Secondly, it urges all proposals and recommendations to be discussed with faculty and those with the most involvement in the actual education process on campus and without unilateral decisions. The document continues by emphasizing the need to maintain high standards in Judaic Studies as well, citing the nature of Yeshiva University's mission and the unique character of the campus. Another point mentioned is the need for transparency and proper communication when changes are made on campus. Lastly, the document concludes declaring the ultimate concern of the University should be its students. Quoting directly from Yeshiva University's mission statement, the document notes the general goal to "ennoble students in purpose...enable them in capacity...[and] make possible achievement of nobility" implores the administration to always prioritize the needs of the students above all else.

Elsewhere on campus, students organized a separate letter writing campaign as a grassroots way to encourage as many students as possible to express their feelings on potential changes to the university. An organizer of the campaign, who wished to remain anonymous, stated: "The campaign is at least intended to ensure that open and frank discussion takes place between the administration, the faculty, and the students, opening the door for significant changes to current proposals." He also added that he believes "the campaign has already succeeded in making it clear to the administration that students expect

a voice in the college's proceedings and for their interests to be taken into account."

Going forward, students are hoping for more transparency and consideration for budget cut effects both in the short and long-term. Student leaders are also hoping that the recent student rallying and petitioning is only the start of something bigger. When asked about organizing the student body going forward, YCSA Vice President Ben Kohane said, "This is definitely just the start of what I hope will be an invigorated student body who cares about their quality of education, having an influential hand in the future of our university." Indeed, this new unified front will hopefully ensure the students end up with a say in the restructuring process during these times of change.

RUMORS AND HEARSAY HAVE CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE OF UNCERTAINTY AND ANXIETY AMONGST THE STUDENT BODY, WITH MANY WONDERING WHAT YESHIVA COLLEGE WILL LOOK LIKE IN THE COMING YEARS. IN EFFORTS TO QUELL SOME OF THE UNREST AND ENCOURAGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT DURING THESE FORMATIVE AND IMPORTANT TIMES, STUDENT GROUPS HAVE STARTED TO TAKE MORE CONCRETE ACTION.

which all YC and Syms students must participate. With unilateral changes being made by those who appear unconcerned about the academic reputation of the University, Steinberg simply couldn't see herself being here any longer.

Another concern outlined by Berman was the value of a YU degree. Should the administration's priorities or budgetary constraints render the curriculum inadequate or deficient, the reputation of the university could suffer along with the value of its diplomas. Consequently, this could reduce recruitment efforts and be a detriment to the makeup of the student body and the campus environment as a whole.

While Berman also seemed to indicate there was a sem-



blance of callousness directed at faculty and student concerns, he shied away from directly accusing the administration of completely neglecting academic concerns. However, he believed that a unified front by the students on behalf of maintaining academic standards could influence the final curricular and budgetary decisions.

After the crowd was briefed on the proposals and the general concerns of faculty and student leaders, Berman opened up the forum for questions and comments. Some students asked if the cuts will ever be reversed or if requirements would be replaced, but there was too much uncertainty for student leaders to be able to confidently answer either of those questions. Others openly expressed concerns over the potential loss of opportunities for research and increased class sizes, fearing both would harm student-professor relationships and intellec-

Wilf Campus Welcomes Variety of New Student Groups

By David Rubinstein

This semester, the Yeshiva University General Assembly introduced seventeen new clubs to the extensive list of student groups on campus.

Business-related clubs abounded among the newcomers, including the Consulting Club, East Asia Business Club, and the Non-Profit Club. The Ice Hockey Club, Maccabees Melee, Ping Pong Club, and Table Soccer Association debuted among the sports and recreational activities. New health and medicine groups included the YU Cancer Society, Get in Shape Club, and the Yoga and Wellness Club. Cultural clubs consisted of Beards & Flatcaps and Pars Club (Persian Cultural Society). On the academic side, two journals officially applied for club recognition. Finally, the Environmental Society is new on campus as well.

Some clubs begin with the initiative of one or two individuals as a platform for like-minded people to come together. "We serve the unique, out-of-the box students of YU," Binyamin Goldman (Syms '18) said of the club Beards & Flatcaps, of which he is president. "We would have called it the Hipster Club, but that would have antithetical to our mission." Goldman sees his club's mission as "providing introspective people with fun experiences," such as trips to museums followed by discussion about the exhibits seen.

Maccabees Melee came from similar origins. President Michael Alpert (YC '15) said a friend was exposing him to diverse martial arts "through YouTube videos and by going to watch fights here in New York. We thought it would be a cool idea to start a club at YU to see if there are others out there who were also into this sort of sport." The club's goal is to expose members to the "various martial arts

techniques and styles from around the world," Alpert stated.

Other groups achieved official club status with a larger membership already on board. "It came to a point where about ten of us were playing hockey regularly," said Ice Hockey Club President Miles Wolmark (YC '16), a history major. "There isn't really anything hockey-oriented at YU, but a lot of people care about hockey here," he remarked. Wolmark said he and his colleagues are seeking to make an ice hockey club team at YU.

Jonathan Green (YC '15), Editor-in-Chief of the Political Science Journal of YU, said the publication has been around since the '70s. After a bout of inconsistent distribution, "the journal as a whole was due for some important improvements, in terms of aesthetics, marketing, editing, and overall professionalism," Green said. Double-majoring in political science and Jewish studies, he is "excited to be part of the journal's revival," which includes, among other improvements, "a wonderful cast of students," a "supportive" faculty

20 signatures and having the support of a faculty advisor. GA approval gives clubs official recognition on the Wilf Campus. The General Assembly consists of the four respective presidents of YSU, SOY, YCSA, and SYMSSC and the senior co-chair of the Student Life Committee.

Student opinion seemed divided about the GA inductions. Eli Azrak (YC '17) a sophomore double majoring in biology and psychology, thought the addition of new clubs "shows YU's commitment to expanding extracurricular opportunities for students." Conversely, a sophomore majoring in political science wondered how new clubs with small memberships continue to be approved even amidst YU's financial troubles.

"The financial concerns of the University have no bearing on clubs," Szegedi said about spending on student activities. "Student Council budgets are collected from a separate Student Activity Fee that is part of the tuition - our budgets are only affected by the number of students enrolling each year and has nothing to do with the overall financials of the University," the GA Chairman affirmed.

Funding for club-sponsored events are appropriated "on an event-to event basis," Szegedi explained. "There is no allotted budget for each club per semester; rather we try to work on individual events they request and find appropriate expenditures based on that."

The Szegedi's reaction to the new student groups? He remained enthusiastic: "A diverse selection of clubs ensures that everyone can find events and extracurricular activities that interest them." He is confident that the new clubs "will take their responsibility to deliver great events with maximum care."

"It's always exciting to see new ideas and areas of interest being offered to the students," Szegedi remarked.

"THE FINANCIAL CONCERNS OF THE UNIVERSITY HAVE NO BEARING ON [STUDENT] CLUBS," CLARIFIED YSU PRESIDENT NATAN SZEGEDI. "STUDENT COUNCIL BUDGETS ARE COLLECTED FROM A SEPARATE STUDENT ACTIVITY FEE THAT IS PART OF THE TUITION. OUR BUDGETS ARE ONLY AFFECTED BY THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLING EACH YEAR."

The two journals which applied for official recognition by the General Assembly have actually been around for a while. The Yeshiva University Journal of Fine Arts, for one, is currently in its fifth year of publication. Editor-in-Chief Makena Owens (SCW '16) explained: "Club status allows us to better communicate with deans and student councils for funding and also enables us to have events," which the journal has not held in the past. Majoring in English literature herself, Owens said student contributors are from a variety of majors. "That is the beauty of the journal. It showcases artistic and literary talents across all disciplines," she reflected.

advisory board, and significant expansion beyond YC to Stern College for Women. Green hopes official recognition as a YCSA and SCWSC publication "lays the groundwork for future years of cross-campus cooperation on this project."

Natan Szegedi (YC '15), Chairman of the General Assembly and President of the Yeshiva Student Union, said the GA approves a club if it brings "new, not-existing club interest to campus." Szegedi reported that the GA also evaluates the positive impact a club can have on the student body, the new ideas it could bring and its inherent value. There are some technical requirements, too, such as collecting

Purim at YU

By Shuey Mirkin

Facebook's Event section seems to indicate that the whole Jewish world was at the Zusha concert on Purim night, where YU's very own Shlomo Gaisin brought down the roof at the Bowery Ballroom. Did someone say special guest appearance from Matisyahu?

For those of us who decided to stay behind at YU, there was no shortage of things to do. Starting with ample nourishment from the legendary Carlos and Gabby's, the Purim Chagigah, 2015 edition, got off to a great - though slightly delayed - start. For one short day, all the stress of midterms and essays faded away, and the only thing to do was, as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Steve Miller would say, Dance Dance Dance. With Neshoma Orchestra, playing all the hits, students and rebbeim joined together to sing and dance and celebrate the holiday. Some highlights included the traditional Purim night party at Rabbi Meir Goldwicht's apartment, where his endearing accent and vast wellsprings of Torah and happiness always draw crowds. After several hours of good food, friends, and spirited dancing, everyone was just about ready to find about

what Josh Botwinick, Yechiel Schwab, Avi J. Schwartz, and the other inimitable members of the Purim Shpiel had been planning for us. To put it lightly, they did not disappoint. From a hilarious round of celebrity Family Feud (#HaMashpia), to several other reasons why you should take a semester of Latin,

Junk. Apparently, Stern girls work at the Seforim Sale, and some of them even live in Brookdale. Who knew?

During the day, dedicated participants of the new Kimu V'Kiblu Kollal program learned for the duration of the morning and were treated to a Golan-style Purim seudah. Music Vs.,

headlined by the indomitable Mark Weingarten, provided opportunities for students to transform their personal days of joy into a day of creating joy for others. Throughout the morning, groups of students spread out to hospitals and nursing homes across New York City to bring music, smiles, and Mishloach Manot to those who needed a little extra happiness. With guitars, ridiculous costumes, and candy to spare, these generous men and women gave their morning to spread Purim cheer all around town. In the afternoon, everyone branched off to their individual Purim seudot, and the awesome sounds of a Purim well spent could be heard well into the night.

However, on Shushan Purim, students woke up (some later than others) to the realization that, as much as their incredible Purim may have implied, their midterms had not in fact gone away. Let's hope the light and joy created this Purim will carry us all the way to the next one, and L'shana Haba B'Yerushalayim.



Avi J. Schwartz, Shua Brick, Josh Botwinick and the crew treated us to an epic cover of Mark Ronson's *Uptown Funk*.

the crew had the audience in stitches. To close it all off, we were treated to an epic cover of Mark Ronson's anthem to the upper latitudes of Manhattan, appropriately titled *Uptown*

may have implied, their midterms had not in fact gone away. Let's hope the light and joy created this Purim will carry us all the way to the next one, and L'shana Haba B'Yerushalayim.

YU Neuroscience Societies Host Speaker

By Ezra Brand

The human brain is a most fascinating object. It is the organ which is the seat of thought, and what makes us truly human. It seems only appropriate that it is so massively complicated, and we seem to be so far from a truly comprehensive understanding of it. The study of the brain - neuroscience - is a fascinating field which has the potential for amazing discoveries change how we understand ourselves.

In many respects, the computer occupies a similar place in society's collective thought. The parallels, as well as the dissimilarities, between the brain and the computer have been made since the early days of computing. The similarities are both clear and exciting: Both are tremendously powerful, calculating, objects, making many calculations per second. The fastest super-computer has not yet reached the calculating speed of the brain. (A caveat: it is difficult to measure these things, and in any case supercomputers are very close to outperforming the brain.)

The computer in its many forms, colloquially generally referred to under the somewhat-vague term "tech," is increasingly in the news, as is the brain. Indeed, one recent entry in a Washington Post blog began: "Neuroscience is appearing everywhere." The Nasdaq, which is weighted toward technology stocks, has reached unprecedented heights, and Apple, the technology behemoth, is now the most valuable company in history. The need for computer programming talent is voracious and only growing. Technology has reached every part of our lives, a fact which does not need to be stressed.

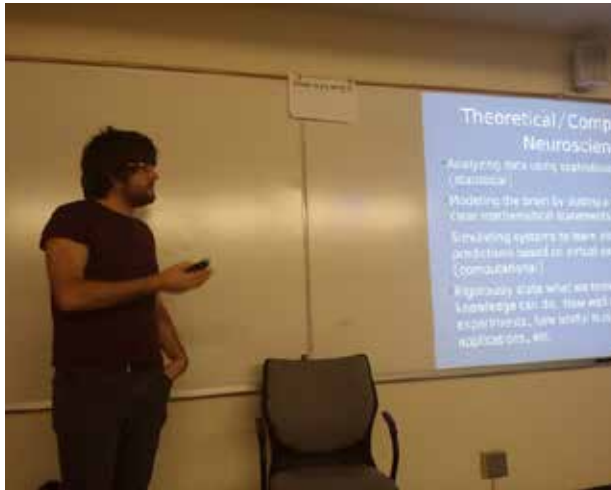
It is only appropriate, then, that there is a scientific field devoted to computational modelling of the brain, called "computational neuroscience." This is different than the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), although there is, as there should be, collaboration between the fields. AI is the attempt to create an artificial "mind" on the same level of intelligence as humans, while computational neuroscience simply attempts to describe the brain as it is. While not connected to computers per se, it attempts to make use of mathematical algorithms to model the brain's method of processing information, in a similar way that computers use algorithm to process data.

In February, Josh Merel from the Computational Neuroscience team at Columbia University came to speak in YU. The event was sponsored by the Neuroscience Societies at YC and Stern and a couple other science clubs. While YC does not, unfortunately, offer a major in neuroscience - Stern does offer such a major, though it is technically a major in psychology/biology with a concentration in neuroscience - there are many students who are interested in neuroscience, and the Neuroscience Society attempts to satisfy that curiosity. (A former co-president of the Neuroscience Club, Donny Rhodes, recently left for the neuroscientifically greener pastures of Penn, where a major in neuroscience is offered.)

Merel is the second lecturer from Columbia to come and

speak this semester. According to Dovi Muller, president of the Neuroscience Society at YC, the Neuroscience Society had finalized this semester a collaboration with Columbia University's Neuroscience Group to establish a lecture series in YU. Advanced doctoral students from Columbia's world-famous PhD program are delivering talks to YU's undergraduate community on a wide range of topics within neuroscience. PhD candidate Cyndel Vollmer's presentation much more general overview of neuroscience just a few weeks before Merel's visit was first, did not focus on any specific area of research.

MEREL CLEARLY DISPLAYED A FANTASTIC GRASP OF BOTH NEUROSCIENCE IN GENERAL AND OF HIS PARTICULAR AREA OF SPECIALIZATION. ALL IN ALL, IT WAS ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL EVENT FOR THE NEUROSCIENCE SOCIETIES OF YU, AS IT CERTAINLY CONVEYED THE EXCITEMENT OF WORKING AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF A FIELD THAT LIES AT THE VERY HEART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN.



Merel came to speak under the auspices of Columbia's program to popularize cutting-edge neuroscience. His presentation drew a respectable crowd—around twenty people—despite the fact that other popular events were happening on campus at the same time. Some more advance students of neuroscience were in attendance, including YU's own Dr. Norman Adler, who is recognized as one of the founding fathers of Behavioral Neuroscience as an independent field of research and has mentored many students in YU interested in neuroscience, as well as Zevi Muller, the club president's brother, who is a junior colleague of Merel's.

After introductions by Dr. Adler and Zevi Muller, Merel discussed what computational neuroscience is in general, followed by more complex issues and his own work. He explained that computational neuroscience is a kind of theoretical neuroscience, which creates models to help make sense of data produced by research on the brain. This helps sharpen the ideas presented by experiments, and facilitates more sophisticated experiments. Merel then began to enumerate why we bother to study neuroscience, and took care to lay it out in a systematic way. He broke it down into three main reasons: To cure medical issues (such as Alzheimer's, sleep issues, etc.); to understand the nature of intelligence; and for philosophical reasons (understanding the mind and consciousness). The various subspecialties of contemporary neuroscience research were enumerated as well, as well as common methods of research. This overview was a nice segue from Cyndell's overview from the previous lecture in the series.

Merel then went on to discuss many other aspects of neuroscience research, such as the work that won the most recent Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, "for their discoveries of cells that constitute a positioning system in the brain." Among other things, he told a fascinating story about a computational neuroscientist who was trying to create a mathematical model, but the current state of math did not seem to be able to model the data that he had. Terence Tao, a mathematical prodigy who is currently a professor in UCLA, was able to assist him by creating new mathematical models. Tao then wrote about it in his popular math blog.

Merel clearly displayed his fantastic grasp of both neuroscience in general and of his specialty. However, many felt that the presentation lacked background and some concrete examples. Still, all in all, it was another successful event for the Neuroscience Societies of YU, as it certainly conveyed some of the excitement in working at the cutting edge of a field that lies at the very heart of what it means to be human.

Kimu V'kiblu Kollel

By Darren May

Purim is inherently dichotomous. On the one hand, this is a day where our Rabbis say that we accepted the Torah on a level that was perhaps higher than the acceptance of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This would lead one to think the proper mode of service on Purim should be to solely learn our ancient texts. On the other hand, there is a commandment on Purim to be merry. According to many rabbinic authorities, the manifestation of this joy is accomplished through drinking wine. Many people run with an enthusiasm rarely seen throughout the rest of the year to drink wine on Purim, but the same fervor to learn is rarely seen on Purim. However, this was not the case this year in Yeshiva University.

This year, an anonymous donor helped fund a revolutionary initiative run by the Student Organization of Yeshiva and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) called the Kimu V'Kiblu Kollel. The idea was simple: Before yeshiva students go and

fulfill the commandment to be merry on Purim day, they should spend time learning Torah. One might think that this program would not succeed. People have other Purim plans, and who wants to stay in the beit midrash on Purim day?

However, the program was a smashing success. "This is a real testament to how great the students are in YU," said the president of SOY Jacob Bernstein. Bernstein continued, "The Kollel was an original and extremely successful program, boasting over 150

participants."

The Kollel started off with prayer at 7:45 in the Glueck Beit Midrash. After the reading of the megillah, there was dancing and singing. Following the conclusion of the prayer service at 9:15, there was an immediate din of Jewish learning. Learning continued until 11:00, when many participants in the program went to the YU Cafeteria to partake in a festive Purim meal. After eating and singing, and afterwards people went about their day doing whatever else they had planned for Purim.

Bernstein said, "It was inspiring to see people get together and learn on a day that is not normally filled with Torah learning." It's amazing how the YU student body never ceases to do amazing things." Just a few emails from mashgiach Rabbi Bacon garnered over 150 people to devote their Purim to the study of Torah. The fact that so many students were willing to spend their Purim break learning is something that the whole school should be proud of.



Intramurals: A Sports Lover's Best Friend

By Joey Chesir

For many Yeshiva University students, the busy dual curriculum schedule can mean a lot of stress and very little free time. Some students opt to spend nights learning in night seder or exercising in the workout room. A large number of students, however, have taken up intramural sports as a fun way to engage in athletics without dealing with the rigors of an NCAA team schedule. YU currently offers intramurals in basketball, roller hockey, floor hockey, soccer, and ultimate Frisbee while flag football has been offered in previous years. Many students even take up positions of leadership in their respective leagues, acting as team captains or even league commissioners. Avi Margulies, a sophomore from West Hempstead, New York, for instance, is captain of a team in the roller hockey league. "As captain," Margulies explains, "it's my responsibility to inform my team when we are playing and to make sure we have enough players. Additionally, throughout the semester we monitor the games to make sure the teams are split up evenly." Margulies also felt the atmosphere of the roller hockey intramural league was appropriate for the players. "The roller hockey league takes place on Monday and Wednesday nights. The league is just serious enough to create competition but not so serious to get too heated."

Intramural basketball is known to be one of the most popular intramural sports in Yeshiva University, consisting of two separate

leagues, one taking place on Tuesday nights and another happening on Wednesday nights. Sophomore David Moskovich, like Margulies, is familiar with the benefits of leading an intramural team, albeit in basketball. "I happen to really like intramurals, and I think it's good YU has them. When you have shiur in the morning, night seder at night, on top of homework and studying, there's no set time to exercise and blow off some steam...Basketball has to be part of my agenda. It's competitive, the players respect each other, and everyone's there for that same reason."

However, Moskovich felt some areas of the league could be improved. "For teams where players don't show up, it [can] get frustrating. Also, I would like some kind of selection process for players in either the Tuesday or Wednesday night leagues, which cater to two different levels of intensity. The process would help differentiate between exactly what players are looking for, that being either highly intense or more pickup-style basketball."

Another popular intramural sport on the YU campus is soccer. Taking place on Monday nights, soccer intramurals are especially popular among foreign-born YU students, especially the Europeans and South Americans. Despite being more of a pickup-style than an actual league, soccer intramurals feature a variety of players and an intense level of play.

In spite of the popularity of the intramurals, many question how YU can maintain so many recreational opportunities, especially

considering the University's many well-documented financial troubles. Despite the University's fiscal problems, the Athletic Department still finds intramural sports to be a vital part of student life at YU.

Specifically, Athletic Director Joe Bednarsh was adamant about the importance of intramurals for YU students. "It's expensive to maintain all of these sports leagues, including uniforms, officials, and other necessary costs. I want to be able to provide opportunities to the members of the student body who aren't part of the athletic teams, so that they have a chance to play organized sports, and therefore that's not something I'm not willing to sacrifice in terms of budget."

The prioritization of recreational activities for YU students is certainly admirable, and hopefully they will not be sacrificed if YU's financial troubles continue. Without question, many students consider intramurals to be highly beneficial area of their YU experience, so the continued presence of intramural sports on campus should definitely be highlighted.



Intramural Basketballers David Moskovich (left) and Izzy Friedman

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Philosophy Professor Departs For Hebrew University

By Doron Levine

Dr. Aaron Segal, one of Yeshiva University's two full-time philosophy professors, has shared many fascinating ideas with his students, including his proof that everything has God as a part, his uncertainty as to whether time travel is possible, and his suspicion that rocks think. Described by *The Commentator* as a "fantasy-world" hire when he came to YU in Fall 2013, Dr. Segal is an ordained rabbi and a student favorite even amongst those not majoring in philosophy – his first year seminar titled



Dr. Aaron Segal

"Philosophy and Science Fiction" was among the first to fill up during registration for this semester. A tenure-track professor of philosophy, Dr. Segal originally intended to stay at YU long term. But, much to his students' chagrin, Dr. Segal has recently confirmed rumors that Spring 2016 will be his final semester at YU.

After completing three full years of professorship at YU, Dr. Segal will move to Israel to join the faculty of Jerusalem's Hebrew University as a tenure-track lecturer in the department of philosophy. At Hebrew University, he will teach courses in metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and other subjects, and he will conduct research and direct graduate work primarily in metaphysics, one of his areas of specialty. His looming departure will not restrict his teaching during the next year and a half; he may even offer an advanced seminar in metaphysics during his final semester.

Dr. Segal explained that his departure is largely motivated by

he and his wife's desire to live and raise their family in Israel. When asked if YU's financial situation played a role in the decision, Dr. Segal responded, "It's possible. But it's possible that it would have made no difference. I find it very difficult to disentangle our various motivations and discern how much of a role each is playing." Dr. Segal is confident that the philosophy department will continue without him, but he expressed hope that the administration will hire a full-time faculty member to replace him. He said that he will "sorely miss" his students at YU, whom he described as "truly fantastic: bright, earnest, humble, and fun." But his students will surely miss him more; one student of his remarked, "Dr. Segal, with his humble rigor, is the best professor I've had at YU. Clear, easygoing, and manifestly brilliant, Dr. Segal is probably irreplaceable."

Yeshiva University Students Attend and Speak at AIPAC Policy Conference

By Esti Hirt

From Sunday, March 1st to Tuesday, March 3rd, 16,000 Pro-Israel activists gathered in Washington D.C. for AIPAC's 56th annual Policy Conference. The conference, held in the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, was bustling with representatives from all 50 states varying in age, political preference, ethnicity, and religion. In fact, AIPAC was proud to mention numerous times throughout the program that it was both the largest and most diverse Policy Conference they had ever held.

The three-day event is planned for months beforehand and no minute goes to waste. There are two days full of large general sessions with speakers such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, plus hundreds of smaller break-out sessions to choose from. Session topics range from discussing Israeli film and food to analyzing China's relationship with Israel and the Middle East to learning about all of the different water-related technologies invented in Israel. The conference then culminates with a third day, where activists take what they have learned and put it to use lobbying on Capitol Hill.

The amount of professionals who use "vacation days" to attend the conference in Washington is greatly acknowledged and appreciated, however the group of conference attendees that is most recognized and spoken about is the student population. More than 2,500 students from over 490 campuses were present this year, amongst them 260 student government presidents from all 50 states.

The entire campus and early engagement branch of the AIPAC staff works for months to secure hotel rooms, funding, and other logistical details in order to ensure student participation at the conference. The investment in student delegates is obvious, and they are frequently referred to as the future of the pro-Israel movement. It is reiterated time and again that students are the activists who will ensure that the strong U.S.- Israel alliance is maintained.

While AIPAC primarily takes a political standpoint and only engages in direct contact with policy makers, for AIPAC trained student activists on campus things are a bit different. With groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), and movements such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) spreading across campuses throughout the country, Pro-Israel students today need more support than ever.

Therefore, AIPAC has created an entire student network with field organizers and advisors in order to help students and Pro-Israel groups on campus figure out how to best combat the opposition they face. These college groups do not only react to opposition, but they are proactive and organize different speakers and events to spread Israel awareness. Additionally, with the guidance of AIPAC, multiple groups, including Yeshiva University's YUPAC, organize lobbying missions both in their school's district and to Washington D.C.

Yeshiva University students were present at the conference, some as YU delegates attending through the allotted spots given to the university by AIPAC, and some students having attended separately with family, friends, or various organizations. Students who attended the conference specifically as YU

delegates had the opportunity to mingle with other Pro-Israel students from across the country and hear about their experiences on campus. With special sessions intended just for college students in order to discuss ways in which to better the

YU DELEGATES HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MINGLE WITH OTHER PRO-ISRAEL STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND HEAR ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES ON CAMPUS. WITH SPECIAL SESSIONS INTENDED JUST FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS IN ORDER TO DISCUSS WAYS IN WHICH TO BETTER THE SITUATION ON CAMPUSES, YU DELEGATES WERE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONVERSATION AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT SITUATIONS STUDENTS HAVE FACED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS.



The author Esti Hirt (left) and her sister Leeza at the AIPAC Policy Conference.

situation on campuses, YU delegates were able to contribute to the conversation and learn more about the different situations students have faced in the past few months.

However, while all students and participants have an exciting experience, mine was a little more unique.

For a short while during the convention I was not sitting

amongst the crowd of 16,000, but alongside my twin sister Leeza (Columbia University '18), I was standing on the stage. As an Israel advocate who has been involved with AIPAC since high school, a few members of the AIPAC staff knew that I would be attending Policy Conference amidst three generations of my family, twelve members in all. They were excited to have two college activists who influenced their family to get involved, and asked us if we would be willing to get on stage and encourage others to do the same.

While the experience of being on the stage was fun and a little daunting, being backstage was ten times more so. High-ranking AIPAC members, The Times of Israel Editor-in-Chief David Horowitz, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Powers were all within a few feet from where we were sitting. Backstage (in a separate room) as well was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was scheduled to speak following our appearance. It was inspiring to see so many important people congregated, each preparing to address the crowd. While everyone backstage came from different walks of life and held different political views, they were all speaking because they realized the value in the cause and in addressing the people who support it.

Our appearance only lasted about a minute and a half. However, the response we have gotten has been overwhelming. When we got on stage we were not only representing our family, but each of us were standing proudly as activists from our respective schools. More importantly, we were standing as young Orthodox women, and people from communities across the country and Israel have contacted us, expressing their excitement to have seen two "frum" girls up on stage (or on their computer screen).

For Leeza and I, it was certainly a once in a lifetime experience. However, hopefully we will see more Orthodox, or even better, more YU students on the stage in the years to come.



Cake Wars 2015: A Huge Success

By Eli Lipnik

On Wednesday, February 18th, after months of preparation, the event both YU and Stern students had been anticipating all year, finally arrived—Sharsheret's Cake Wars 2015. With over 300 participants composing over 40 teams, students from both campuses came together to support Sharsheret, a breast cancer awareness and research organization, decorating cakes with hopes of becoming Cake Wars champions.

The evening began with an informational and inspirational speech about the organization, given by Shera Dubitsky, the Director of Navigation and Support Services at Sharsheret. She shared some personal anecdotes of her connection with women afflicted with breast cancer and explained the importance of the interconnected web of support Sharsheret offers. Moreover, she eloquently delivered the message that Sharsheret is important because it gives individuals strength and a sense of unity knowing that they are not alone, in their battle. Dubitsky was followed by Avi Kessler, the president of Sharsheret on the YU campus, who delivered a heartfelt and passionate introduction and welcoming to the event. Subsequently, he revealed the theme of the evening—heroism. This theme was intended to be incorporated into the design of each cake decorated during the competition.

Heroism is an ideal that truly fit as the theme of the evening. It is recorded that about one in every eight women will develop

breast cancer over the course of their lives, and every individual that fights the battle is a hero. In fact, there were quite a few very creative cakes that embodied this notion. One of the many innovative ideas was a "Pinkerbell" cake that had the appearance of a pink-Tinkerbell, who would go around curing individuals with her fairy dust. Another cake from the evening, was an extremely realistic sub-sandwich stylized cake, based on the concept of a "heroes sub sandwich." The winning cake,

helped raise money for an important cause, but I had a fun time doing it too." Sophomore Akiva Marder similarly exclaimed, "I didn't know I could have such a good time at a YU event. I wish there could be a Cake Wars twice a semester!"

Beyond the cake decorating, merchandise was sold, such as YU Sharsheret t-shirts, sunglasses, pens, stress balls, pins, decks of cards, and more. In addition, there was a specialized backdrop in which students could don cool gear and take pictures in front of a Sharsheret photo-booth. With the act of giving in the air that evening, many participants stayed behind to assist the YU Sharsheret board in cleaning up, while girls from Stern took many of the remaining cakes to Times Square to give them out to the homeless.

Kessler beautifully summed up the evening and gave YU students much to look forward to in the coming years. "Cake Wars stands alone as one of the most anticipated events of the year here at YU. Each year the Sharsheret club works fervently to improve and build upon the event, creating a product that is fresh, more appealing, and more successful than previously. We have the unique opportunity to share our passion for such an important organization as Sharsheret, while creating a vibrant and spirited event aimed at defeating Breast Cancer. Cake Wars 2015 brought out a significantly larger crowd and we were able to raise 25% more than we have in years past. The

students were clearly pumped to be there and they built some of the most unique and professional looking cakes I have ever seen. Overall, Cake Wars 2015 was a monumental success and the planning toward Cake Wars 2016 is already underway."



One Cake Wars Group Enjoys Their Cake

however, was modeled off the Superman symbol. Overall, all the cakes were exceptional, each in its own, special way.

The event was a hit, a huge success. Carly Friedman of Stern College, said, "I had the most incredible time! I not only

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A Macs-tastic Basketball Season

By Adir Feifel

The 2014-2015 Maccabees Men's Basketball season was the start of a new era. For the first time since 1972, the team did not have Jonathan Halpert as their head coach – instead, Elliot Steinmetz took over the reigns from the legendary 400-game winner. After achieving a remarkable level of success coaching Hebrew Academy of Nassau County and North Shore Hebrew Academy in the high school Yeshiva League (while also heading the gold-medal winning U-18 Team USA in the Israeli Maccabiah Games), Steinmetz returned to his alma mater at YU to coach at the NCAA level and bring a new style of exciting basketball to the Max Stern Athletic Center (MSAC).

The head coaching change was hardly the only storyline heading into the new season though. Only seven players from the previous year's squad returned, led by senior star Benjy Ritholtz who had a brilliant Academic All-American campaign in 2013-2014. There were many transfers ranging from post presence Michael Berg to three-point threat Joseph Ammar, many of whom it was clear would make significant contributions to the Maccabees' rotation. In addition, Yogev Berdugo, another accomplished Jewish high school coach, joined Steinmetz as assistant coach and was a tremendous asset in developing player skills. However, arguably the biggest story of all was that last year's leading scorer Yisrael Feld deciding to sit out from basketball for the year, putting an early dent in any playoff hopes for the Macs.

As a whole, expectations were not too high for the new-look Maccabees, but by the time winter break came around, they found themselves at the top of the Skyline

Conference standings. This surprising run to first place was keyed by a six-game winning streak after starting off the year 3-3. "Maybe we caught a few teams by surprise," Steinmetz said remarking on the Macs' early season success. He continued, "It was fun and something our guys worked for, I'm glad they got to experience being at the top for a bit. But ultimately, it only matters where you are at the end of February in the



conference." The Maccabees were lead in their winning ways by the stellar play of Ritholtz with his 17.7 points per game and the breakout season of junior forward Shelby Rosenberg who was a force to be reckoned with on both sides of the court (15.8 points per game and a team-leading 8.1 rebounds per game). Another third-year player who shined for the Macs was Shaje Weiss, who in previous years struggled to get playing time, but quickly established himself as a starter that was top-five in the conference for shooting percentage and the team's go-to defender. The MSAC was rocking during home games, and Macs Madness was back on campus.

The goal of the Maccabees coming

into the season was to host a home playoff game in the Skyline Conference tournament, and that seemed well within reach as the spring semester beckoned. This was not only thanks to the Macs' impressive record, but also due to the fact that two significant additions were being made to their roster after winter break. The first of those was the heavily touted recruit Benjamin Oirech from Israel joining the team to play as a 6'9" center.

career points.

Despite being in excellent position to seize a top playoff seed earlier, the Macs needed to win their last three games of the season to take the fifth place spot, meaning they would need to play Old Westbury on the road for their first playoff game in two years. The game ended up being a blowout, even with Rosenberg putting up a monster game of 29 points and 11 rebounds. As the final buzzer rang and MacsLive wrapped up their coverage of the Maccabees' 70-82 playoff loss, the most exciting Men's Basketball season in recent memory came to a close.

Although the Maccabees did not get to experience a storybook ending, this season still was undoubtedly a step in the right direction. For the first time in years the team finished with a winning record in both overall and conference play. Coach Steinmetz said, "It was great to get some playoff experience for our guys coming back, but they also see how hard they have to work to take the next steps." In fact the Macs will have almost all their players back next year, for the only

departing senior from this season was their team leader Benjy Ritholtz - who again received the Capital One Academic All-American Award for the second straight year and Skyline First Team All-Conference (Rosenberg received the latter honor as well).

The future is bright for the Maccabees and the Steinmetz era is off to an excellent start. "Overall, the goal for us is to find ways to improve every day," he said, "if we can do that over the entire offseason as players and coaches, then we should be very successful." Success that Macs players and fans alike hope will finally lead to that elusive conference championship and the chance to play in the NCAA Tournament.

Got Farbrengen? Chabad Club Organizes Shabbaton

By Raphy Sassieni

On February 20 and 21, Shabbat Parshat Terumah, over 70 students from Yeshiva University, Lander College, and Queens College gathered in Crown Heights for the annual YU Chabad Club Crown Heights Shabbaton. Upon arriving in Crown Heights, the students were split up into two groups. Each group experienced a tour of 770 Eastern Parkway, the world headquarters of Chabad, and of the Rebbe's library. The tour of the library was given by the Rebbe's chief librarian, Rabbi Shalom Ber Levine. After the tours, the students went to the house of Rabbi Moshe Rubashkin who graciously housed all of the students and most of the shabbaton. The group davened Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat at Kollel Menachem, where Rabbi Zalman Goldberg gave a chassidus shiur before Maariv. After davening, the guys were divided into groups of five to eat dinner at different houses in the community. The entire group then came back together in the basement Rubashkin home for a spiritually uplifting post-dinner farbrengen. Together with tens of bochurim from Yeshivas Ohelei Torah in Crown Heights, the YU students heard a brief but in-depth introduction to chassidus from Rabbi Yossi Paltiel, founder and director of InsideChassidus.org. Over 100 people attended the farbrengen that ended past two in the morning.



Shacharit was again held at the Kollel and the group came together for lunch at the Rubashkin home. There, the students heard from the world renowned author and educator, Rabbi Simon Jacobson, author of the best-selling book, Towards a Meaningful Life. Rabbi Jacobson spoke about the tactics he used to memorize the Lubavitcher Rebbe's sichos (discourses) that would go on for hours. The Rebbe would give a sichah of Shabbat afternoon that would many times last well after the

end of Shabbat. He would then write down the whole sicha word-for-word after Shabbat and then send it to the Rebbe for approval. Even more challenging, he said, were the three-day holidays where he would have to memorize three days' worth of discourses and remember which information was said in which. The trick, Rabbi Jacobson said, was to clear the mind of all thoughts. The human mind naturally processes information upon hearing it. However, once it begins processing the new information, the listener is busy relating the information to information he heard in the past and less attention is left for remembering the words. Therefore, he said, the trick is train the mind not to process any information and to only take in the words at face-value. After hearing from Rabbi Jacobson, the students sang and heard from the well-known speaker and educator, Rabbi Chaim Schochet, while Rabbi Rubashkin lead a beautiful Havdalah to end off an amazing Shabbat.

After the students packed their bags, the group headed towards the Levi Yitzchok Library for a kumzits lead by Reb Shlomo Katz. After countless niggunim (songs), stories, and dancing, the bus returned back to YU filled with spiritually uplifted and rejuvenated students. The whole Shabbaton would not have been possible without the tireless work of the Chabad Club of YU and especially its head, Danny Fordham.

YU's Active Minds Discuss Alcoholism

By David Tribuch

With the holiday of Purim fast approaching, the YU Active Minds club hosted an event on alcoholism awareness. As expected, the event focused on alcohol consumption on Purim, but not necessarily in the way one would have expected. Surprisingly, the theme of the night was not one of temperance, but rather encouraging students to simply be safer about their drinking habits. Dr Chaim Nissel, Dean of Students on the Wilf Campus, opened the evening's discussion by saying that "we're not here to tell you to drink or not drink, we just want a discussion about alcohol and safer drinking."

The event was divided into three parts, with three panelists discussing different aspects of drinking on Purim, and alcoholism in general. The first panelist, Dr. Esty Rollhaus, an MD and Psychiatric resident, discussed the physical effects of alcohol on the body, and how to prevent dangerous intoxication, as well as alcohol poisoning. Dr. Rollhaus argued that the great danger when drinking on Purim is right after Taanis Esther, where people drink on an empty stomach. People consume one drink after another, believing that the alcohol is not affecting them. She explained that alcohol takes a little time before you really start feeling the effects, and by having a quick succession of drinks on an empty stomach, you will get intoxicated quickly, putting a lot of stress on your liver. She recommended that to counter this, students should first eat a meal rich in proteins and fats, and to stay hydrated with non-alcoholic beverages, throughout the

drinking process.

Dr. Rollhaus then cited that 1,825 students die each year from alcohol related incidents, with 600,000 injuries, and 97,000 cases of sexual assault. To help prevent any of this from happening, she urged students to travel with friends, refrain from accepting drinks from strangers, and of course to never drink and drive. Dr. Rollhaus ended her discussion by discussing how to take care of friends who have had too much to drink by, discouraging them from further consumption of alcohol, and if necessary, remain with them and help them into the safety position.



Akiva Perlman, PhD
Substance Abuse Specialist



Esty Rollhaus, MD
Psychiatric Resident

Once Dr. Rollhaus finished her remarks, the second panelist of the evening, Dr. Akiva Perlman spoke about alcohol addiction. Like the earlier speakers discussed, Dr. Perlman said that getting drunk is nothing to be ashamed about, and that there are many well-functioning people who have a couple of drinks every now and then. However, he warned that like Yom Kippur, "Purim should be a time for introspection." He attributed this

to the fact that alcohol, as well as other substances, can cause a change in people, and cause them to notice their own deficiencies. People then feel that only when they are drinking do they actually feel comfortable with who they are, stating that "I've never met an addict who is comfortable in their skin." He advised that "the first rule of alcohol use is, are you taking care of yourself, because if you're not, you may develop a poor relationship with it."

The final panelist of the evening was a young man, simply going by Shmaya, who had previously struggled with addiction. In his story, Shmaya reiterated many of the issues that Dr. Perlman discussed in his presentation on why people become addicts. Shmaya felt that despite being a very talented individual, he did not succeed, believing that everyone had something that he was lacking. He drank alcohol because he felt that it was the only time that he was able to feel good about himself, and connect with others. He concluded his talk by urging those who are struggling with addiction to seek help immediately. He also urged people that if they know someone struggling with addiction, they should try to help them, regardless of the effects that it might have on the relationship.

YU's Active Minds club is a branch of a national organization present on college campuses to remove the stigmas associated with mental health problems. Hopefully, the club's discussion on the seriousness of alcoholism helped remove the negative perceptions of people struggling with addiction, in addition to giving them some good advice on how to remain safe on Purim.

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IMMERSE YOURSELF IN TORAH

A Message from the Israel Club, cont from p. 1

the place that many of us call home. The place we vacation. The place our aunts, uncles and cousins live. The place about 80% of us lived and studied in for a year. But, you know, Game of Thrones was on.

Two events in particular stick out in my memory. In my opinion these events were probably the best events I have been to in my years at YU. I'm sure that opinion is shared with nearly all the attendees. But you will be hard pressed to find out about them, because collectively less than 50 students showed up to these events.

The first of those two events was toward the end of last semester. Those in attendance were lucky enough to hear from Izzy Ezagui an amazing speaker with an even more amazing story and a hero of Israel and the Jewish people. After volunteering to serve in the IDF he was injured on the border of Gaza his first day in the field. The injury resulted in him losing his left arm, but did not stop him and he still serves in miluim, reserves, as a sharpshooter. After the event he asked me why there were so few people, explaining that he had spoken the day before to a packed room of over 200 people at Brandeis the night before. I explained to him that unfortunately this was not an uncommon occurrence at our event and he was dumbfounded. How could it be that on the Zionist campus so many people were apathetic, so few people cared?

The other event took place in the Koch Auditorium just a few weeks ago. It featured Rabbi Jeremy Gimpel of World Mizrahi and a former candidate on the Bayit Yehudi list. He

was to speak about an end to the conflict in ways that do not involve the two-state solution. Due to the pathetic turnout, the speech turned into a round table discussion. While many of the attendees did not agree with the opinions of Rabbi Gimpel, all were welcome and encouraged to express their opinions and participate. This created one of the most interesting dialogues I have ever taken part of. In my opinion this is probably the best



image courtesy of: <http://mizrachi.org/>

event, structurally, to have taken place on campus in my time here. Yet 99% of you all missed it. How can that be the norm?

I cannot present the answer. I do not have the faintest idea why none of you come. It could be you do not care, although I doubt it. It could be the very time-consuming schedule we have here, but I do not believe for one minute you do not have an hour to spare every other week. I do not ask you to come to all of our events, even I am not able to do that. We offer so many

events, in such variety in hope that there will be something that sparks the interest of every single one of you.

On every other campus in the country we are fighting a battle. Jews do not feel safe walking around while publicly identifying as Jewish. On some campuses, while walking to class Jewish students are heckled and spat at. It is not because they are draped in Israeli flags and other Zionist propaganda, it is purely because they are Jewish. Open anti-Semitism is back.

Not only is it your right, but it is your duty to stand up and say "I Stand With Israel" because if we cannot do it here where we stand unopposed, how are our brothers and sisters going to stand up for themselves when they face opposition everywhere else?

You are offered the opportunity of a lifetime here on campus. You can shape the conversation or you can just be apart of it. You can shake hands with the lawmakers of Israel one week and you can turn around and make hummus with those same hands the next. You can ask questions, voice your opinion and sing the songs of our people.

All you have to do is show up.

Michael Osborne is the President of the Yeshiva University Israel Club as well as a delegate for the Zionist Spring in the World Zionist Congress. He also serves as the Nefesh B'Nefesh Aliyah fellow on campus and is involved with many pro Israel and Israeli political organizations such as World Mizrahi and American Friends of Likud.

Are the Clintons Foreign Agents?

By Avishai/Jacob Cohen

Since its inception, the Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea Clinton Foundation (Clinton Foundation), has received tens of millions of dollars from foreign governments. The Clintons, arguably, are the closest thing America has to a royal family. In the years following the foundation's establishment, Hillary Clinton has continued her involvement in national politics, serving in the U.S. Senate, running for President, and serving as Secretary of State. Rumors have also surfaced that First Daughter Chelsea may leverage the family name and pursue politics herself. While the humanitarian work pursued by the foundation is certainly admirable, and Bill Clinton undoubtedly is a tireless advocate for the causes the Foundation focuses on, one must wonder why these foreign entities, many with subpar humanitarian records themselves, seem so intent so funding the Clintons' efforts.

The Foundation's website says that among its top priorities are climate change, and women's issues. Many of the countries funding the Foundation have, to say the least, very poor records in those two issue areas. If those issues are so important to these countries, why has there been so little progress domestically on them? How come these countries do not fund other foundations doing similar work, or sponsor other similar efforts via official government channels? According to the Foundation's website, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has given between \$10 million and \$25 million to the Foundation. Does anyone really believe that these two key Foundation issues are so important to an oil-dependent nation where women cannot even drive? Or how about the State of Qatar, which the Foundation says has donated between \$1 million and \$5 million? In addition to a lackluster record on both aforementioned issues, Qatar has not exactly acted very friendly to U.S. interests in recent years, including during the period that Hillary served as Secretary of State. The Qatari government spent about \$5.3 million lobbying the U.S. government during Hillary's tenure. Among the projects lobbied for by the Qataris is the 2022 World Cup slated to take place in Qatar.

The Government of Brunei has donated between \$1 million and \$5 million dollars as well. The Sultanate, which recently implemented strict Sharia law despite significant backlash, seems to share few of the Clinton's values. Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates also line the Foundation's donor rolls with total contributions between \$6,075,000 and \$20,150,000 according to Foundation records. Again, these four countries with the UAE possibly excluded, seem to share

few values with the Clintons, or the work of their Foundation.

Before Hillary's appointment as Secretary of State, the Foundation agreed not to accept most donations from foreign governments during Clinton's tenure. According to *The Washington Post*, the agreement allowed governments that had previously donated to the Foundation before Clinton's nomination to continue giving at similar levels. The agreement also allowed foreign governments with business before the U.S. government to give to the Foundation. The Foundation failed,

IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE PUBLIC WILL EVER KNOW, IF, AND TO WHAT EXTENT, FOREIGN CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CLINTON FOUNDATION HAVE PLAYED A ROLE IN CLINTON'S EXECUTION OF HER DUTIES AS SENATOR OR SECRETARY OF STATE. GIVEN THE FACT THAT COUNTLESS PROMINENT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE HAD THEIR CAREERS ENDED OR DERAILED BY CONNECTIONS EQUALLY AMBIGUOUS OR FAR LESS SIGNIFICANT, MAYBE IT IS TIME TO SHINE SOME LIGHT ON THE SITUATION.

in at least one instance, to uphold the agreement, in accepting a donation from the Government of Algeria of \$500,000. The Post says that the money was given for earthquake relief in Haiti, but at the same time, the Algerian government was spending heavily to lobby the State Department on human rights issues. Disclosures under the Foreign Agents Registration Act show that the Algerian government spent about \$422,000 lobbying the State Department that year.

Several other foreign governments, including the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada and Australia, have also donated to the Clinton Foundation. But as these countries are Western-style

democracies with freedom and equal rights, and do publicly share many Foundation goals, their donations to the Foundation should not be a cause of significant concern, although they are certainly not irrelevant. Because of these common values, it is not difficult to believe that their donations were to advance those values, even if in reality their purpose is more sinister. That being said, it is worth noting that a Canadian company promoting the failed Keystone XL pipeline was also donated to the Foundation while the pipeline was under consideration.

But for those nations with few values in common with the Clinton family or the Foundation, it is not unreasonable to ask what motivated their generosity. To suggest that these governments were looking to buy influence with the Clintons may not be so far fetched.

Where does this leave us? The Department of Justice maintains a website for foreign agents to submit the required disclosure filings, as well as to permit the public to search for and read those filings. On the homepage, the site says:

The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) was enacted in 1938. FARA is a disclosure statute that *requires persons acting as agents of foreign principals in a political or quasi-political capacity to make periodic public disclosure of their relationship with the foreign principal, as well as activities, receipts and disbursements in support of those activities.* Disclosure of the required information facilitates evaluation by the government and the American people of the statements and activities of such persons in light of their function as foreign agents. (Emphasis added)

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the Clinton family and the Clinton Foundation's relationships with foreign entities, it is entirely possible that the Clintons fit this definition. Even if not explicit, there does seem to be elements of this definition at play here. It is unlikely that the public will ever know, if, and to what extent, foreign contributors to the Clinton Foundation have played a role in Clinton's execution of her duties as Senator or Secretary of State. Given the fact that countless prominent government officials have had their careers ended or derailed by connections equally ambiguous or far less significant, maybe it is time to shine some light on the situation. Is it entirely possible that these activities are completely benign? Absolutely. But the Clintons should learn from the mistakes of Ted Stevens, Michael Grimm, or David Petraeus, to name a few, that the public trust is not a gift, is not everlasting and should not be taken for granted.

Consider Dirt

By Doron Levine

The average mile of US highway is dotted with sixteen thousand pieces of trash. Each of these discarded items costs about thirty cents to pick up and dispose of. The cents quickly add up: in 2013, litter removal cost American taxpayers more than eleven billion dollars.

The average New Yorker generates 2.9 pounds of garbage every day, and the city expels over twenty-eight billion pounds of waste annually. When it comes to litter, New York City has a particularly colorful history.

New York City's Rikers Island prison, which sits in the east river alongside the runways of LaGuardia Airport, is built on a massive landfill. After the City acquired the property in 1884, it artificially quintupled the island's size by loading solid waste onto garbage scows, shipping it out into the river, and dumping it onto the island.

In the early 1900s, legions of rats began to invade the putrid island. The prison's superintendent brought in dogs to fight the vermin, and among these dogs was a large hungry Irish terrier named Battle-axe Bill which had, according to the New York Times, a "hatred for the Island's invaders" and a "proper fighting spirit." But Bill met a gruesome end; in 1915, the savage rodents, born and bred on mounds of New York's noxious waste, banded together, cornered Battle-axe Bill, and devoured him.

But even as New York City's Department of Sanitation, which now boasts over two thousand collection trucks, over seven thousand uniformed workers, and four hundred fifty mechanical street cleaners, has taken great pains to improve its treatment and disposal of waste, the recalcitrant citizenry does not always comply; pervasive littering still sullies many city streets.

Littering in New York is punishable by a fine of up to three hundred fifty dollars for the first offense and up to seven hundred dollars for subsequent offences. But despite this monetary disincentive, and despite the twenty five thousand trashcans that line the city's avenues and streets, NYC has always had trouble combatting the litterati. In 1880, the year before the Department of Street Cleaning was established, around fifteen thousand discarded dead horses were removed from New York City's gutters and alleyways.

In 1895, Civil War officer Colonel George Waring took over as commissioner of the Department of Street Cleaning (Theodore Roosevelt was offered the position, but he turned it down) and he began a process of sanitation reform that has served as a model for many other cities and, to this day, continues to inspire new strategies to combat littering.

Here's a counterintuitive example: the MTA recently announced that it will be removing garbage cans from subway stations as a measure to combat rampant littering. Go figure.

YU suffers from a similar surplus of rubbish. Abandoned half-drunk cups of lukewarm Dunkin' Donuts coffee sulk in the shadowy corners of the Heights Lounge. Rectangular tins encrusted with the congealed residue of Saturday-night Golan greet the drowsy attendees of Sunday's 8:30am shacharit. Plates covered in stale crumbs and drenched in Lake Como pizza oil decorate the metal tables in Nagels, the sad remnants of a cheerful meal. And many a desk in Furst is marked with a sticky ring of dried Snapple, permanently branded as the location of a mid-class quaff.

But YU's filth transcends discarded wrappers and neglected pizza plates.

Even the furniture in YU has a certain disordered fluidity to it. Students and professors freely rearrange desks into fancy classroom conformations, and drag chairs in and out of rooms without bothering to return them. There is no sense of reverence for the ordered arrangement of the university's furniture.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Heights Lounge. The lounge began as a space with distinct boundaries: square rugs divided the main floor area into ten equivalent sections with a proper portion of couch-space delicately distributed onto each carpet. Sofas and plush single-seaters were appropriately arrayed in a mathematically balanced layout designed for geometric socializing and studying. But this delicate harmony soon fell into disarray; students now freely rearrange the seating to optimize it for their personal use. A group of students will often usurp three or even four sofas, dragging them onto a single carpet for a group study session and neglecting to return them afterwards.

Sitting amidst this anarchy, I recently had the embarrassing

experience of watching an exceptionally muscular member of the janitorial staff struggle to return the lounge to its original state. He sweated as he hoisted chairs and hauled sofas with a look of grim resignation, knowing that his efforts would soon be undone by the insuperable forces of chaos.

This disorder is problematic, and not just because of its aesthetic distastefulness.

HAMLET REACHES THE PINNACLE OF PESSIMISM WHEN HE IRONICALLY CALLS MAN A "QUINTESSENCE OF DUST."

DUST—FORMLESS, UNIFORM, AND UNCHANGING—HAS NO QUINTESSENCE.

GOD SAID TO ADAM, "TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN". YOU SHALL DIE AND DISINTEGRATE, WHEREUPON YOU SHALL BECOME PART OF THAT VAST BROWN MULLIGAN OF GROUND UP STUFF THAT WE CALL EARTH. YOU SHALL LOSE YOUR IDENTITY.

BY UNITING WITH THAT WHICH IS COMPOSED OF EVERYTHING, YOU SHALL BECOME NOTHING.



Consider dirt.

When we say that something is dirty, what do we mean? We do not merely mean to say that a given object or space is coated with particles of brown soil. A dirty room is cluttered with clothes, toiletries, and trinkets, but not necessarily with soil per se. The floor of a dirty van is covered in crumpled papers, scratched CD's, and unfinished lollipops. Are we misspeaking when we call these spaces dirty?

Well, what is dirt? It is made of rock, clay, and sand. It is made of wood, decomposed plants, and worm excrement, earwax, dead skin, potato chips, plastic, pizza, and infinitesimal particles of everything imaginable. Dirt is the entropy of all physical stuff. If you were to place the earth into a giant blender and run it on high for a few minutes, you would soon be left with a blender full of dirt (or mud). Dirt is the result of everything losing its identity and mashing together into a formless mass.

Hamlet reaches the pinnacle of pessimism when he ironically calls man a "quintessence of dust." Dust—formless, uniform, and unchanging—has no quintessence. God said to Adam, "To dust you shall return". You shall die and disintegrate, whereupon you shall become part of that vast brown mulligan of ground up stuff that we call earth. You shall lose your

identity. By uniting with that which is composed of everything, you shall become nothing.

Dirt is the final, most extreme stage of the process of de-individuation. If dirt is tiny particles of everything mixed together into one mass, then a cluttered morass of clothes and toiletries on the floor of your room is dirt on a larger scale. Whenever disparate individual things mix together into a larger heap, the individual things begin to lose their identity and the process of degeneration into dirt begins.

Therefore, clean, neat people take great pains to ensure that things stay separate and distinct. They keep their books arranged neatly on shelves, their Risk pieces organized by colors, and their cutlery sorted in separate compartments because they know that clutter is dirt and dirt is entropy and entropy is death.

Boundaries are critical in this struggle against dirt. Items must be kept vivid and separate, lest they conglomerate into a dull brown slop, blurring of the sharp lines of reality. Thus when we use the word "dirty" to describe disorganized clutter, we are speaking quite accurately.

This is why I do not like littering, and this is why I want people to respect the layout of the couches in the Heights Lounge. But I do not think that students rearrange the furniture because they do not care about this institution and therefore feel free to sully it.

Here we must make an important distinction between two types of littering. The first is motivated by disregard for a certain environment and the lack of a sense of ownership and responsibility to keep it clean. When a person drops an empty Doritos bag or a cigarette butt in Central Park, he is engaging in this littering of apathy. He is motivated by convenience and the immediate lack of garbage receptacles, and he expects to never see this piece of trash again; someone else will deal with it. This type of litterer fails to internalize Garrett Hardin's tragedy of the commons.

If everyone would imitate this litterer's behavior, Central Park would soon look like a landfill. He likely prefers Central Park debris-free, so when he litters, he implicitly hopes that someone else will pick up after him. He expects that other people will act more responsibly than he, and this is inexcusable.

But, interestingly enough, there is another type of space that people often leave dirty: personal space. People often leave clutter in their own homes, their own backpacks, and their own rooms. Keeping things distinct and separate is lively and invigorating, but also exhausting. So in places people are familiar with, places where they feel relaxed and "at home," they are able to take a deep breath and forget about keeping things perfectly individuated.

When a person leaves dirty laundry on the floor of his room, he does not expect that someone else will clean it up—quite to the contrary—he can reasonably assume that he is the only person who will ever have occasion to tidy his room. But a person leaves his room messy not out of passive indifference, but because he loves his room, because it is his. His bedroom is cozier this way – a crisply made bed may be reassuringly clean, but there is something uncomfortably austere about it until you throw back the covers and snuggle.

A teenager's mother scolds him for not cleaning up his room. Maybe he ideally prefers it clean, but he leaves it messy because its clutter is part of its character. This notebook, that baseball hat, this old camp T-shirt—each item in the mess carries a story.

We might question the humanity of a person whose room is too neat. Does he not ever just throw off his clothes and jump into bed? Does he not ever lose track of his stuff? Must everything always be perfectly in place?

So here we have two paradigms of littering: littering of apathy and littering of love. Littering of apathy is destructive to a society and is also indicative of the breakdown of social responsibility and cohesion. But I suspect that much of the littering in YU is of the second type.

Because unlike almost every other university in the United States, YU is the scholastic center of a community. It is largely run, staffed, and attended by members of a relatively insular and tight-knit ideological group. We feel comfortable shifting furniture, napping on public couches, singing loudly in the halls, and leaving behind a mess because, for all its quirks, imperfections, and financial misfortunes, this place is ours.

Vaccinations: A Public Concern, Not a Personal Choice

By Hila Refael

Measles was supposedly eliminated in the United States 15 years ago with the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine, but an outbreak of measles last month in Disneyland proves otherwise. The disease once killed 450 children each year and disabled even more, yet fortunately it has been under control for over decade. A growing anti-vaccine movement and lack of thorough understanding of measles has resulted in a recent comeback, and now the disease is spreading.

The anti-vaccine movement was driven by a 1998 study in a British medical journal that associated the MMR vaccine with autism. The study has since been meticulously discredited, and the researcher that published the study was stripped of his medical degree. But, for some conspiracy theorists, the fear remains. Some people are now also afraid of other vaccines as well.

As of March this year, 173 measles cases have been reported in the US, compared with 189 total cases last year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is concerned with the outbreak and issued a health advisory on January 23, following the Disneyland incident in California. The organization noted of the 52 measles cases resulting from the outbreak, 28 had been in unvaccinated people. With more and more people avoiding immunization, consequences can affect the American community at large.

The number of cases might sound small, but they may be only the beginning of a threatening trend. Dr. Paul A. Offit, a Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases and the Director of the Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, explains that vaccinations are effective at wiping out contagious diseases only when nearly the whole community joins in, called a "herd immunity." This is proven with diseases

such as polio, smallpox and for the most part measles, which had been more rare up until now. With the majority of the population immune to the disease, the more vulnerable individuals in society are protected, such as those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons or very young children and infants. When some refuse vaccinations yet still hope to reap the benefits of society, immunity breaks down and everyone is more vulnerable. Policymakers need to address this issue by barring unvaccinated children from public schools and by tightening rules that allow parents to opt out of vaccinations.



According to Dr. Offit the current immunization rates in the US are good - in the high 80 percent, low 90 percent range, but what is dangerous is that certain districts or communities are sadly under-vaccinated and consequently have been the hosts of recent outbreaks. The measles vaccine has proved itself to be very effective for an especially contagious virus, but when communities are avoiding vaccinations more often public health is, unfortunately, compromised.

What might happen if more Americans stopped getting vaccinated? When immunity among the nation starts to diminish and more and more people avoid vaccination, the disease will

spread quickly. A 2008 measles outbreak in San Diego shows exactly how many can be put at risk by the egocentric decisions of a few. One 7-year-old whose parents left intentionally unvaccinated spread the disease to 11 other unvaccinated children. In less than a week, the infected individuals exposed more than 800 other people to the disease through school, swimming lessons, grocery shopping and on a flight to Hawaii. The disease has proven to be extremely contagious and clearly makes vaccinations a public concern.

Not surprisingly, the Disneyland outbreak occurred in California, which has some of the most liberal opt out policies in the nation. In California, exemptions are given not only for religious reasons, but even personal philosophical reasons. The Los Angeles Times reports more than 13,000 California kindergarten students actually have waivers due to their parents' personal beliefs, which California allows parents to do. Ironically, on the other end, the strictest standards are in Mississippi; despite the state's politically conservative reputation citizens cannot get either personal or even religious exemptions. Unfortunately, some politicians have also supported the anti-vax movement, including prominent Republicans such as Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin, and Rand Paul. New Jersey governor and potential 2016 presidential candidate Chris Christie has also expressed some support for personal choice in the matter, though he admits to his children having been vaccinated. The attitudes of these states and politicians, which span both sides of the aisle, are putting our public health at risk.

Opt out policies have to be tightened to protect communities. Opposition is linked to only one small risk, which the CDC states involves mild fever and a rash that does not last long for healthy individuals. Those who refuse to take this risk not only inflict the consequences on themselves, they put the lives of anyone they come in contact with in danger.

Religion is Brutal: Call ISIS Islamic

By Harel Kopelman

On February 18th, Secretary of State John Kerry penned an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal which outlined the Obama administration's philosophy for countering radicalism overseas.

"No legitimate religious interpretation teaches adherents to commit unspeakable atrocities, such as razing villages or turning children into suicide bombers," Mr. Kerry proclaimed. Huh?

If the Secretary of State's speculations about religion come off as grandiose, naive or false, it's because they indeed are. To anyone who has ever studied the bedrock text of the three Abrahamic religions, the Old Testament, Kerry's proclamation is a theological head-scratcher.

Did Secretary Kerry miss that part in Deuteronomy where the Bible says in no uncertain terms, concerning a city where the majority of Israelites had started to worship a deity aside from the Judaic one, to "smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword" (13,16)?

Or when Deuteronomy outlines the genocidal commandment to "blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven" (25,19)?

The Talmud and early legal authorities codify these verses, affirming that the religious obligation to decimate an entire town includes killing all its men, women and children, regardless of whether or not they themselves had worshipped the foreign deity, and that blotting out the nation of Amalek also entails putting to death all its men, women and children.

If that sounds like extremism, terrorism, or the corruption of a peaceful religion's words for political purposes, it isn't. It's actually a very straightforward reading of the texts, and is considered normative Orthodox Jewish law.

It may come as a shock to Secretary Kerry or modern Jews, but the Old Testament is violent and punitive. It isn't a pluralistic document. Many of its precepts do not fit modern notions of liberal democracy and self-determination.

But if this foray into Biblical study comes off as irrelevant, that's because the astute observer can concede that it largely is. Jews probably never fulfilled these commandments when they lived in Biblical Israel, and certainly don't use it as pretext to commit acts of terrorism nowadays.

In a riveting essay for *The Atlantic* published the week before Kerry's op-ed, Graeme Wood interviewed Princeton scholar Bernard Haykel, a leading expert on the Islamic State's

ideology. Haykel astutely observes that Islam isn't merely a static reading of religious text: "It's what Muslims do, and how they interpret their texts."

What is true about Judaism is true of Christianity, Buddhism, and yes, Islam: religion is not monolithic. Its interpretations and practices are shaped by historical, political and cultural pressures. Today's Jews recoil in horror from the thought of killing children, even though the Bible commands it, and most Muslims today oppose the religiously-sanctioned terrorism employed by ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Kerry's desire to not alienate moderate Muslims and show that the West is not at war with Islam is commendable. We indeed are not at war with Islam and its majority of moderate Muslims. His rhetoric, however, is incredibly naive, and may actually do more harm than good in the fight against Islamist extremism.



So too, when President Obama proclaimed (employing the term ISIL to refer to Islamic State) that "ISIL is not Islamic," he avoided a key opportunity to combat ISIS's radical ideology.

ISIS is indeed Islamic. As Wood explains at length, it's an organization hell-bent on bringing about the apocalypse, destroying the West and ushering in the coming of the Mahdi, a prominent messiah figure in Islam. These goals are not merely religiously-masked political objectives: they are scholarly, Salafist interpretations of the Qu'ran and the Hadiths which draw on seventh century Islamic practice. They are religious, Islamic goals. Full stop.

Kerry and Obama's points about the group's political aims are prudent: it is impossible to understand the rise of ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist groups without taking into account political and economic factors, such as the decline of the Ottoman Empire after World War I; the West's disastrous carving up of the Middle East after Sykes-Picot; and the oppressive, socially backwards and economically stagnant societies that secularist Arab regimes have created.

Islamism isn't a purely religious answer to the Middle East's dilemmas. It is a political expression of Islam that has found favor among some Muslims today seeking a better life.

Disenfranchised Muslims in failing Arab states will indeed be more easily drawn to the extremism of ISIS. A New York Times profile of Islam Yaken, a young Egyptian man turned ISIS foot-soldier, shows how a failing Egyptian economy and political alienation following Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's coup d'etat creates fertile ground for jihadist recruiting.

But to combat its potentially dangerous consequences, the West must understand the Islamist ideology. To deny its religious nature and roots is to battle it blind, and leave frustrated young Muslims in failing Arab countries vulnerable to its attractive promises: Democracy hasn't brought us success, so why not return to Islamism and the heyday of Muslim power and glory?

By rebutting the religious arguments of Islamism and advocating more moderate forms of Islam, the West can help discourage possible recruits from joining ISIS, which can tangibly degrade the group's military capabilities, and help push Arab countries towards more stable forms of democracy.

There is also a public relations issue in not calling the Islamist spade a spade. Much of the Arab world acknowledges that Islamic radicalism is a cancer destroying Muslim communities from the inside out: Egyptian president el-Sisi's recent speech at Cairo University, a prominent center for Islamic study and thought, has called for a "religious revolution...because the Islamic world is being torn, it is being destroyed, it is being lost. And it is being lost by our own hands."

The key to stabilizing the Middle East lies with such moderate regimes as el-Sisi's. If the leader of the free world and his administration cannot agree with Arab leaders regarding the ideological nature of the threats facing these regimes, it only undermines those leaders' efforts to persuade an agitated citizenry which still needs to be convinced of the merits of more secular governance.

Religion can be brutal. ISIS is Islamic. Messrs Kerry and Obama ought to acknowledge that.

Trigger Warnings: Insulating Thought and Opinion from Challenges

By Avi Strauss

[Trigger Warning: Substantive Content Ahead]

If you were confused by the opening to this article, consider yourself lucky to have avoided the phenomenon of “trauma triggers” and “content notes” up until now. Trust me, you do not want these coming to a place near you.

Trigger warnings are the new, hip, cool way to demonstrate you are caring and sensitive. Originally conceived and used on Feminist blogs and websites to warn rape victims of upcoming discussion of rape, they enable readers and viewers to censor what information they have to encounter or learn about. The intention is to prevent some traumatic response to material that reminds the reader of a past distressing experience. Should a student feel the content may upset their sensibilities or rubs them the wrong way, they can exercise their right against being made to feel uncomfortable and skip class or discharge their responsibility towards certain course material.

At face value, this seems to be a reasoned and carefully considered mechanism for the avoidance of unnecessary emotional grief and distress. If we have the opportunity to minimize and reduce the anguish victims of trauma must suffer, why would we not? However, while that may have been the original intent of the triggers, they have since been bastardized into a tool to avoid any and all opinion, information or content deemed potentially upsetting to a person’s sensibilities. Rather than serving as a means to protect the few students that may seriously require screening of their reading material, the expanded use of trigger warnings is slowly encouraging students to avoid opinions that they find unfavorable.

In some places on the internet, “trigger warnings” have become expected and those who refrain from suing them deemed discourteous and disrespectful. Critics of the warnings have even been called “certifiable a**h***s” among other insults. As a BuzzFeed article reported, trigger warnings have morphed from isolated alerts preceding graphic content into a phenomenon all its own.

On some college campuses, syllabi carry warnings for terrorism, gun violence, drones, discussion of racism, sexism, pregnancy, obesity, needles, medical procedures and spiders, among other things. Effectively this means that students can shield themselves from things they suspect they will be distressing, at all times, which has translated into the students avoiding

ideas that challenge their own. Think abortion is a universal right reserved for all women until the day of birth? Never mind ever being challenged on that point. Disagree with the philosophical theories of Plato, Rousseau, Burke or Marx? Take half the semester of your basic philosophy course off. Think Israel is objectively an “apartheid state” which must be punished, sanctioned and stripped of legitimacy? Feel free to not read or watch anything in your Middle Eastern politics course that may say otherwise. And all these warnings are all flown under the flag of “sensitivity,”; better that you do not feel uncomfortable than actually learn something new that can enhance your overall approach to a topic.

[Content Note: Reasoned Analysis Advocating Open Debate Below]

Now I think most people can appreciate the legitimate concern of further victimizing the already maltreated. However, life’s vast and complex information cannot simply be divided and compartmentalized, specially designed to please and suit each person. Content warnings can not wash away the indignities of the past, the controversies of the present or the debates of the future. History must be studied. Opinions must be challenged. Emotions must be stirred.

In order to be a well educated and informed modern population, we need to be able to confront all ideas, whether easy to understand or hard to swallow. Isolation and avoidance of challenging facts and competing ideas can only serve to further polarize our already polarized political and social discourse. Can we really debate how to deal with the Islamic State if we cannot even read about the atrocities they commit? Would it be possible to have an honest conversation about race in America without addressing violent histories and the socially complex present? Perhaps those who who traumatic ties to these topics can be reasonably excused from reading or viewing this material, but broad avoidance and evasion from divisive, contentious or graphic content will only have a negative impact on civil and intellectual discourse.

Nowhere is this more important than in the college setting where most of these warnings are being instituted. Of all the stops in life, college is meant to be the most eye-opening, the most enlightening, the most rigorous intellectually. But all these things pre-suppose challenge. They require material to contest

false premises and empty arguments. Colleges are meant to just test students on targeted material, but to test their thought and logical processes and sharpen them. Trigger warnings are doing just the opposite.

Perhaps in limited circumstances they would be desirable, shielding abuse victims or severely depressed persons from the torment of reliving past indignities and traumatic experience. But their expansion into larger and more comprehensive spheres is entirely troublesome. For instance, when a woman in an online forum complained of an unromantic engagement and certain bloggers told her to “get over it”, others responded that they were “triggering her” and should cease and desist. In another case, an openly homosexual woman used a trigger warning to introduce the idea of her using the male’s bathroom. In yet another, a professor requested their students not use the word “violate” under the same premise. Clearly, the idea of “triggering” has been corrupted far beyond its original purpose to silence and ignore dissenting opinions.

Mature adults must be able to confront the injustice, violence and controversy in the world with all-inclusive understanding. No side in an argument can be permitted the privilege of hiding from opposing views. And colleges are supposed to be the fertile soil for students to develop the necessary comprehension skills to do just that. Blissful ignorance does a disservice to both the ignorant and those with whom they are supposed equals and it severely inhibits our ability to face a scary, chilling world.

[Heads-up: Conclusion Approaching]

Colleges reputations for rigor and thoroughness will necessarily be watered down by continued use of these warnings and students who cannot read a passage about slavery or gun violence or income inequality or pregnancy cannot possibly be expected to mature socially or intellectually. The world is full of contested topics, controversial ideas and discomforting events, but pretending they do not exist will not help solve with them. Only minds refined by a comprehensive understanding and approach will be able to combat them and ultimately work to improve the situations others deem too traumatic to even acknowledge exist.

LETTER to the EDITOR

Dear Editor:

It was pleasantly surprising to read not only one, but two articles in the February 23, 2015 edition of the Commentator addressing stereotypical views of the paper, the history on which such views may be based, and today’s Commentator’s attempts to restore it to a position of respect among the student body as a publication which properly reflects the concerns and attitudes of the students.

That the Commentator has taken numerous steps to exercise better oversight regarding its content and to broaden its appeal is highly commendable. It is easy to zone in on sensational, unconstructive news items and, in fact, that is what sells in general, worldwide media. Yet, I believe students of Yeshiva University are composed of deeper, more sophisticated character than that and it has been refreshing to be presented with editions of the Commentator this year which consistently demonstrate more diverse, thought-out perspectives.

Of course, not every article will find favor in the eyes of every

reader; however, besides providing news, this is precisely the objective of a quality publication: to call attention to critical issues pertinent to its readership and serve as a springboard for further discussion among the readership. Naturally, all dialogue ought to be conducted in a respectful manner, and, in Yeshiva University, in a way that remains faithful to Torah values on a basic level, a respect which I have found to be present in the Commentator this year more so than ever before in my time at YU.

In a slightly different vein, given the financial struggles of Yeshiva University today, it is impossible—and would be wrong—to publish articles which simply offer a rosy, optimistic outlook manner on our future. Nevertheless, in times of struggle there remains the option to report the news in a nihilistic manner or, conversely, in a constructive way which creates readers who see a path forward and care to be part of it. In particular, Arie Levi’s editorials have been notable in their approach of identifying an issue of concern to the student body, offering a brief, insightful analysis of said issue, and leaving the reader with food for thought as to how they can contribute to a betterment of the issue at hand.

The efforts of the contributors to the Commentator are to be commended and we hope it continues to be a publication the student body respects and looks forward to reading.

Chaim Goldberg

Dear Editor,

We want to publicly thank two YU students who helped us get our car off the ice from a YU parking lot on the last Sunday of the Seform Sale. The two - Alex Daitch and Doni Weinberger - worked very hard and were very helpful in extricating our car - and if not for them, we would probably still be there!

Yishar kochachem and many thanks!

Hanoch and Tova Dubitsky

To the Editor:

I read with interest Yitzchak Schultz’s well intentioned January 28 “Tenure and Adjuncts at YU.” I found it thoughtful, stimulating, and—with regard to the system of tenure for college and university faculty—seriously misguided.

The author believes that tenured professors are likely to become lazy and ineffective teachers:

“It’s incredulous that almost every other career is based on merit: if you perform your duties, then you keep your job. If you don’t, then you run the risk of being fired. Since professors who have tenure can only be fired in extenuating circumstances, then what motivates them to get up in the morning and teach? The potential to be moved to a less roomy office? Their own academic integrity?”

Despite the seeming logic of Yitzchak Schultz’s rhetorical questions, it is overwhelmingly the case that tenured professors do not become lazy about their teaching. Because of my desire to be circumspect about referring to my colleagues, I will offer as evidence in support of my conclusion not professors at Yeshiva University but the professors at Columbia University who were my teachers when I was studying for M. A. and Ph. D. degrees.

Professor Richard Nochimson
Professor of English, Yeshiva College

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Cuts to Our Education, cont from p. 1

demning FYSM seemed obvious (at least to them): it was a strange, unloved Core, with offerings by professors spanning the departmental gamut vaguely united by a writing component. Yet other students, including myself, recall their FYSM class as one of their most influential and best-liked classes at Yeshiva College, a class which truly solidified their writing skills while simultaneously applying those skills to the world at large. To these students, cutting FYSM was incomprehensible. Interesting conspiracy theories abounded as to why FYSM would be no more. But the real reason remained unknown.

Enter the budget crisis. Yeshiva University's financial perils are not a closely guarded secret. But throughout the years of turmoil, President Joel has assured the student body that the administration will do all that it can to ensure that the quality of education being offered at YU will be impacted as little as possible. Previously, cuts were proposed in areas where they would matter the least, including in President Joel's own salary. Since 2008, each and every department has tried to reduce spending wherever it can. There are close to 100 overall fewer classes being offered now than in 2011. Tenured faculty have gone without raises for several years. To save costs, faculty receive little compensation for administrative duties, research, and travel. Professors are even asked to take out their own trash from their offices.

But as times have worsened, it seems that the administration has found a new place to reduce spending: FYSM. Because the department is entirely staffed by contract employees who are not subject to the same legal protections as tenure-stream positions, it is quite easy to simply let contracts expire. "There's a sense," says one anonymous professor, "that students won't be affected and won't notice the changes." But the results will be catastrophic for students. As Dr. Gillian Steinberg, Director of Writing, asserts; "The instructors who are scheduled to lose their jobs...are some of the most beloved and talented at YU...No one involved in this decision-making, even at the highest levels, has any complaint about their teaching ability, work ethic, or commitment to the institution and its students. On the contrary, these instructors are widely recognized as among our very best." The course itself cannot be blamed either. First Year Seminar classes, despite student grumblings, were carefully developed and tested over the course of several years and have been immensely successful in preparing students for future academic writing. So why FYSM? Steinberg explains, "The course is just in the administration's sightlines right now because it is largely staffed by easily-fired faculty."

If FYSM is eliminated, other departments will not be far behind. The Spanish department, built up by Professor Graciela Bazet-Broitman, would be at risk. The Music department is also staffed exclusively by contract faculty and would be a natural cut. A full half of the Sociology faculty is made up of contract faculty, meaning that it would survive only by depending on its tenure and tenure-track faculty. Beloved sociology professor Daniel Kimmel would be lost. Even the Hebrew Department, a staple of Yeshiva College, is at risk of being transformed to an online form that would save costs and eliminate most instructors. The overall loss of faculty would have a profound effect on students. In addition to those named above, some of our most treasured professors like Tsering Lama, Bella Tendler, Carin White, Jamie Aroosi, Chaviva Levin, Johanna Lane, Liesl Schwabe, Eliezer Schnall, and Barbara Blatner would be forced to leave. Eventually, all twenty-two lecturers employed by the university across several departments would likely be removed. And the damage would be irreversible. Claims one professor, "It is unclear how we will be able to continue to staff those courses and give students a full roster of high quality classes to choose from with the potential loss of these extremely talented faculty over the next two years (as their contracts expire)."

Indeed, it would be impossible. Even if tenure and tenure-track faculty were asked to teach more classes to make up for the loss, there is still a limit to how many classes they can teach. Inevitably, gaps in course offerings would still exist. The example is well-illustrated in the chemistry department, where one professor left abruptly this year, leaving students to take classes at CUNY. Additionally, college professors tend to be specialists in their particular fields and cannot be expected to teach other subjects with the same passion and alacrity as experts. The loss of such professionals would impact our education in countless ways. Also planned is an increase in class size, one of Yeshiva's strongest assets in attracting and maintaining students. Estab-

lishing personal relationships with professors would prove to be far more difficult, if not impossible.

In the past decade, Yeshiva College has worked hard to improve itself and the level of education it offers in order to attract new applicants. The Honors College was one step in that direction, as was the hiring of a number of renowned professors in a variety of fields and prominent research faculty to bolster their individual departments. The Core was a third such investment in improving the quality of education. The effects that these changes have had on Yeshiva College cannot be quantified. Long-time professors have noted the differences in the student body, reporting that today's students are far more open to education and to interacting with other cultures and ideas. Such progress is difficult to build but, unfortunately, all too easy to destroy. Those proposing such a plan are underestimating the importance of education and the importance of protecting everything that has been created in the last few years. As one professor succinctly put it, "YU needs to decide if it wants to be

GRANTED, YU IS GOING THROUGH A TOUGH PERIOD. IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT CUTS MUST BE MADE, AND THAT CERTAIN THINGS MUST BE FOREGONE IN ORDER TO ENSURE A FUTURE FOR THE UNIVERSITY AS A WHOLE. YET IT IS SHOCKING TO OBSERVE THIS ADMINISTRATION'S CALLOUS APPROACH TO OUR EDUCATION. STEINBERG RESENTS THE "CAVALIER ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNIVERSITY'S FINANCIAL WELL-BEING BY THE PEOPLE WHOSE CHARGE WAS TO ENSURE OUR FISCAL HEALTH." AT THE VERY LEAST, OUR PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENTS, ALL OF WHOM MAKE TIDY PROFITS FROM THE UNIVERSITY, SHOULD BEAR SOME DEGREE OF RESPONSIBILITY. THE FACULTY ARE NOT TO BLAME, AND NEITHER ARE THE STUDENTS.



the Jewish Harvard or the Jewish Indiana State." If these plans are put into place, YU's mediocre reputation of the past will be restored upon it.

The sea of changes at Yeshiva has ramifications for the present as well as the future. Claims one professor, "Our educational agenda has been literally paralyzed by the continuing financial crisis at YU." Professors were recently sent an email from the Provost informing them that faculty jobs were at stake and simultaneously thanking them for their help in creating a "brighter and better future" for YU. After this cruel awakening, professors were expected to go on teaching as usual, wondering if it was their position being cut. Popular tenured faculty hired in the past few years have been told directly that their hiring was a costly mistake, yet they are still expected to teach classes and conduct research and do what is expected of them on a daily basis. As a result, faculty members have noted that morale is lower than ever.

This is exacerbated due to the size of the College, which allowed for close-knit partnership and interaction between all members of the faculty, regardless of their departments and fields. The loss of faculty in certain departments is keenly felt by all. Dr. Steinberg says "Nearly every day, I find myself near or in tears as I think about what has been done to this university that meant so much to me and thousands of others. Being part of this community has completely changed my life for the better, but I can no longer see a future for myself here." At the helm of the ship through turbulent seas is President Joel, who recently told tenured faculty that if they had offers elsewhere they should accept them. Apparently, the leadership of the University sees no future for its faculty either.

Granted, YU is going through a tough period. It is understandable that cuts must be made, and that certain things must be foregone in order to ensure a future for the university as a whole. Yet it is shocking to observe this administration's callous approach to our education. Steinberg resents the "cavalier attitude toward the university's financial well-being by the people whose charge was to ensure our fiscal health." At the very least, our president and vice-presidents, all of whom make tidy profits from the University, should bear some degree of responsibility. The faculty are not to blame, and neither are the students.

And how much money will we save through these cuts? Overall, the College is projected to save \$2 million over the course of four years. The total cost of maintaining FYSM? \$400,000; a drop in the bucket considering the salaries of some within the administration. If each of these individuals accepted some culpability for the past and reduced their salaries, Yeshiva College's educational future could remain stable, at the very least. It is simply incongruous that our high-level administrators collect hefty salaries while forcing students to sacrifice their education.

Any future improvements to the Core are understandably being put on hold until a final decision is made and a final vote is cast about the future of the College. Like many, Professor Mesch is a strong believer in the Core and its potential. Mesch adds that because the Core is still in its experimental stages, it is still very much susceptible to student opinions. She notes that she "has met with students and pored through evaluations" and that "there are certain questions that have arisen in the past few semesters that the Core committee is eager to address." Unfortunately, positive changes to the Core cannot be implemented while the future of its faculty members is in limbo. And for those students who think that they should drop their FYSM classes now, Dr. Steinberg cautions, "I can say with certainty that the current FYSM will count towards students' graduation requirements and that students who do not complete FYSM in the near term will have to take some other writing requirement instead." The only thing left to do is wait.



Agent Carter and Marvel's Mission of Cinematic Dominance

By Zev Behar

Agent Carter and Marvel's Mission of Cinematic Dominance Unless you've been completely ignoring pop culture since 2008, you'll have noticed that the Marvel cinematic universe has been making the most popular movies since Iron Man and has stretched its hand further than any prequel or sequel movie genre ever has. This year alone there will be three new movies, 4 new shows airing on Netflix, and two shows currently running on ABC. The most recent of these shows, Agent Carter, just finished its first season airing and the plan here is to hopefully explain where the show came from, summarize the 8-episode plot, and then show how it fits back into the Marvel cinematic universe and why it has necessary information that can apply to the movies, so unless you are completely caught up in the movies, there will be SPOILERS ahead.

Agent Carter began during Captain America: The First Avenger with Agent Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell) acting as Steve Rogers' (Chris Evans), or better known as Captain America's, superior in the American army during WWII. After the events of Captain America, when Steve crashes into a frozen tundra and is believed dead, Peggy goes back to America to work for the Strategic Scientific Reserve (S.S.R.), an organization that will one day turn into the S.H.I.E.L.D. we all know and love (and no, it's not the YU news channel).

On every DVD/Blu-ray release of a Marvel movie, it includes something they call a "Marvel one-shot." It's a five to ten minute short clip that can tie into the plot of the movie it came out with. For Captain America, it had a one-shot titled Agent Carter. This video followed Carter while she worked at the SSR, and since it was the 1940s, women were overlooked and asked to only be receptionists. Knowing that she was a better agent than all the men, Carter decided to take matters into her own hands so she went out into the field, took down an entire gang, and was then promoted to Agent in the SSR. The T.V. show follows Carter after this promotion.

The main plot of the show follows Carter working at the SSR, where they are trying to capture Howard Stark (Dominic Cooper) for treason, while also working with Stark to try and find the people who framed him. To assist her in clearing his name, Stark enlists his butler, Edwin Jarvis (James D'Arcy).

In the beginning of the show we see that Carter is unappreciated and overlooked as an agent at the SSR since she is a woman. During a briefing, it is revealed that Howard Stark, who had worked with Peggy and Captain America during WWII, has been selling weapons overseas. He is marked as a traitor and everyone is told to find and arrest him. Soon after, Carter gets a call from Stark explaining that he had his vault had been robbed and that he had done nothing wrong. Carter decides to work as a double agent, messing up the SSR's investigations for Stark while also trying to find the stolen weapons and clear his name.

Eventually the investigation leads the SSR to believe that Stark will be selling weapons in Russia, so Carter and a few other agents are sent to investigate and stop the sale. They find nothing of Stark's in the Russian base, but they are attacked by soldiers guarding a prisoner. Carter manages to get everyone out safely, including the prisoner, Dr. Ivchenko (Ralph Brown).

After returning to America, it is discovered that Carter had been assisting Stark throughout the entire investigation and she is arrested for treason. During this commotion, Carter realizes that Dr. Ivchenko is a skilled hypnotist who can convince people to kill themselves. Carter convinces the other agents in the office that she is telling the truth about Stark when she points out that Dr. Ivchenko has been communicating in Morse code to another Russian spy. But before they could act, he escaped.

Before he left, the Doctor had taken one of

Stark's weapons, the only issue is that nobody knows what it does. We find out soon enough when it is released in a crowded movie theater. The gas, created by Stark, turns people mad with a complete bloodlust towards any other living creature. When the SSR finally arrive, everyone in the theater is dead. Soon afterwards, Carter figures out that the Doctors plan is to release the gas over all of New York during a huge parade creating pandemonium and a chance for Russia to attack. His plan is thwarted right in the nick of time and the doctor is arrested.

The final scene of the show is perhaps the most

ALL THIS INFORMATION IS NECESSARY TO COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND ALL THE EVENTS IN THE MARVEL MOVIES AND THERE'S A LOT TO KEEP UP WITH: 12 MOVIES OUT NOW WITH 11 MORE SCHEDULED TO COME OUT UNTIL THE END OF 2019, 2 T.V. SHOWS, 5 MORE SERIES' COMING OUT ON NETFLIX, 5 MARVEL ONE-SHOTS, AND 13 TIE-IN COMIC BOOK SERIES'. IT'S A LARGE COMMITMENT, AND MAYBE NOT ALL OF IT IS WORTH IT, BUT FOR THE MOST PART, I'VE BEEN HAVING A GREAT TIME. KEEP 'EM COMING MARVEL.

important and explains many of the events that take place in Captain America: The Winter Soldier. Dr. Ivchenko, whose real name we discover is actually Dr. Fennhoff, is escorted to a prison cell with his mouth bound shut so that he cannot hypnotize any of the guards. He is shoved into the cell and the door is locked. His new cellmate though, recognizes him and tells him that together they can take down the entire organization that brought them there. It is none other than the scheming Dr. Arnim Zola (Toby Jones) from the first Captain America.

This one scene explains so much. As we all know, in Captain America 2, S.H.I.E.L.D. falls, since for over 50 years it had been infiltrated by Hydra, the terrorist organization that came into power alongside the Nazis. We also see in the movie that Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan), who was once Captain America's best friend, has no memory of being friends with, or even knowing him and is now set on killing him. From what we see in Agent Carter, we can make a few assumption. Dr. Zola and Fennhoff, who we also find out in Cap 2 were asked by S.H.I.E.L.D. to be scientists for the good of humanity (as many Nazi scientists were asked to do by America after WWII), used this freedom to plot their rise back to power. Fennhoff used his hypnotizing ability to erase Bucky's memories and make him want to kill Captain America. Meanwhile, Zola went around S.H.I.E.L.D. convincing agents that Hydra is the organization that everyone should be working for. We see the fruits of their labor in Cap 2 when S.H.I.E.L.D. is completely destroyed, the winter soldier nearly kills Captain America, and Hydra rises again more powerful than ever before. Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. will pick up with the few scattered agents left, led by Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg), who will try to disband Hydra for good.

All this information is necessary to completely understand all the events in the Marvel movies and there's a lot to keep up with: 12 movies out now with 11 more scheduled to come out until the end of 2019, 2 T.V. shows, 5 more series' coming out on Netflix, 5 Marvel one-shots, and 13 tie-in comic book series'. It's a large commitment, and maybe not all of it is worth it, but for the most part, I've been having a great time.

Keep 'em coming Marvel.



images courtesy of: moviepilot.com (left), firewireblog.com (above)

The Bottom Line in Health: The Spot Reduction Myth

By Judah Schulman

Have you ever listened while a friend or colleague told you about their new abdominal workout that promises to target stubborn belly fat? Have you ever seen a commercial for some piece of exercise equipment that guarantees to target specific areas of your body where flab has accumulated, and to melt away those extra pounds? Fitness companies and workout enthusiasts who make these claims are all referring to the same exercise myth known as spot reduction. Spot reduction can be understood as the belief that fat stores in specific regions of the body can be targeted for elimination by exercises that work the muscles of that same area. A simple example would be exercising the abdominal muscles in an effort to reduce weight around the midsection. It seems plausible that focusing a workout on a particular area of the body would burn the calories, stored as fat, in that section. However, this is not the case, and it is time to reveal the real effect of this endeavor.

Performing physical exercises will undoubtedly strengthen the muscles used while carrying out those movements. However, according to research, this will not create any type of significant impact on the fat stored around those muscles called into action. A recent study published in the American

Journal of Physiology concluded that spot reduction may be possible, although the results were mostly negligible. The study had male subjects perform a single-leg exercise with light weight for thirty minutes. The other leg remained at rest throughout the experiment to act as a control group. After thirty minutes, researchers measured blood flow to the subjects' fat cells in both the exercising and resting thighs, as well as the amount of lipolysis (breaking down of fat cells) from those fat cells. The results showed an increase in blood flow and lipolysis in the exercising leg in comparison to the measurements in the resting leg. The study suggested that during exercise, body fat is preferentially used from the area being trained, but at a magnitude that has little to no practical significance.

So why are so many convinced that blasting a specific body area with endless variations of exercises will trim the fat in that region? The misunderstanding in the spot reduction craze may be attributed to the firming and shaping effect of muscle hypertrophy training (exercising to increase the size of skeletal muscle). After exercise, when scar tissue is formed to repair the micro-damage that occurs as a result of exercising, the scar tissue takes up new space which can briefly compress subdermal fat against the skin. Additionally, until the skin adapts, a larger bulging muscle

shape is also more easily seen through the layer of fat on top of it. This can give the illusion of fat being reduced when it has not. An example of this would be the feeling of tightness between your muscles and skin following a workout that typically lasts a day or so, until the skin stretches to accommodate for the newly developed muscle mass.

One might wonder why people continue to implement this strategy in their fitness routines, despite the research proving its ineffectiveness. While the aforementioned misunderstanding is a major part of the answer to this question, keen marketing and blind faith have also contributed to keeping it alive and prevalent. Advertisers will lure in customers when selling an exercise-related product by hiring fitness models to show off the product and offering money-back guarantees. The reality is that the models most likely do not use the products, and if they do, it is a small component of their larger workout regimen. Furthermore, reclaiming the purchase value of the product can be a frustrating and tedious process that many will not fully complete. So fitness product companies profit, and customers see minimal results and continue to look for the next exciting piece of exercise equipment to buy as they attempt to conquer their exercise goals.

Amidst this confusion, how is one supposed to get rid of the undesirable fat around one's body and show off a lean, toned body? The truth of the matter, which many do not want to hear and even more continue to ignore, is that fat is lost from the entire body as a result of a balanced diet and regular exercise. I repeat, muscle growth in the abdominal region does

not reduce fat in that region. Instead, exercise programs that incorporate total body workouts that elevate the heart rate and place an intense demand on the respiratory system and the strength of the body's overall skeletal muscle will be effective in reducing fat mass, albeit across the entire body. This is contingent, of course, on balanced diet that delivers the appropriate proportions of macronutrients, at a reasonable caloric intake.

So, next time an online or magazine advertisement guarantees to trim the fat away from isolated areas, remember that your body is the one that makes the decision about where fat is reduced!

A Note on the Author:

The Bottom Line in Health seeks to provide simple fitness and nutrition tips for the Yeshiva University community.

As a National Academy of Sports Medicine Certified Personal Trainer and Fitness and Nutrition Specialist, it is my goal to enhance the readers' understanding of how to maintain a healthy standard of living while improving performance in and out of school and supporting an overall sense of well-being.

IT SEEMS PLAUSIBLE THAT FOCUSING A WORKOUT ON A PARTICULAR AREA OF THE BODY WOULD BURN THE CALORIES, STORED AS FAT, IN THAT SECTION. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE CASE. PERFORMING PHYSICAL EXERCISES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY STRENGTHEN THE MUSCLES USED WHILE CARRYING OUT THOSE MOVEMENTS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO RESEARCH, THIS WILL NOT CREATE ANY TYPE OF SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE FAT STORED AROUND THOSE MUSCLES CALLED INTO ACTION.



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Staff Spotlight: Professor Raji Viswanathan

By Yadin Teitz

Dr. Raji Viswanathan is a professor of chemistry and past Chair of the Chemistry Department. A Yeshiva mainstay for over twenty years, Professor Viswanathan is both loved and respected by her students. In addition to teaching, Viswanathan devotes much of her time to research, and several of her studies have been published. Viswanathan has also held various administrative positions at YU and is the former Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. She sat down for a conversation with The Commentator's Yadin Teitz.

YT: *Could you tell us about your childhood and early life?*

RV: I was born and brought up in Madras (now Chennai) in a middle class family that valued education highly. I was encouraged by my parents to pursue my dreams, and was led to believe that anything can be accomplished with hard work and perseverance. Growing up in suburban India in a family of three daughters, I cannot remember ever feeling that, as a female, I would have limited opportunities in life.

YT: *How interesting! What sparked your interest in science? How did you decide to become a professor of chemistry?*

RV: During my grade school and high school years, I was a very good student of mathematics and science and didn't have to work very hard. I can't say the same about literature or history. So, I got interested in pursuing what came more easily to me. Besides, I was also keen on understanding how things worked around us, and as I learned more, my passion for science grew more. I wasn't sure of my major until I entered college, though I knew it will be one of the mathematical sciences. I finally decided to major in chemistry because the applications of chemical principles to understand and solve many everyday life problems fascinated me. I started to see how chemistry is a central science that also required a certain level of mastery in the other related sciences. I enjoyed my undergraduate major so much that I decided to pursue higher education in a sub-field. I had always wanted to be in academia, and the role-playing game I enjoyed most as a child was pretending to be a teacher! So, you can say that I wanted to be a professor even when I was a child, but not necessarily a professor of chemistry.

YT: *That's amazing that you found your niche so easily. But how did YU come into the picture? Why did you choose Yeshiva?*

RV: Why not Yeshiva! As I was completing my postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University, I knew that I would be happy in a position that combined my strong interest in research with my passion for teaching. So, I decided to find a position in a college/university that valued both research and teaching. As we decided to remain in the east coast of the United States, I needed to find a position in the NY/NJ area. Though I had a strong research portfolio at that point, I had no experience in teaching. I got an opportunity to teach for a year at Barnard College as a sabbatical replacement. I hoped that this would open other doors for me later and hence took that opportunity. The next year, I was interviewed and offered the position as an assistant professor at Yeshiva College and my dream came true! As I come close to completing my twenty-fourth year at Yeshiva College, I can honestly say that there is no other place I would rather be or anything else I would rather do. The students at Yeshiva are the best I have seen anywhere and they make my job most enjoyable.

YT: *Here's what I'm curious about: How was the transition to an all-male, Orthodox Jewish environment?*

RV: I am a practicing Hindu, so I was a bit apprehensive during the early years of my career at Yeshiva, as I was not very familiar with the environment. But, very quickly, all my colleagues and students made me feel at home. It was clear to me that this was a place of higher learning where there was mutual respect and appreciation and that I would thrive here. I respect and understand the very hectic dual curriculum our students have chosen to pursue, and have never stopped wondering how they can accomplish so much in a day.

YT: *I ask myself the same question! But somehow it all gets done (usually). What's your favorite part of teaching? Which course is your favorite to teach?*

RV: I enjoy the interaction with students and practice a discussion-based approach rather than a traditional lecture. I enjoy teaching courses where students come prepared and are eager to learn. The most favorite part of my teaching is when I find that I have successfully explained a difficult concept to the students and see their eyes light up when they have understood it. I enjoy teaching many different courses, and my favorite courses to teach are those where students ask interesting questions and engage actively in discussions. There is no dearth of such courses or students at Yeshiva.

YT: *Most of your courses are designated for science majors, but you also teach EXQM courses, designed for students with little or no background (nor interest) in science. I know that for many students, taking an EXQM course is daunting. How do you approach such students? Do you try to instill in them a love of science?*



Professor Raji Viswanathan

RV: I know EXQM can be perceived as a difficult course by some students, and as not a very exciting course to teach by some faculty. I am quite excited with an opportunity to develop and teach a course for students with minimal background in the sciences. My goal is to expose these students to scientific thinking and share with them my passion for science. My approach assumes that students have little or no background in the sciences, and I constantly redesign my lectures/presentations based on the level of the students in the class. The most difficult part of teaching this class is to engage students who may feel that they are forced to take this class, and may not have an open mind about the course.

YT: *Is there a particular chemist/scientist who you look up to?*

RV: My role model when I was growing up was my aunt. After completing her doctoral work in astronomy and her postdoctoral training at MIT, she went on to become the director of the largest planetarium in Delhi, India. She has always impressed me, not just by her academic achievements and abilities, but by her humility and strength of character. I always look up to great chemists in my chosen area of expertise, like Professor Roald Hoffmann and Professor Dudley Herschbach. I had an opportunity to work closely with Professor Hoffmann when he was a visiting scholar at YU, and that was an extremely valuable experience for me. I also had the opportunity to interact with Professor Herschbach when he visited YC as a Kucin Lecturer several years ago. They are both Nobel laureates of extraordinary accomplishments, but so humble that they make ordinary scientists like me very comfortable in interacting with them.

YT: *Tell me about your own research. From what I've gathered, you're currently researching the nature of protein binding. How do you choose what to research?*

RV: My current research is to identify the uniqueness of protein structures that guide them to choose specific binding partners. I enjoy exploring new areas of research where I can apply my experience with research methodologies to problems of current interest. The problems at the intersection of chemistry and biology are most interesting to me. Working on such projects enables me to continue to learn new things, which is the most exciting part for me.

YT: *With all that you're involved in, where do you see yourself in ten years?*

RV: I hope to continue to excel in my research and teaching. I have been in administrative positions at Yeshiva College and have returned to full-time as a professor. As much as I enjoyed being an administrator, I enjoy being a professor a lot more! I would like to continue to be a productive scholar and teacher.

YT: *How do you spend your time outside of school? What are your hobbies and interests?*

RV: I enjoy taking long walks (weather permitting) and cooking. I often experiment with different cuisines. I guess that is the experimental chemist in me!

YT: *What's the best advice you can give to students?*

RV: Students should make their best effort to get the most out of every class they take during their undergraduate years. I know students feel that a number of classes will not be of much use in what they plan to do in their future. But every course exposes you to different modes of learning and thinking, and you never know when these skills will come in handy. It is much more important to be familiar with different learning methodologies than to master particular skills. This makes you more versatile and likely to succeed in challenging and changing environments.



Latest at the YU Museum: Modeling Synagogues of the Past

By Hillel Field

The Commentator's Hillel Field recently interviewed David Kahane, a sophomore at Yeshiva College and a tour guide for the YU Museum. The interview focuses on a current exhibition at the Museum, "Modeling the Synagogue—From Dura to Touro." For more information on the exhibit, please see <http://www.yumuseum.org/>.

HF: *This isn't your typical extra-curricular activity for a lowerclassman. How did you get involved with the YU Museum in the first place?*

DK: I decided to get involved with the Museum last year. I had been to the YU Museum before, which is just a short trip downtown, so I was comfortable going there and asking about becoming a tour guide. Museum educator Ilana Benson and I spoke about the possibility of me being a tour guide. I finally got started this year.

HF: *What did you have to do to prepare for this position?*

DK: It was actually pretty simple. After expressing my interest, I spent about two hours researching the synagogues. I then came to the Museum to give a mock tour of the exhibit. Thankfully, I knew the material well and was able to give a solid presentation. They accepted me on the spot.

HF: *For those who may not be familiar with the YU Museum, can you tell us what it's like in general?*

DK: The YU Museum is located on one of the floors of the Center for Jewish History. There are always a few exhibitions at a time. Besides the synagogue exhibit, we currently have exhibitions featuring the Borscht Belt of the Catskills and Yiddish Theater. There is also an exhibit that focuses on Jews who served in the German army during WWI.

HF: *What do you do as a tour guide?*

DK: I give tours on Sundays, from 1:30 to 2:15 pm. I take people around the synagogue exhibit. Our museum has ten model synagogues, ranging from the oldest—the Dura Europos synagogue, from the mid-200's (c.e.)—all the way to the late 1800's, with the Tempio Israelitico synagogue. That's around 1600 years of synagogue history. We also have a mini-Beit Hamikdash. The Museum has been around since 1973, and these models were displayed for the first time in 1979. They were also displayed at Bloomingdale's, and then they sat in the Museum basement for decades. After presenting all the models to visitors, I usually show them the original molds used to create them.

HF: *Who came up with the idea of the exhibit? Why were these synagogues chosen?*

DK: Renee Wishnitzer, a former European History Professor at Stern College, really spearheaded this project back in the early 70's. She chose the synagogues that would go on display, so it makes sense that most of them are European and North American. You wouldn't expect to see Far Eastern or South American synagogues based on her area of expertise.

HF: *This isn't like the Cloisters exhibit, with original fragments of the sites, correct?*

DK: No, the sculptors and architects who designed the models wanted them to look the way they did when they were first built.

HF: *How big are the models?*

DK: I would say about half of this desk at least (about three feet wide). You can even see inside the models; sometimes I'll ask people if they can spot certain details. Since these models are so big, they are hard to clean; we have to use a mini-vacuum to reach all the tight spots.



Model of the Florence Synagogue; photo courtesy of <http://www.yumuseum.org/collections>

The models aren't the only part of the exhibit. We have other artifacts as well, like a Sefer Torah dating back from the 18th century.

HF: *Is it associated with any of the synagogue models?*

DK: The Torah was originally in the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam. I think it was transferred in 1804 to Congregation Shearith Israel, here on 79th Street, which has been around for about 350 years. When the shul received the Torah, it was already considered an antique.

We also have a tombstone dating back to Amoraic times, from around 456 CE. It shows some motifs that were present during that time. I'm talking about motifs that you could find in a couple of our synagogue models, like the Dura Europos in Syria and the Beit Alpha synagogue in Beit She'an. We see a motif that probably existed for a few centuries after the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, where you have a lulav, shofar, etrog, and menorah. These four things were present in most synagogues. The synagogue on display is the Altneuschul in Prague from the 13th century, and by that time the motif already disappeared.

HF: *Do you have any other artifacts?*

DK: Yes, this one is actually really cool. We have an illuminated Tanakh from the 1480's. It's unique, because it has the word u'vishnat (and in the year of...) all in gold lettering. In English Bibles from that time, the first capitalized letter of a word would be made with gold. Since there's no capitalization in Hebrew, you would have to illuminate the entire first word of a passage. This is a very expensive Tanakh, and a very rare

manuscript.

HF: *By illuminated, do you mean there were illustrations also?*

DK: Back then, the way Bibles were written was with the words copied first, and a square space left at the bottom to paint images in.

HF: *Would everyone have one of these Bibles at home, or would you only find it in the community synagogue?*

DK: These kinds of works were considered treasures. Back then, books weren't mass-produced, and it was very expensive to produce one. To have a Tanakh like this was basically like owning a Bugatti.

Another interesting artifact we show is the only remaining evidence of the synagogue located in Zabłudow, Poland. It's a community register that would record things such as notable events, population figures, etc.

HF: *What is the main demographic for museum visitors and the synagogue exhibit? Mainly YU students?*

DK: No, actually; it's common to see older couples or families with young children show up. The Museum does give public talks every so often, usually showcasing the exhibitions. Sometimes students will come because they were given an assignment by a professor to visit an exhibit, usually from classes in the Core Curriculum.

HF: *How would you recommend attracting more students to the Museum?*

DK: Somehow, students don't even realize we have a museum. The Museum actually used to be located near the library on the Wilf Campus, and moved downtown about twelve years ago to allow more room for displaying artifacts and exhibits. Such a central location may have made it convenient to check out back then, but it's gone under the radar of student consciousness since its move. The only reason I became so interested in it in the first place is because one of my professors assigned a trip to the exhibit about Iranian Jewry, which I found to be fascinating. In addition to class trips, I think it would be worthwhile for clubs such as the History and Architecture Clubs to take advantage of the Museum. The exhibit will only be on display until May, so make plans to come visit this downtown hidden gem soon!



Boyhood: Overrated Film at Its Best

By Yitzzy Mayefsky

To say that *Boyhood* is not only grossly overrated but an incredible waste of time is a bold statement. After all, the film scored an impressive 98% Freshness rating on Rotten Tomatoes and was nominated for six Oscars and five Golden Globes, winning four of these awards. Well, since I like making bold statements, I will assert that the only award director Richard Linklater and his film deserve is for duping the world into providing them with the highest accolades.

For those who haven't seen the film, or those that started it but fell asleep during the slow-paced 165 minute story, *Boyhood* is the story of a boy named Mason (Ellar Coltrane) and his journey from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood. To say more would be under-simplifying the plot. Sorry for the spoilers.

Before discussing the movie's flaws, let me point out the positive aspects of the film. Actually, scratch that. Let me point out the only positive aspect of the film. In order to most effectively and artistically display the progression of Mason throughout the years, filming spanned the course of twelve years with the same cast. As Coltrane grew and matured, Mason grew and matured, and the same for the rest of the film's cast. Now admittedly, that's pretty cool. There is no better way to describe it. Right when I heard about the film several months ago I was eager to see it. It's especially impressive considering that filming began before household brands like Facebook and the iPhone even existed. There must have been a tremendous sense of going-with-the-flow when the movie was written, since pop culture and technological advances, some of which actually make a relatively strong impact on the plot, are inserted into the movie as they become temporally relevant. That sense of trust in the director's and writers' flexibility and creativity is impressive and admirable, especially in today's movie culture supersaturated with reboots and adaptations.

Now that we have exhausted our ability to compliment the film, let's start off discussing the film's issues by examining the main cast. Ellar Coltrane's acting has been called by GQ and others a "breakout performance." I call it uninspired and blasé. For a majority of the film, Coltrane speaks in the same somewhere-in-between-angsty-and-apatetic monotone. We see him confront young love, heartbreak, pedagogy, and youthful inspiration all with a vocal attitude that sounds like he just rolled out of bed. Honestly, he sounds most in-character during the first 45 minutes or so when he is still a shouty, whiny prepubescent. When was the last time that a teacher told off a teen for being a lazy piece of trash, or a girl told her boyfriend that she had been cheating on him with an older guy, and he reacted in both situations with the same indifference he would employ when responding to "Would you like fries with that?"

Let's move on to Lorelei Linklater, the director's daughter who plays the role of Samantha, Mason's older sister. There must have been something contagious going around the studio, because as Samantha gets older, although the drama of life issues might progressively get more difficult and complex, Linklater's performance also appears increasingly more lethargic and uninterested. Frankly, if the purpose of the movie is to get you to hate teenagers because of their disinterest in the world I finally understand the film's praise.

Further, another huge issue with Linklater's character was the uncapitalized potential laced in that role. Sam is the classic better-than-you-at-life older sibling who is busy earning straight A's, a perfect antagonist to Mason whom teachers constantly rebuke for having his head in the clouds. Now, if one is going to make a film about "boyhood," and that boy just so happens to have an older sibling, the sibling rivalry and relationship is going to have profound effects on how that boy grows up. At most, the film touches this concept peripherally. I guess by year 6 of filming Papa Linklater finally figured out his daughter's role was made relatively ineffective to the general storyline, because Lorelei's presence in the film gradually disappears to

near irrelevance during the back end of the film (which is still a hefty 80 minutes).

Next on the cast list is Patricia Arquette who won the Academy Award this year for Best Supporting Actress in her role as Mason and Samantha's mother (only called "Mom" in the film). Finally, something positive to say about the cast right? After all, it would be fair to assume that the actress who beat out Meryl Streep at the Oscars must have had a stellar performance. While this is a fair assumption, it is by no means correct. Arquette's role is relatively unimpactful in the grand scheme of things, as she seems to have more of an effect on the life of a plumber's assistant than on the lives of her own children. Thus, it doesn't really make sense for her to win Best "Supporting" actress when she really occupies the space of a

WHILE THE FILM EFFECTIVELY DISPLAYS THE MATURATION OF MASON'S DAD, IT COMPLETELY FAILS TO DO SO WITH REGARDS TO MASON. THE TITLE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN "FATHERHOOD," NOT "BOYHOOD."

tertiary character. As for her performance, frankly it is plain and unmemorable. I wish I could make a more complex critique about her acting, but it is relatively impossible considering that there is simply nothing there to talk about. The few intense sequences that Arquette does have are mainly of her yelling at her kids, or finding herself in a midlife crisis as she is about to



Ethan Hawke (left) as Dad and Ellar Coltrane (right) as Mason, in *Boyhood*

be an empty-nester, but none of these scenes are particularly moving or captivating. A "Best Actress" should not just display the emotions of the character, but she must convey those feelings to the audience: make them feel her rage, her joy, her despair. Arquette's doesn't even come close.

Finally, we arrive at Ethan Hawke's character who plays Mason and Samantha's father and their mother's ex-husband (only called "Dad" in the film). Frankly, if anyone deserved an Oscar for his or her performance in this film, it would be Hawke, who utilizes his wit and charm to highlight his character's strengths and weaknesses. It's ironic that of all the characters in the film to develop and mature most over the course of the 12 years it is not Mason but his father, who starts off as an unemployed irresponsible estranged parent, and by the film's close is a put-together, married family man. It's almost a bit ridiculous that in one of the last scenes of the film, Hawke's character says to Mason, "I think I probably turned into that boring guy your mother wanted me to be 15 [or] 20 years ago," as if the movie recognizes that the film is more about Dad than about Mason. The title might as well have been "Fatherhood" not "Boyhood". (Unless you are a Pixar theorist that will argue that really the whole focus of the film was really on Dad, not

Mason, and his progression to maturity from his "boyhood." But that's just ridiculous.)

While the film effectively displays the maturation of Mason's Dad, it completely fails to do so with regards to Mason. A film that records twelve of the most crucial developmental years of a boy's life should provide a tremendous sense of understanding of how the young adult at the film's end acquired certain personality traits and life perspectives. Especially if the 6.3 million minutes of the story's timeline are condensed into a relatively meager 165 minutes, with scenes that are expertly written, spliced, and constructed so that the events of this boy's life give the audience insight into the intricate process and progression of his intellectual and emotional persona. Well, by the end of the film, we see that Mason has developed a very cynical view on life. He states that people have become biological cyborgs that don't live a life of experiences due to their addictions to their smartphones and social media (a point we will address more in a bit). He has a work ethic when it comes to his passion for photography, but that's just about it; he's pretty lazy otherwise. Where did all of this come from? Honestly, I have no clue. There is nothing in the film to explain what made Mason become such a cynic, nothing that indicates where his passion for photography came from or why he is so committed to it when he isn't interested in doing... anything. The only aspect of Mason where the process of growth throughout the years is effectively displayed is the length and style of his hair. I kid you not, there were times where I would have remained clueless as to whether a new scene was during the same year as the previous scene had I not noticed that more of Mason's face was hiding behind his blond mop than before.

My final issue with *Boyhood* is the most serious, but perhaps not as apparent as Patricia Arquette's lack of acting. At one point in the film, Mason and his girlfriend Sheena are driving to visit Mason's sister who is in college, and Mason begins to rant about how people are too addicted to social media and have become more robot than human. He entertains the idea of closing his Facebook account while Sheena ironically checks her Facebook News Feed, and he says, "I just want to try and not live my life through a screen. I want some kind of actual interaction. You don't care what your friends are up to on Saturday afternoon, but you're also obviously not fully experiencing my profound bitching so... it's like everyone's just stuck in, like, an in-between state. Not really experiencing anything." Very profound sounding, right? Ok, sure. But let's take a step back for a second.

Why do people watch movies? I'm sure there are lots of legitimate reasons: They like to escape their lives to a fantasy or even a realistic but fictional situation; they want to exercise their imaginations and look for hidden meanings and analogies within the film; or maybe they want to learn something from a biopic or historical fiction. But here is the funny thing: *Boyhood* actually accomplishes none of these and is meant to accomplish none of these. *Boyhood* is a condensed and edited summary of a fictional person who is meant to go through as realistic of a life as possible that can be artificially constructed in a studio. In essence, the film is meant to be a synopsis of twelve years of family home videos. So let me ask you a question: Why are we wasting 165 minutes of our lives sitting on our dorm beds, or at the theatre on 84th Street watching a fictional person live life?! Would you spend three hours watching a film synopsis of the life of that random guy in history class you've never talked to? Then why do it for fictional Mason? And here's the punchline: Mason himself tells you not to watch his own movie. Why are we living life, Mason's life, through a screen? Why are we electing to "not really experience anything" for three hours as we gain nothing but the story of some made-up kid? *Boyhood*, aside from having very little merit to begin with, is a caricature of its own lesson and one not worth waiting two plus hours to figure out.

Staff Spotlight: Rabbi Josh Blass

For a lot of students, coming to Yeshiva University presents a radical change. Most of us took similar routes before coming here: Jewish day school and Yeshiva in Israel. The majority of these institutions are small in comparison to YU, giving students ample opportunity for personalized attention from faculty and rebbeim. In YU, one would think that such personalized attention would be in short supply due to the size of the student body. Thanks to the amazing work of the mashgichim such as Rabbi Josh Blass, this is not the case. Students come to Rabbi Blass every day to speak to him about a plethora of topics, knowing that he is always available to offer an attentive ear and insightful advice. Due to his incredible work on campus, and his dedication to making YU a better place for students, we at The Commentator felt it was imperative that we sit down with Rabbi Blass and ask him some questions.

TC: *What is the job of a YU Mashgiach, and how does the system of mashgichim work in YU?*

RB: The job of the mashgiach is to try, as much as possible, to be involved with the students in all areas of their spiritual and emotional lives. An average day can combine giving a va'ad on some topic of religious growth, learning with a number of students, dealing with a couple who are having marriage issues, speaking with a student who has lost interest in learning or is struggling through a personal issue, talking through nervousness about career paths, or just trying to give advice about which shiur to go to. On top of that, the mashgichim, spearheaded by Rabbi Bacon, are involved in running many of the Yeshiva programs that are constantly taking place. One of the most enjoyable aspects of the job is that it is so varied and multi-faceted, and always brings with it new situations and challenges instead of simply being the same work day in and day out. I am truly blessed to be able to continue to be in the Yeshiva and to occupy this position.

TC: *What are the main initiatives that the mashgichim are undertaking this year?*

RB: I'm not sure. I would point to just one initiative. I think overall we, along with SOY and Student Services, are continuously trying to add to the vitality of the Yeshiva. The Bein HaSemesterim program, June Zman barbecue, special Elul speakers, Yom Ha'atzmaut Yom Iyun, official In-Shabbosim, Rosh Chodesh kumzitzim, a Purim morning kollel, and many other initiatives didn't exist ten years ago and all help to create a more active and vibrant Yeshiva.

TC: *How do you try to have a relationship with the many YU*

students when there is only one of you?

RB: The good news is that there is an entire team of people in YU whose major focus in the Yeshiva is to help cater to the needs of the talmidim. Besides all of the rebbeim, Rabbi Penner and the entire RIETS staff and the university support staff, myself, Rabbi Bacon, and Rabbi Zahtz are officially assigned as the mashgichim for MYP, Rabbis Willig, Ciment, and Weinberg service the BMP program, and Rabbi Blau as the Senior Mashgiach and Rabbi Weinberger as the Mashpia all play critical roles. Additionally, we have established networks of sho'alim u'meishivim for BMP, madrichim for most of the Israeli Yeshivot, and shiur assistants for the YP shiurim. The



effect of all of this is to hopefully create layers of hashgacha so that, ultimately, every student has been reached out to and connected with. Obviously, we don't try to force ourselves on anyone, and not everyone is looking for a deep relationship with a rebbe or mashgiach, but it's important to us that the students know that we as an institution truly care about each talmid who walks through these doors. With all of the different personalities and strengths of the mashgichim, the common

denominator of the staff is the enormous feeling of admiration and affection that we feel for the students, and those feelings of ahava propel us forward in trying to connect with as many people as possible.

TC: *What are the main things about our beis midrash that you are proud of and would like to continue to excel in, and what things are you unhappy about and would like to change?*

RB: Thankfully the list that I'm proud of is significantly longer than the list of those areas that need major improvement. If I had to choose just one specific area of pride it would simply be how remarkable the student body is. I get to come to 'work' every day and be surrounded by guys who are sincere, genuinely growth-oriented, intellectually curious, open to self-reflection, respectful, concerned about the world at large, and are generally refined in their character traits. There are hundreds upon hundreds of students with these characteristics in the YU orbit, and they help to create just a beautiful and positive environment and tapestry. Sadly, I don't think most guys fully appreciate that tapestry until they have stepped away for a little while.

As far as an area that continues to need to be strengthened, it is the challenge (felt by many at any age) of being a part of the larger environment and milieu of both the University as well as the broader culture while still somehow being able to inoculate oneself within the Beis Midrash. As a staff, we understand everything—the time constraints and various pressures—the students face, but we also understand the value, both for the immediate future and for setting a course for one's later years, of being fully engaged in a Beis Midrash that includes night seder, Thursday night mishmar, and In-Shabbosim. That strong Beis Midrash culture exists already, but continues to need to be strengthened and cultivated.

TC: *How can students better take advantage of the mashgichim in order to enhance their YU experience?*

RB: We are around and want nothing more than to play some small supportive role in people's lives during these incredibly formative (and often overwhelming) years. If you don't see us in the Batei Midrashot or in our offices, we can always be contacted, day or night, by phone or e-mail. You should all be blessed with nothing but peace and success for the rest of this semester and during the coming years.

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or at blass@yu.edu

YUNMUN and Admissions: A Curious Relationship

By Yechiel Schwab

Since September, the Office of Admissions has been hard at work preparing for this year's YUNMUN (Yeshiva University National Model United Nations). Now entering its 25th year, YUNMUN is a yearly conference that YU hosts for hundreds of students from across North America, and oftentimes other continents, to discuss and debate real issues. This year's conference was hosted at the Stamford Plaza Hotel, with over 450 high school students participating from forty-four schools, including students from South Africa and Brazil. Months in advance, the students are each given a country and put into one of fifteen different United Nations committees run by YU students, who present topics for the students to prepare and then debate and create resolutions at the conference.

In previous years Moshe "Ziggy" Zharnest and Heidi Fuchs played instrumental roles in organizing YUNMUN from the Admissions Office, but since both no longer work in Admissions (completely unrelated to their

roles in YUNMUN), a new staff took over this year. Matt Schwartz, Associate Director of Admissions, explains that "The admissions office has a smaller staff this year so each member of the team is taking on additional roles. The different responsibilities of the conference were divided up amongst various employees, who added these new projects to their pre-existing portfolios." This staff includes Rachel Shandalov, Martha Decaille, Dena Feigenbaum, and Menachim Lewis, who have been coordinating with the high schools, the hotel, the caterer, the buses and airports, and many other logistical issues. Matt spoke very highly of his predecessors, explaining how organized they were, and how that made it easy to follow the structure they laid out. Rachel mentioned that she has been in constant contact with Ziggy, who has been extremely helpful to her, especially since she has taken on a large portion of the YUNMUN organizing.

While the Admissions staff organized the logistics of the event, arranging the programming itself and the topics discussed

lay in the hands of the YU students. Aaron Portman YC '16 served as Secretary General, and, along with his three undersecretaries, Dovi Nadel YC '16, Hadassah Tirschwell SCW '15, and Danielle Orenshein SCW '16, was in charge of creating the schedule, selecting the staff, and producing the atmosphere of the conference. The rest of the student staff worked on the committees themselves to maintain decorum during committee sessions, or in the media center to help with social media and other issues which may have come up outside of committee sessions.

Despite the large role that the Admissions staff plays in organizing YUNMUN, many have questioned how effective YUNMUN is as an Admissions event. And last year, research done by the Office of Institutional Research seemed to confirm these suspicions. Rabbi Kenneth Brander, Vice President for University and Community Life,

oversees the Admissions Office, and with it YUNMUN. He explained that "we try to bring measures and metrics" to everything we do and "evaluate all programs on a regular basis." In line with this idea, the Office of Institutional Research ran a study about four Admissions events: YUNMUN, Sarachek, Wittenberg,

see **YUNMUN and Admissions**,
cont on p. 27

**STUDENTS FROM HIGH
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YUNMUN and Admissions, cont from p. 26

and the Open House. They compared the application rates and matriculation rates of similar students, and found that the Open House had a significant positive effect on students attending YU. For the other three events, “they couldn’t prove it made a difference,” explained Brander. Despite these results, however, the Admissions Office ran YUNMUN again this year, with little change to its programming, and with employees still investing hours of work, as well as a substantial financial cost to the Department. A closer look at the goals of YUNMUN, and at the distribution of money among YU offices, will explain this decision.

Rabbi Brander, the Admissions staff, and Portman expressed similar aims and goals when discussing YUNMUN. Brander explained that he was most excited about two things. Firstly, “Students from high schools across North America coming together and working on important social issues through a prism of civil society and Halacha... that is nowhere but here. Secondly... I think it’s great and unbelievable that our students have the opportunity to shape a program for 500 high school students, and they choreograph it... YU students who want to communicate the importance of being public intellectuals, who engage in Torah and responsibilities to humanity. There is no better way to advocate what YU is.” The Admissions staff similarly pointed to these two aims, explaining how the program itself affords an intellectual yet Torah-safe environment that only YU can provide, and how the YU students who run and attend the event serve as excellent role models for these students. Portman echoed these themes, discussing the unique social and intellectual opportunities offered by a conference like YUNMUN.

Within these aims, we can begin to understand what distinguishes YUNMUN from an event like the Open House. The Open House’s only goal is to attract students to YU. YUNMUN, within its two functions (affording high schoolers on the one hand, and current YU students on the other hand, the chance to lead and to express themselves) can be divided into an Admissions component, and a non-Admissions component. Portman asserted that even if YUNMUN had no effect on Admissions, it would be important for YU to run due to the amazing opportunities it gives the students (both collegiate and high school) who attend. When asked about why they attended YUNMUN, high school students cited these reasons. Lily Gelman from Beren Academy explained that she came to YUNMUN because “it teaches really good skills like public speaking and confidence, and it really builds good character in the students that go.” Becky Portman from Columbus Torah Academy said she came because “I want to learn what it’s like to be an advocate, and to be able to express my opinions and how I feel about certain issues,

and to be heard.” Ari Marder YC ‘16, Chair of COPOUS (Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space), said that YUNMUN is a unique extracurricular activity for YU students, since “you can not only be for yourselves, but be role models for others, which gives a profound opportunity both for us (YU students), and for them (high school students).” Aside from its Admissions purpose, YUNMUN achieves other important results.

This dual purpose affects how YUNMUN’s Admissions message is created and perceived. The YU students who chair the committees are responsible for maintaining the atmosphere of the event, and therefore when speaking about the importance of YUNMUN emphasized the positive effects it had for high schoolers, not its Admissions aspect. Rachel Rolnick SCW ‘16, Chair of ICC (International Criminal Court), felt the most important part of YUNMUN was “watching students present something they have worked so hard on, where their care, effort, and preparation are evident.” Josh Nagel YC ‘16, Chair of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), said his number one goal was “for kids to have a serious experience where they can delve into topics, and I can make them think about issues, but also they can have a great time.” Though they acknowledged that through these aspects, they hoped to fulfill YUNMUN’s Admissions-related goals, their answers indicate that YUNMUN is less about students recognizing YU as a college which fills all their needs, and more about having a positive experience that they associate with YU.

But why did this positive experience not show up in the research? Brander explained that after he received the research from OIR, he contacted Noel-Levitz, a world renowned research firm that YU had recently hired, which explained that despite the research, YUNMUN, Sarachek, and Wittenberg still had important uses to YU. The effects of an event like YUNMUN extend far beyond the students who attend. When the participants at YUNMUN have such an incredible time and gain a positive perspective on YU, this perspective is transferred to their friends at school. Since YUNMUN is such a popular event, even those students at schools that do not attend know about it, and their friends return from YUNMUN and speak about how much they enjoyed YUNMUN. This explains why the research wouldn’t indicate a significant increase in participating in YUNMUN; this message extends far beyond the participants. There may be students who are influenced to attend YU because of their experience at YUNMUN, but their classmates may have had similar thoughts without ever stepping foot inside the Stamford Plaza, which is why the research showed no difference.

Brander further asserted that even if YUNMUN was not categorized strictly as an Admissions event and was instead run by some other department, the Admissions Office wouldn’t get to keep the “pot of gold.” He explained that the budget and personnel on the Admissions staff is proportional to the events and programs they run. So if YUNMUN was run through another department, that department would receive the funds and personnel necessary to run it. Whether or not to run YUNMUN does not necessarily depend on its direct Admissions effect, but whether it is a program the University values. Between its positive effects on high schoolers and YU students, and the message it communicates to schools around the country about YU, Brander is committed to running YUNMUN. Furthermore, for an event as well-known and well-liked as YUNMUN, Brander might also have



considered the negative effects of cancelling it, and the message this would send to high schoolers about our university’s financial status. Though the effect would be short-lived, and some students may look past it, it would leave a bad first impression on students to cancel an event like YUNMUN due to budget cuts, and though Brander didn’t mention it, this may have been part of the consideration.

In explaining why YUNMUN has remained an Admissions-run program, Brander maintained that he still views the event as having an important Admissions component. Further, both he and Portman spoke extremely highly of the Admissions staff and the effectiveness with which they ran this year’s event. Portman described Rachel Shandalov as “maybe the most talented logistic[s] person I have ever met. It was incredible working with her.”

Much to the appreciation of high school students across the country, as well as current YU students, Brander concluded that YUNMUN would continue running through the Admissions Office despite the results of the research. The research did, however, impact Brander’s approach to the event and its aims and goals. Curiously, neither the Admissions staff nor the YU students in charge of producing the atmosphere of the event seemed aware of this research, its results, or the proceeding discussions with Noel-Levitz. Though the research did not result in cancelling YUNMUN, the Admissions staff and the Secretary General should be aware of the research and its results, and determine from there what changes, if any, should be

made to the programming. Nonetheless, high school students and college students alike had glowing reviews for Portman and the Admissions staff and greatly enjoyed and benefited from YUNMUN XXV, though assessing its effectiveness as an Admissions event may be more difficult than we thought.



MANY HAVE QUESTIONED HOW EFFECTIVE YUNMUN IS AS AN ADMISSIONS EVENT. AND LAST YEAR, RESEARCH DONE BY THE OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH CONFIRMED THESE SUSPICIONS.

Belfer Hall: Uncovered

By Tzvi Levitin

Belfer Hall is the ever-beating heart of the resilient body that is Yeshiva University. Whether or not you are a student in one of the 156 undergraduate and graduate classes that meet in Belfer Hall, it is hard to miss the sixteen-story building that towers above the Wilf Campus in Washington Heights. As a state-of-the-art building full of classrooms, laboratories, and offices, Belfer Hall is a hub for students, faculty, and administrators to learn, work, and enjoy awkward elevator rides with President Joel. But what lies within those walls? Unfortunately, many students don't take any classes in Belfer, and those who do tend to visit only one or two floors of the building. So join me as we journey through Belfer, because an informed student body is a virtuous student body, or something like that.

We begin our expedition with Belfer's entrances. There are two ways to get into the building. The first is to brave the Belfer wind tunnel on Amsterdam to reach the main doors of the lobby, and the second is to traverse the literal tunnel under Rubin Hall that leads to the Belfer basement, so long as you follow all of the signs that say "Do Not Enter." (If you choose to enter the building conventionally via Amsterdam, be sure to wear some kippah clips, lest your yarmulke end up at the doors of Chop Chop.) The first floor of the building is home to Weissberg Commons, where large events such as Orientation Day, popular student club events, and, most recently, the Seforim Sale, are hosted. Also located on the ground floor are an ATM and a Caf card reload machine, for when you run out of restaurant money but still want to avoid paying tax on your Zaidy's.

The bulk of Belfer is made up of undergraduate classrooms and laboratories. There are several classrooms and lecture halls on the second and third floors almost exclusively used for Yeshiva College natural science majors and Sy Syms business students. Meanwhile, floors eleven, fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen consist of laboratories, classrooms, and offices for the science, technology, mathematics, and engineering departments. It is in these laboratories that students take their late-night lab courses and professors conduct their own cutting-edge research at the forefront of physics, biology, and chemistry. Outside of the classes, students also use the labs for their own independent research.

Graduate schools also have a presence in Belfer Hall. The Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration has offices and classrooms on the fourth floor, while the Wurzeiler School of Social Work is based on the eighth and ninth floors. The close proximity of the graduate schools to Yeshiva College and Syms students encourages younger students to interact with and seek the guidance of those pursuing higher degrees in their fields of interest. Long elevator rides are often ideal opportunities for such cross-disciplinary interaction.

There are also several floors used for administrative purposes. The fifth floor is made up of faculty offices for most of the liberal arts departments, such as English, History, and Sociology. Occupying the sixth floor are the payroll department and Information Technology Services, which is responsible for establishing and maintaining network services, telecommunication, information security, and likely ensuring that we can't access Wi-Fi beyond the second floor of Furst. The seventh floor is home to the Department of

Institutional Advancement, which coordinates alumni affairs and the Yeshiva University Museum, among other projects.

The Offices of the Provost and the Vice Provost are located on the thirteenth floor. The provost's office oversees all of the University's academic programs, faculty, and resources. Recent talks of budget cuts have brought into question the actions of the provost, but that's a topic for an entirely different article. Also on the thirteenth floor are the Division of Science Management, where you can go to

become more jaded about the pre-engineering program, and the Department of Academic Computing, which is a great resource for when you want to wait three weeks to get a printer fixed. One floor below, you'll find the Office of the President, where once per year you can have an intimate meeting to discuss the future of the university with fifty of your closest friends. Also on the twelfth floor is the Sky Caf, which features a salad bar and some other lunch offerings in the afternoon, as well as vending machines available throughout the

day.

If this groundbreaking article hasn't inspired you to drop your newspaper and go running to Belfer, I implore you to reconsider. The next time you get a package from productions, take a detour to walk the halls; you'll catch some great views of the Washington Bridge, maybe grab a snack in the Sky Caf, and perhaps even spot some of your old friends or professors in the awkward and poorly-photographed portraits hanging in the hallways.



An Open Letter from the Staff of The Commentator

To the Yeshiva University community:

It is no secret that YU is going through tough times. As discussed in the pages of this publication, our poor financial situation contributes to a growing sense of uncertainty about the future of this university.

As editors, we understand that changes are necessary. Cuts are certainly not out of the question, even deep ones. We hope that the scars will heal with time and proper care.

As students, we also hope that the necessary changes target the appropriate channels, and do not chip away at our undergraduate schools to the point where YC and Syms are no longer up to the high standards that we set for ourselves. As Jewish life on other college campuses continues to become more and more vibrant, YU needs to solidify its position as a home for all Jewish students, where one can receive a top-rate university education within the confines of an institution that represents the values of Modern Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, recent moves by the administration undercut that very mission. The concept of claiming to provide an acceptable education for today's competitive workforce without a writing program, without basic sciences and arts, is unfathomable. The fact that tenured professors, Ph.Ds who are in top of their fields, are leaving to teach in high school is shocking. The fact that Yeshiva University, the bastion of Jewish education, is considering cutting its Hebrew department and Judaic studies requirements leads us to question what is being prioritized.

As students of Yeshiva University who are firmly committed to its mission we set forth the following principles:

- I. Academic standards are objectively important for an academic institution.
 - High academic standards should be maintained to the fullest extent possible.
 - We firmly reject the notion that incoming and current students in Yeshiva College do not view academic standards as a top priority.
 - Catering to those who do not share these priorities negatively impacts the character of the college.
 - The value of a Yeshiva University degree for its graduates is tied directly to the academic rigor of the institution and the strength of its departments.
- II. When curricular changes that affect academic standards must be made, they must be made with the direct and significant involvement of those who design curricula—the faculty.
 - Administration should not act, or appear to act, unilaterally in effecting changes, even regarding personnel decisions.
 - Deans, department chairs, and other faculty leaders should be most involved in proposing and executing alterations.
 - Without this process of decision-making, faculty morale, which has already declined, will continue to decline, leading to inferior quality of academics at YC.
 - * When presented with opportunities to leave the college, some of our most talented and promising faculty, feeling unwanted, have left and will continue to leave.
 - The laying off of entire swaths of beloved, skilled, and knowledgeable professors to be replaced with adjuncts is simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the students.
 - Decisions should also take into account the opinions of student leadership on campus when appropriate.
- III. In addition to overall academic standards, we expect that serious academic Jewish studies remain a significant part of the Yeshiva College education for every student.
 - For an institution built on the values of Torah u-Madda, academic Jewish studies serve as the bridge between our Torah study and our analytic methodologies of scholarship.
 - Yeshiva College is unique in providing students the opportunity to explore challenges that the Jewish people face in the modern world in a comfortable, safe, and respectable environment.
- IV. Transparency is crucial in times of transformation at the University.
 - In order to maintain an environment of trust, those responsible for major changes must make every effort to make their decisions transparent.
 - Failure to do so creates an atmosphere where people affected by those decisions believe that the decisions are not being made in their best interests.
 - Not only does this result in unnecessary agitation, but also lowers the University's image in the eyes of students and committed alumni.
 - Part of transparency is taking responsibility for mistakes that were made. Those who were involved in the investment mistakes that precipitated this crisis must be held accountable, no matter their position.
- V. The University's absolute priority should be its students
 - As stated in its mission statement, Yeshiva University serves to “ennoble students in purpose...enable them in capacity...[and] make possible achievement of nobility.”
 - When allocating its limited resources, the University should first focus on achieving its academic goals before turning its attention towards its role in supporting broader communal goals

The Executive Series: *An Interview with Allen Fagin*

By Raymond Cohen

About *The Executive Series*: Through '*The Executive Series*,' The Commentator provides its readership with access to the thoughts and experience of highly accomplished individuals in the business world. The column has a conversational style and expresses the individual journey of each business leader, including their motivations, struggles, successes and failures. The Executive Series also serves as a forum for a broader conversation about leadership in business and in life.

About Allen Fagin (Adapted from OU.org): Mr. Allen Fagin currently serves as Executive Vice President and Chief Professional Officer of the Orthodox Union. He practiced law at Proskauer Rose, LLP, one of the leading international law firms, beginning in 1976, where he specialized in employment law, co-chairing Proskauer's Labor and Employment Law Department for many years and served as Proskauer's chairman from 2005-2011. Mr. Fagin is a graduate of Columbia College (1971); Harvard Law School and the JFK School of Government at Harvard, where he received a JD and a Masters Degree in Public Policy, both in 1975.

RC: Tell me about your first leadership role. What experiences did you take with you throughout your career?

AF: Two of the earliest experience I had in a leadership role were on the communal side. One as Chairman of the Board of Yeshiva Dov Revel - at the time it was going through all kinds of significant transitions - and another as President of the Queens Jewish Center in Forest Hills. Probably the most important lesson from both of those experiences was how to manage the process of change. Anyone, whether in a management or highly entrepreneurial role will constantly be faced with the challenge of managing new and different circumstances. Managing change, the change process, and expectations with respect to change is the hallmark of a good leader, because circumstances will almost never be steady. You either learn to adapt or you fail.

RC: Could you talk about some of the changes you saw in the dynamic of business throughout your career?

AF: Every enterprise goes through significant change in the way it does business. When I was a young lawyer, we sent messages to clients either by fax or by messenger and made copies using carbon paper. Modern technology virtually didn't exist and so the demands that came with modern technology didn't exist. If you received a message you had time to think of a response and weren't expected to reply within 30 seconds having received it. The corollary of that was the expectation of 24/7 availability, clients started expecting that you have one electronic device or another constantly at your side, so that at any hour, day or night, you would be responsible to respond to any issues that arose.

Also, when I first started practicing law there was very little in the way of international transactions. By the time I stopped practicing law, virtually every deal had a global component to it. We were operating across multiple jurisdictions, multiple time frames, and throughout multiple countries. Every one of those changes, technology, globalization, information management and the need to further and further specialize our area of expertise, had an effect on the way our firm conducted business, how we related to clients, and how we trained our young lawyers. We had to adapt to business in the 21st century.

RC: How were you able to lead that change as chairman of Proskauer Rose?

AF: The most important element in leading change is first understanding its implications. We had to peer over the horizon, to realize where the trends in the industry were taking us. We asked: "Where do we want to be two years out? Five years out? 10 years out?" Once you do that, you can work backwards and say, "Well here is what we need to do today in order to position ourselves for what the world will look like in the relatively short run, mid-range and long run." Sometimes those predictions would be accurate and sometimes they turned out to be inaccurate, but if you did a reasonably good job at predicting what the industry was going to look like, what

clients are going to look like, and what their demands are going to look like, then creating the strategy to meet that turned out to be a lot easier.

RC: How were you able to convince others sitting around the table that your vision was the correct one?

AF: I always felt that the primary way of leading change is to make your case as clearly and honestly as you can and let the facts speak for themselves. Using data and analytic techniques, in effect proving your case the way you would if you were

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representing a client and trying to have them prevail at a trial. I was talking to very smart and highly analytical people who were open to new ideas and concepts but wanted to understand the factual basis for the arguments that were being made. For me, marshalling the evidence was the most important first step. But I always mixed in a healthy dose of instinct with a factual presentation. And instinct is not a dirty word - instinct is based on your own sense of experience, your sense of history, your gut understanding of what your firm is and how the business environment with respect to the firm developed over a period of time. So if you mixed a healthy dose of instinct with a reasonable dose of fact, you could make a pretty persuasive case to people who were used to applying logic and sensibility to make careful decisions.

RC: Could you talk a little bit about the challenges you faced as a Jew in the workplace and how you were able to overcome those obstacles?

AF: I think I've been blessed during my life and throughout

my career in never feeling that my religion or my religious observance stood in my way. I think that most of the professional world operates on a meritocratic basis. Really what they care about is who are you and how good are you at doing what you do. When I was considering whether to run for the chairmanship of my firm, I talked to a number of my colleagues, Jewish and non-Jewish, about the fact that I would be unavailable on Shabbos and Yom Tov. I wanted to hear from them whether or not they thought it would be an impediment, and I can't think of a single person who felt that it was an issue, because they all knew that I had found ways to compensate for that unavailability. If you're determined enough, you find a way to marry your Jewish and professional life.

RC: How did you get involved with OU?

AF: I first got involved about thirty of thirty-five years ago, in what was then the New York region of OU and over time began to participate in a variety of other activities of the Union, including the Institute for Public Affairs, now called OU Advocacy. I was involved with JLIC and more recently with NCSY. When I retired from Proskauer (end of 2013) the OU was searching for a new CEO (called Executive Vice President) and it wasn't long after I announced my retirement that I was approached to see if I would be interested. I hadn't thought about becoming the CEO until then, but the role certainly fit the ideal job description of what I wanted to do with the rest of my professional career, which was to give back to the community.

RC: You've dedicated a large portion of time to giving back to your surrounding community. Why has this been so important to you? And what advice can you give to young professionals about how to balance work with community service?

AF: I think it's an individual choice that everyone has to make. Everyone needs to figure out how to find time to do all of the things that are important to them in their life. Obviously that includes professional life, family life, and social life. It includes being Koveah Itim and devoting time to community service. The most important place to start is to find out what gives you satisfaction. What adds meaning to your life? That calculus will vary from person to person. Another factor to consider is what stage you are in your life. I think mid-career, people have more time and more resources to devote than when they are first starting out professionally. It could be particularly challenging if you have a young family to take care of. The third factor is utilizing your time wisely. The old saying "Time is a terrible thing to waste" is particularly true for frum Jews who feel a profound sense of obligation in multiple directions. You have to find ways and strategies to use your time in the most effective way that you possibly can.

But again, I think the most important component is determining fairly early on in your life is why you are here. Why are you on this planet? Why did G-d put you here? What do you want to accomplish with your life? And then you can let every decision be guided by your answer to those questions. And, almost inevitably, you'll push yourself in the direction that gives you the most Sipuk HaNefesh.

RC: How do you compare the management experience of a law firm to that of a non profit?

AF: That's a great question. Before I took this job, I would have assumed there are really significant differences, but now that I've been in it for a year, I actually think there are far fewer. One of the keys to being a successful manager is possessing the ability to strategically plan and mesh the goals of the organization you work for with a clear plan for effectuating those goals. The goals of a for-profit enterprise are going to be very different from the goals of a non profit enterprise, but each has goals, each has a mission, and each needs strong leadership with a plan to bringing that mission into reality. That planning process is relatively consistent - it doesn't matter if its a law firm, accounting firm, non profit or frankly any business.

Secondly, a really good manager tries to determine how to motivate the members of the staff. What gives them satisfaction? Why are they coming to work in the morning? What are they trying to accomplish in their

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cont. on p. 31

The Executive Series, cont. from p. 30 lives and are you giving them the tools to be able to reach their goals? The answers to these question may be different in a for-profit vs. a non profit, but the basic framework is the same. So a lot of the management skills are the same.

RC: *What intangible skills do you think are most critical to success in the business world today?*

AF: The one skill I've always found to be the most important is the willing to take responsibility for your own advancement and to take ownership of whatever you are being asked to accomplish. It's an attitude. It says: "This is my task, this is my problem. I own it." No one is going to write you a cookbook on how to get the job done, you've got to do it yourself, because it's your responsibility. If you have that attitude right from the outset, from the first day you walk into a job, you will show through in a way that differentiates you from many people

who, rather than grabbing life by the neck and wrestling it to the ground, are perfectly content passively marching through life.

RC: *What trends do you see in the marketplace that will guide the future of business? Where should undergraduates focus their efforts?*

AF: There's probably no question that there are two fairly fundamental trends in the entire business world that are growing. The first is the globalization of commerce. Anything you can learn about how business is conducted around the world, sensitivity to cultural differences, and sensitivity to different business practices will be extremely helpful as the world continues to contract in terms of commerce and internationalization. The second key trend is the impact of technology. Data gathering, data management, and data mining will all have tremendous influence on the future of business. Even if you're not technically oriented, you should know what

it means and how to use those tools and understand how they could be applied in virtually any field.

Having said that, trying too hard to predict what the field of the future is going to be is probably a mistake. I'm not saying that it can't be done. But as you go through life, the more important element of success will be enjoying what you do and feeling committed to it. If you pick a field solely because it's expanding and you don't enjoy the work, you may find a job, but you won't keep it very long, because it's not going to sustain your desire to do something that you feel is productive. The most important thing is to figure out is who you are and what "tickles your funny bone," so to speak. Try to find a profession that is expanding, but is also in a niche that you think you'll enjoy. You should also be willing to concede to yourself, if you get to the point where you say "I've made a mistake," to move on to something that will give you pleasure. All of us are devoting such a large amount of time to pursuing careers that, if you don't thoroughly enjoy what you're doing, you will find it to be very hard to motivate yourself to succeed.

Entrepreneurs of YU Leveraging Talent: The Quantum Way

By Avi Hershberg

About *Entrepreneurs of YU*: *'Entrepreneurs of YU' serves as a forum for sharing the ideas, struggles, vision and success of current and former YU students who have entrepreneurial ventures. The series focuses on one unique story at a time to provide readers with a focused understanding of the passionate entrepreneurship that exists throughout the YU community. If you, or someone you know, would like to be featured in this column please email raymond.cohen@mail.yu.edu.*

In the early 1990s, valuations of US companies were based primarily on the worth of their tangible assets, with PP&E (property, plant, and equipment) composing the majority share of their market value. Due to such a straightforward method of valuation, there were hardly any discrepancies between the book value and market value of many US manufacturing-based companies such as Chevron, Chrysler, and Reliance Steel & Aluminum.

Nowadays, however, it doesn't take much financial discipline to comprehend that the value of companies like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter have practically nothing to do with the value of their tangible assets. Unlike their 20th century counterparts, these companies' intangible assets comprise the vast majority of their market value. In light of these changes, the following question begs to be asked: What justifies the significant difference between the market value and the book value commonly found in these companies?

The answer to this question lies in the most valuable component of intangible assets – the creativity of the human mind that is expected to create future value for a business. The intangible assets most commonly used today are knowledgeable workers and their intellectual capacity, as opposed to the old manufacturing model of hard assets over talent. Take Snapchat for example – and notice how little tangible value it actually has.

As the advanced technology and marketing worlds collide with more traditional areas of business, Talent Acquisition has moved towards becoming an integral element of businesses. Talent Acquisition will move beyond simply hiring employees who satisfy a job description and concentrate more on locating inventive workers who can directly contribute significant value towards a company's bottom line. This shift will fuel more technically-oriented job opportunities to those who can offer a more inventive and collaborative mindset. As a result, employees will receive recognition for the importance of their role within the company which will, in turn, motivate them to drive the company towards success.

The quintessential example of a company capitalizing on human creativity is Quantum Networks (Quantum), a New York City-based e-commerce company that, according to its website, "specializes in marketing and selling niche next generation communication devices," including items such as "cell phone amplifiers, 3G and 4G routers, GPS tracking devices, and mobile hotspot gear."

The company expanded from a startup driving \$300,000 in revenue in 2008 to a multimillion-dollar company the very next

year. They not only expanded considerably, but also catapulted into record breaking numbers. To this day, it remains among a short list of companies that saw a 1,000% increase in revenue in Year 1, a rise deemed unprecedented in the industry. The company has maintained its place on the Inc. 5000 list since it's founding in 2008, among the fastest growing companies in the United States. The visionary co-founders of this skyrocketing startup are Eytan Wiener (YC '05) and Ari Zoldan (SSSB '99), proud Yeshiva University alumni that speak very highly of the institution and their time on campus.

NOWADAYS, HOWEVER, IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE TO COMPREHEND THAT THE VALUE OF COMPANIES LIKE FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN AND TWITTER HAVE PRACTICALLY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE VALUE OF THEIR TANGIBLE ASSETS. UNLIKE THEIR 20TH CENTURY COUNTERPARTS, THESE COMPANIES' INTANGIBLE ASSETS COMPRISE THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEIR MARKET VALUE. IN LIGHT OF THESE CHANGES, THE FOLLOWING QUESTION BEGS TO BE ASKED: WHAT JUSTIFIES THE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARKET VALUE AND THE BOOK VALUE COMMONLY FOUND IN THESE COMPANIES?

At the time, market expectations, competitive pressures, and the rapid pace of change steered Quantum's founders to explore Talent Acquisition coupled with a unique company culture as their pathway towards success. Most companies in the industry were hiring talented people; however, those companies primarily concentrated on investing in technology to gain an "edge up." Even then, no company had placed nearly as much emphasis on Company Culture and Talent Acquisition as Quantum Networks. Rather than following the pack, Wiener and Zoldan believed that the antithesis of traditional practices

-- that is, placing a stronger emphasis on human resources and company culture than on technology -- was a more effective approach.

To that end, all employees at Quantum Networks are told to adhere to the "open-door policy," stressing the importance of maintaining communication with senior management. Forgoing the need to schedule appointments is one of the strategies they use to encourage more collaboration. CEO and founder Ari Zoldan said, "It's imperative that companies start moving from a competitive to a collaborative landscape to compete in today's environment."

Quantum has now evolved focus on building and developing next-generation products and services for the rapidly growing broadband market. "We are excited about our new products, but we are even more excited to select and retain talent-- especially since our company is greatly reliant on the talent that we will hire. If we hire a poor performer, the cash flow generated by these assets will be less than if we hire a superstar," said Zoldan.

More recently, companies have decided to acquire smaller companies in order to leverage that talent for other vertical services or products they offer. In 2009, Facebook bought FriendFeed, a service to help people track the online activities of their friends. Tech insiders thought it was trying to compete more effectively with Twitter, but Facebook was really interested in FriendFeed's dozen well-regarded product managers and engineers, including two of its founders, Bret Taylor and Paul Buchheit, who had previously worked at Google. Zoldan thinks this acquisition is representative of an emerging trend. "We are going to start seeing a trend of larger companies acquiring smaller companies strictly for the talent... [T]he product and service in the company is secondary..."

This trend will likely continue to gain momentum in 2015 as companies hone their talent management processes to acquire specific types of candidates while consolidating recruitment processes to become more streamlined. Zoldan explained, "Today more than ever, companies need to put serious emphasis and capital on identifying and retaining top talent; that's how companies will differentiate themselves in the 'new economy' and truly maximize their potential."



YU Adds Real Estate Course to Curriculum

By Raymond Cohen

In 2010, amidst a slow national recovery from the recession, undergraduates struggling to find gainful employment were left questioning their decision to attend college. News authorities such as TIME Magazine, US News, The New Yorker and The New York Times called into question the assumption that a bachelor's degree provides the necessary value to offset its cost. A mere 55% of newly-minted grads surveyed in 2011 claimed that their college education prepared them for a job - a result suggesting that college was no longer a worthwhile investment.

Fast-forward five short years, and what was once one of the most hotly debated topics is now a no-brainer. A 2014 Pew study found that the earnings gap between those with a four-year degree and those without one had reached an all time high. College graduates also had lower poverty rates and were more likely to be satisfied with their job. Put succinctly by a recent article in The New York Times, "Yes, college is worth it, and it's not even close."

Higher education has rapidly reclaimed its position as one of the most important investments for young adults. But what is it about college that provides so much value? Is college a four-year academic endeavor or intensive preparation for your first job? The question is particularly tricky for a business school. The Sy Syms School of Business has made a concerted effort to provide its students with a combination of academic rigor and technical ability. As Dean Pava put it, "We search for high caliber faculty, whether it be academically-oriented faculty or professionals, but we make sure to maintain a balance between the two."

In an effort to provide more practical courses like Kukin Executive Lecture Series and Social Media, the Syms administration added a specialty course this semester called "The Anatomy of a Real Estate Deal."

The course is being taught by Professor Jason Greenblatt, a graduate of YU ('85 YUHSB, '89 YC) and 22-year veteran of the real estate industry. He earned his J.D. from NYU Law School in 1992 and joined The Trump Organization in 1997 where he has worked ever since. Per his Bio, Professor Greenblatt has "represented Donald J. Trump and his children in legal and business matters, concentrating on all aspects of domestic and worldwide real estate development, financings, acquisitions, operation and management..."

The fact that the Professor has so many years of real-world business experience has excited many of the students. Sam "Shmoozie" Weinstein (SSSB '15), a student in the course and the Vice President of the Sy Syms Student Council, labeled this "the course that transcends University." He went on to explain that the course provides students with the tools to "succeed in [their] job and succeed in business." In doing so, Shmoozie echoed the Professor's idea of the essence of what the class

is supposed to provide: "This is a course that, by design, is intended to allow students to learn what is really going on in a real estate deal, in many cases utilizing actual real estate transactions as examples."

For some students who are looking to pursue a career in real estate, this class has yielded tremendous benefits. Charles Saka (SSSB '16), a former intern for Thor Equities, one of

**"[THE] GROUP PROJECT
REQUIRES STUDENTS TO
ANALYZE THE INTRICACIES OF
A REAL ESTATE DEAL.
STUDENTS SELECT AN
ATTRACTIVE INVESTMENT
PROPERTY ANYWHERE IN THE
UNITED STATES, CONDUCT
MARKET RESEARCH, PROJECT
CASH FLOWS, AND ENGAGE
IN NEGOTIATION."**



the worlds largest real estate development firms, and current intern for Paramount Realty, came to the professor with what he thought was a great investment opportunity. As Charles tells the story "[Professor Greenblatt] asked me two or three quick questions and really made me think for myself. I was forced to reevaluate my position and I learned something new in the process." The following week Charles presented his newly developed analysis to the class and took the role of professor as he explained about the function of ground leases.

The course has an interactive style and encourages students to develop both hard and soft skills that are useful in the professional world. Course assignments engage students and encourage them to follow the real estate market to develop their own opinions. For example, students were sent a relevant article about a potential real estate investment and each got the chance to publicly address the pros and cons of investing in the particular project. This assignment not only provided students with the opportunity to enhance their public speaking skills, but also sharpened their analytical skills in the context of business.

One of the main assignments for the course is a group project that requires students to analyze the intricacies of a real estate deal. Students select an attractive investment property anywhere in the United States, conduct market research, project cash flows, and engage in negotiation. Not only was this an opportunity for experiential learning, but, by observing their peers, students were exposed to the negotiation process for a wide range of transaction types, including one group presenting a commercial property, another residential, and a third presenting a building being sold by a non profit. Max Stern (SSSB '15) elaborated on his involvement in the project: "When I go for an interview, I'll be able to differentiate myself easily."

Like Charles, Max is also pursuing a career in real estate; he interned two summers for Ashkenazi Acquisitions and is thrilled about the course. "The project is giving me experience in everything from confidentiality and title insurance to term sheets and purchase and sale agreements." He also noted the added benefit of working in a group setting, which sharpens his team building skills.

To add to the course's professional development experience, the class will be taking a trip to the offices of The Trump Organization sometime later in the semester. The trip has garnered a large amount of interest amongst the students and is sure to benefit them by exposing them to real estate in a professional setting.

Former Congressman Addresses Accounting Society

By Avishai/Jacob Cohen

Former Congressman Joseph J. DioGuardi (NY-20), the first practicing Certified Public Accountant (CPA) elected to Congress, spoke to the YU Accounting Society last week about accounting and the federal government. During his talk, DioGuardi specifically focused on the ever-expanding national debt, the subject of his life's work. DioGuardi served in Congress for two terms for a total four years; his most significant legislative accomplishment was authoring the Chief Financial Officers Act, which reformed the way the federal government manages its money.

About thirty-five students showed up to hear from DioGuardi who also distributed free copies of his book, *Unaccountable Congress: It Doesn't Add Up*, to event attendees. DioGuardi schmoozed with students before he spoke and expressed his thanks for the invitation to share his thoughts. DioGuardi began by playing an audio clip from a radio interview he had done the previous week, discussing the current state of the national debt, in light of President Obama's recent \$4 trillion budget proposal. DioGuardi also showed a flash video that he wrote and produced, simplifying the national debt crisis for those without a background in the issue. "It's an absolute lie when you use the cash basis," DioGuardi said. Very simply, the difference between cash and accrual accounting is that under the cash basis, income and expenses are recognized when cash

changes hands, while under the accrual basis, revenues and expenses are recognized as soon as they happen, regardless of when cash changes hands.

DioGuardi went on to explain his thesis that the federal government should switch over to accrual basis accounting, which is required by the SEC for all publicly traded corporations,

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rather than the cash basis accounting the government currently uses. The national debt is currently about \$18 trillion, but DioGuardi asserts that the true national debt is really almost triple that, or about \$72 trillion, when converted to the accrual basis. "Most people are not conditioned to believe that the government would impose a debt so onerous," DioGuardi said.

DioGuardi is certainly in a position to know about government accounting, having been a partner at Arthur Andersen, the prestigious accounting firm that collapsed in the Enron scandal in the previous decade. While at Arthur Andersen, he was on a committee of five partners that produced the first ever financial statements for New York City. "We have a big problem...we can't count straight in government," DioGuardi said regarding the general financial reporting environment. DioGuardi had well crafted slides that complemented his message. He also fielded many questions from students unfamiliar with the system.

On the whole, students enjoyed the event and had a positive reaction. Syms junior and Accounting Society board member Aharon Shevach told *The Commentator* that hearing from the congressman was an "incredible honor." Shevach went on to say "his speech was thought-provoking and eye-opening in regards to the government and who should be accounting for Washington. I learned a tremendous amount from him and am very grateful to the Accounting Society for putting together such a fantastic event." Syms senior Yale Jasphy described the event as "informative" and the congressman as "extremely interactive".

Another Profitable Year at the Seforim Sale

By Shaul Yaakov Morrison

The annual YU Seforim Sale is one of the largest events on campus each year. This year, the sale lasted from February 1st to March 1st, which was a week longer than the 2014 sale. According to Seforim Sale CFO Nathaniel Kukurudz, this year's sale generated \$722,000 in revenue, down about \$10,000 from the 2014 sale. However, Kukurudz projects a similar net income to the 2014 sale, which was \$46,000, but it is too soon after the sale to determine the exact net income. Coming off a profitable 2014 sale, the management of the sale hoped that the sale would grow in 2015 due to some of the changes made, but the revenue and income remained stagnant. Nonetheless, it was a positive sign that the sale was profitable in consecutive years, which was not always the case.

After losing \$57,000 in 2013, the Sy Syms faculty began to advise the student leadership on how to best manage the sales' finances. Last year, Professor Leonard Fuld advised the sale as part of a Sy Syms course, and this year, Sy Syms Associate Dean and Entrepreneur-in-Residence Michael Strauss was the faculty liaison to the sale. "Dean Strauss was presented the budget and major expenses, which he approved and contributed great inputs to. I speak for the team when I express our thanks to him for all his help," said Kukurudz. Having the Syms faculty as part of the team has helped the Seforim Sale become profitable once again.

Planning the sale requires months of preparation and a committed management team to ensure that the sale runs profitably and efficiently. The Seforim Sale management team started planning for this year's sale at the beginning of the academic year. They coordinated with various YU departments, determined what titles to stock, coordinated with over 200 vendors to receive merchandise, set pricing, and worked on the budget for the year's sale.

The management team allocated money from the previous year's sale in order to ensure that the sale would have enough cash to pay the various upfront costs incurred during the planning stages. This year, the sale faced an expense they did not face in years past; the furniture used in the sale had been made available at a lower price due to the generosity of donors, but this year the sale had to pay about \$7,000 upfront to pay for the rental. This expense was covered from money saved from last year's sale and allows the sale to operate without going into debt. Another key method that management used to remain debt-free was by exclusively selling merchandise on consignment. This arrangement minimizes upfront costs for stocking books. As part of their agreement, the books remained property of the author, publisher, or distributor until they are sold. Once sold, the Seforim sale remits a pre-negotiated sum to the publisher. Additionally, at the end of the sale, and extra books are shipped back to their owners, ensuring that the sale is never left with inventory.

The Seforim Sale's prices remained cheaper than even

some of the largest booksellers, including Amazon.com. For example, a copy of Shlomo Brody's newly released book, *Guide to the Complex*, which retails for \$29.99 on the publisher's website and about \$25.00 on Amazon, was priced at \$20.59 at the Seforim Sale. According to Kukurudz, "The main reason our prices are so competitive is because of the incredible relationships we have fostered over the years with our many suppliers, who understand our mission, and thus make every effort to provide us with their most competitive prices." Another reason the sale is able to maintain low prices is due to the low staffing and overhead costs. Though the sale employs over 100 people, most of the people working at the sale, including the Section Managers and cashiers, work as volunteers and are given a \$300 gift certificate to the sale as a gift. This allows the sale to remain profitable while offering low prices and enables the sale to hire a large staff, contributing to its effective customer service. When talking about the volunteers, Kukurudz said, "What we give them in

"OUR GOAL IS NOT TO MAXIMIZE PROFIT, BUT TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY WITH THE BEST PRICES ON JEWISH BOOKS, SERVE YU WITH PUBLICITY AND BRAGGING RIGHTS, AND ALSO SERVE THE STUDENT BODY BY GIVING THE PROFIT BACK TO THEM."

**- NATHANIEL KUKURUDZ,
SEFORIM SALE CFO**

no way does justice to all they contribute to the store."

Each year, the sale attempts to identify new opportunities to grow and increase sales. One of the ways the sale hoped to grow this year was through the expansion of online ordering. Under the direction of sale CTO Ari Hagler, the sale introduced a new point-of-sale system that integrated the sale's in-store inventory with online orders. This new system decreased the sale's technology and credit card processing fees, while allowing for growth in online orders. This year, the sale generated \$47,000 of sales online, which represented 6.5% of total sales. Though this did not represent such a high proportion of sales it year, it was a significant increase from previous years' orders. Kukurudz added, "We are projecting online sales to

make up an increasing amount of the total sales in the coming years. Our current model necessitates an expansion and we see it as coming from our tapping fresh markets in states beyond New York and New Jersey." Because of the online ordering, the sale was able to deliver merchandise to California, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In a year plagued with as many snowstorms as this one, the online shopping option was also beneficial to local customers, providing them with an alternative way to shop. Additionally, having a strong online presence helped the sale's overall visibility, and provided additionally publicity for the sale.

The sale also hoped to increase sales through new marketing strategies and product offerings. Altaras began working on a gift card campaign around Chanukah to sell Seforim Sale gift cards. Additionally, the sale reintroduced a music section and began selling more non-Seforim items as a way to diversify its product offerings to attract more customers. "Every year, we face the challenge of re-introducing ourselves to the scene and making people aware that we are back, and the music and Judaica offerings, which we had stopped a couple years ago, were used in our marketing efforts in that regard," said Kukurudz. Though neither of these departments contributed a significant amount to this year's sales, there is hope that the foundation established at this year's sale will grow these departments in future years.

Summing up the sale's accomplishments, Kukurudz said, "We are proud to have again produced a significant profit, cementing our positive turnaround. This is even though the nature of this Sale is not to maximize profit, but to serve the community with the best prices on Jewish books, serve YU with publicity and bragging rights, and also serve the student body by giving the profit back to them." Though the profits remained stagnant from 2014 and management was hoping that there would be an increase in sales, the sale proved that it is operating with a sustainable model that will allow it to be profitable and grow in future years.

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Israeli Tech: *Apple Establishes a Stronger Presence in Israel*

By Adam Kramer

About Israeli Tech: The 'Israeli Tech' column is a forum for both in-depth explorations of specific start-ups, as well as broader, industry-based analyses. It not only enables readers to learn about and appreciate the tech wonders that have emerged from Israel in the past, but also provides a glimpse of the technology being developed today that may change our lives in the future.

In a mid-February excursion to Israel, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, met with current Israeli president Reuven Rivlin, as well as former president Shimon Peres. As The Times of Israel reported, Rivlin remarked how much of a privilege it was to have Cook in Israel: "Even for me, as one who prefers to write with a pen and paper, it is clear what a great miracle you have created when I look at my staff and my grandchildren." [1] Cook thanked Rivlin for his kind words, saying that he and his staff "have an enormous admiration for Israel, not just as an important ally for the US, but as a place to do business." [2]

Since assuming office, Rivlin has worked towards the further inclusion of minority groups in Israel. In their conversations, Cook and Rivlin touched on issues relating to the environment, education, and diversity. In particular, they discussed how Apple could help ensure that marginal groups in Israeli society like Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews could be further included in Israel's high-tech scene. Cook brought Apple vice president of hardware technology Johnny Srouji along on his trip. Srouji is an Israeli-Arab from Haifa who has ascended the ranks to a top position in Apple. The Israeli government has been endeavoring to boost Arab participation in Israeli high-tech, with a recent government allotment of \$2.5 million to two organizations that will help provide training and job-placement services for Arab, Druze, and Circassian academics.

Cook's visit, which came after weeks of speculation that he might be making a trip to the "Start-Up Nation," was mainly for the purpose of opening up a new research and development center in Herzliya. According to a Jerusalem Post report, the

new R&D center is 134,550 square feet and will employ 800 employees. It will house Apple Israel's development center and marketing and sales division. [4] With the addition of this new R&D center, Israel will become the home for Apple's second-largest engineering facility in the world. [5]

Aside from the new R&D center in Herzliya, Apple actually has a somewhat lengthy history in Israel. Back in December of 2011, Apple bought out Anobit, a Haifa-based maker of flash memory controllers that Apple has since integrated into many

WITH THE ADDITION OF THIS NEW R&D CENTER, ISRAEL WILL BECOME THE HOME FOR APPLE'S SECOND-LARGEST ENGINEERING FACILITY IN THE WORLD.

of its products. After the acquisition, Anobit was turned into an Apple R&D center, and its 200 employees, three quarters of whom are engineers, became Apple employees. Since that time, the original Haifa R&D center has hired dozens more employees, which can partially explain why Apple and CEO Cook had such a strong desire to continue expanding operations in Israel with the new center in Herzliya.

The acquisitions of Anobit and a November 2013 purchase of semiconductor manufacturer PrimeSense represent the two largest acquisitions by Apple in Israel, with each of those purchases exceeding \$300 million. Since then, there have been a number of high-profile Apple incidents in Israel. The first occurred last August in the midst of Operation Protective Edge, when "Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak arrived in Israel to participate in the EduAction Forum, an annual education conference that kicks off at the start of the school year." [6]

A few months after Wozniak's visit, Apple opened their first official store in Israel, in the duty-free shop at Ben Gurion Airport. While this is a significant development for Apple

supporters in Israel, the store is situated as a store within a store and will be staffed by only one Apple employee. That being said, it should be a stark improvement from the current Israeli market in which Apple products in Israel commonly sell for up to 60% more than their list price on Amazon.com's U.S. site. [7]

Around the same time that Apple publicized their impending new store in Ben-Gurion Airport, they announced plans to open a local sales and marketing office in Israel. According to an Algemeiner.com article, Apple is worried by the successes of Samsung, LG, Asus, and Toshiba in the Israeli market and wants to re-price and re-market their Macbook laptops in an effort to win over Israeli consumers. [8]

Israeli tech companies have made headlines in recent years, and the world, including Apple, has certainly taken notice. Apple has made its presence felt in Israel by purchasing Israeli companies and forming R&D centers. As Apple continues to innovate and expand its product line—they'll be coming out with an Apple Watch in the coming months and recent reports say that Apple is working on a prototype of an automobile—you can be certain that Israel will be at the forefront of Apple's plans.

[1] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/apple-ceo-tim-cook-makes-surprise-israel-visit/>

[2] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/apple-ceo-tim-cook-makes-surprise-israel-visit/>

[3] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/apples-herzliya-rd-center-now-second-largest-in-world/>

[4] <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/New-Tech/Apple-CEO-Tim-Cook-to-inaugurate-new-Israeli-headquarters-next-week-390866>

[5] <http://www.zdnet.com/article/tim-cook-visits-israel-to-open-new-r-d-center/>

[6] <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/New-Tech/Apple-CEO-Tim-Cook-to-inaugurate-new-Israeli-headquarters-next-week-390866>

[7] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/fans-hope-for-low-prices-at-new-ben-gurion-apple-mini-store/>

[8] <http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/10/05/apple-set-to-open-first-store-in-israel-at-ben-gurion-airport/>



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