

# THE COMMENTATOR

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The men's basketball team is the Skyline Conference Champion for the second time in YU history. See article on Page 4.

THE COMMENTATOR

## Following Haphazard Rollout, Security Updates to Include Alumni Restrictions and Shabbat ID Requirement

By AVI HIRSCH

New security policies, which include restrictions on which buildings alumni may enter as well as a new requirement for students and other visitors to carry ID cards when entering YU buildings on Shabbat, will go into effect on March 15, according to a recent update to YU's website. As of the time of publication, students, alumni and other members of the YU community have not been formally notified of these upcoming security updates.

The website now includes a section detailing a list of locations on the Wilf and Beren campuses that alumni will be allowed to visit following the implementation of the new policies. At the moment, security guards allow alumni to enter all YU buildings on the

Wilf Campus and all buildings except the dormitories on the Beren Campus. But absent from the new list of locations are all dormitory buildings on both campuses. The Rubin Shul, Morgenstern Hall beit midrash and the Sephardi *Beit Midrash* are all located in dormitory buildings and are absent from the list; Fischel *beit midrash*, also in a dormitory building, is on the list of locations open to alumni. Other locations seemingly no longer open to alumni are Furst Hall and Belfer Hall, and the only locations listed on Beren Campus that alumni will be able to visit are the library and dining hall.

According to the updated website, the Furman Dining Hall, which is located in Rubin Hall, will remain open to all alumni, and the Max Stern Athletic Center, located in

the same building, will remain open to male undergraduate alumni only. It is unclear how or whether security will enforce the restriction on alumni entering the dormitory rooms also located in Rubin Hall.

All alumni will have to carry new alumni identification cards with them when entering any building on campus. Alumni who wish to access any location not open to them or any location without the new alumni ID card will require the same "daily visitors pass" as any other visitors, which according to the website will require a staff sponsor and "may be limited to only certain buildings and times, and certain purposes."

New visitor policies also include special identification

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## New Undergraduate Student Email System Announced

By TEMMI LATTIN

New undergraduate email guidelines for student club and event announcements will replace the current *ssud/ystud* policy in early March. The updated system will include new email policies that limit the number of emails that can be sent per event and will eliminate "clickbait" in the subject line.

*The updated system includes new email policies that limit the number of emails that can be sent per event and eliminates "clickbait" in the subject line.*

The new system was announced via an email sent to the student body by Linda Stone, director of student events for the Office of Student Life (OSL), on Feb. 24. The system will aim to "improve communications regarding

events scheduled for undergraduate students," according to Stone.

The email linked to specific guidelines for emails, with a limit of three messages for each approved student event or initiative and a requirement for the email's subject line to include only the event or club name and event date. A daily email listing all upcoming events in the next two weeks will also be sent to students' email addresses. Prior to announcing the new email policy to the student body, Stone sent an email to student club heads asking them to acknowledge that they understood the new changes.

A previous email, sent to the undergraduate student body by Stone on Dec. 10, cited "feedback from multiple student discussions [that] have pointed to what, for many, is the ineffectiveness of those systems, which frequently inundate undergraduate students email boxes with messages; resulting in them not being read," and stated that "new guidelines for student to student *ystuds* and *ssuds* will be announced shortly."

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# THE COMMENTATOR

2019-2020

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*For 85 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.*

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## The Case for Student Access to Course Evaluations

By Yossi Zimilover

In the days leading up to registration, students scramble to find out as much information as possible about the courses they may take and their respective professors. WhatsApp and Facebook groups blow up with requests for details, older students and alumni are bombarded with questions and RateMyProfessors.com is scoured, all in the hopes of acquiring a clearer picture of what our course experience will be like the following semester. And while these sources are sometimes helpful, more often than not, students are left with only a couple of anecdotes or two ambiguously worded reviews from 2006 that only confuse us more.

Committee (SAAC), a now-defunct branch of the student government, alongside four Yeshiva College professors, had a developed plan to make this suggestion a reality for Yeshiva College (YC). Yet a follow-up article written in 2013 described how that progress had stalled in the years since. Nine years since the SAAC's proposal, YU's undergraduate students deserve better.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that these evaluations will be able to flawlessly assess a teacher's abilities. Of course, like most reviews, there is often a strong sampling bias of respondents; students who either had an extremely positive or negative experience are more likely to complete the surveys. But if students knew that their fellow peers would be

yeshiva and has three older siblings who attended YU versus a true freshman from Venezuela who is the first in her family to attend our institution. He has many more outlets for course information than the student from a different background.

Yet even the Teaneck student is limited to a few bits of skewed anecdotal evidence from peers who come from a similar environment as him. Making these evaluations available will enable students from all backgrounds to have equal access to the opportunity to make an educated choice when creating their schedules.

The release of the evaluations must be done with the utmost sensitivity to faculty. Emphasis must be placed on laws of *Lashon Hara* and the gravity of writing anything remotely negative about a professor. Students should only respond if the information is truly *l'to'elet*, for a constructive purpose.

I also do not believe that evaluations should be made public for the world to see, nor am I advocating for students to write reviews on RateMyProfessors. Instead, only current students should have access to the evaluations in a password-protected database. Although this information must be kept secure to protect our faculty members, it is vital information that can greatly benefit our students.

The current system in which we complete a scavenger hunt before registration is absurd. Students should have the right to make informed decisions regarding their education. I urge the student body to advocate for this important issue. To the administration, I hope this can be the renewal of a meaningful conversation that needs to take place on campus. In the meantime, I call on all the wonderful professors at YU to pledge to release the course evaluations of your respective classes moving forward and help guide us on our academic journeys.

*The current system in which we complete a scavenger hunt before registration is absurd. Students should have the right to make informed decisions regarding their education.*

However, there is a resource that is totally untapped that could actually provide students with the answers to our questions. At the end of each semester (and in Syms, in the middle of the semester as well) students complete course evaluations — anonymous surveys in which students provide feedback to the administration on the classes they took. These evaluations have the potential to be a substantive dataset that can guide students in making informed decisions and should therefore be made accessible to the student body.

This idea is not my own, nor is it revolutionary. Other colleges around the country, including Columbia University and NYU, have implemented similar programs. In fact, this idea isn't even foreign to YU. In 2011, The Commentator reported that the Student Academic Affairs

examining their words, the response rate among all students could increase significantly and the evaluations would be taken more seriously. More evaluations completed would create a much richer dataset that would also fulfill the administration's original intentions for the questionnaires.

My proposal would not magically give students a completely accurate representation of their classroom experience the following semester, but it is certainly better than the status quo. Today, students who have a strong network from their community or their *yeshiva*/seminary in Israel are at an enormous advantage compared to those from communities that are less represented at YU. For example, there is a tremendous amount of information asymmetry between a student from Teaneck who attended a *hesder*



1

AIPAC

If you weren't able to attend, the Commencement Ceremony is around the corner!



2

Dr. Michael Gerber

Lifhack: If you see him walk into an elevator, RUN THE OTHER WAY!!!! #chazakah



3

The Seforim Sale

Not going to make the same joke again... @Doniel @Sam @Benjy (See issue 84.9 for reference)



4

The Bernstein and Rosenzweig families

Thank you for all that you do. Stern would not be the same without you.



5

The scaffolding at Duane Reade is gone!!!

The sKy is bLuE!!! The air doesn't always smell like weed!! #BrainInAVat



6

Love is Blind

Tying the knot within a week without having seen each other? Why do I feel deja vu? #chassidim



7

No art floor, no art

It's the new duct tape banana.

7UP

by Elisheva Kohn

NMODZ

Farewell, bizarre y/sstud email subject lines

Shiva will be held "on or about March 1" and Orthodox Israel Coalition student ambassadors will be there to harass you. Bring babka!

1



The humanities at YU

"Say something I'm giving up on you."

2



Handshakes

To shake or not to shake, that is the question...

3



The weed world truck is always parked at the same spot as the Chabad mitzvah tank

"Lord get me high" just got a new twist.

4



Joint YU and YU Connects dating panel held at Stern

Co-hosted by the baking club, NCSY, the Seforim Sale, the 2nd floor of the library, the shuttle, and Brookdale lounge. Special guest appearance by the minyan men!

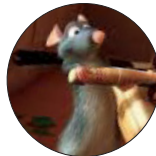
5



Rats in restaurants

Remy's ultimate comeback. This time, he's making his famous ratatouille in the Heights.

6



No Commentator article on last week's elevator incident

I'd rather blast "Yummy" by Justin Bieber at the dating panel than write one more elevator news piece. Observer, you take this one, please.

7



When Disagreement Turns Disrespectful

To the Editor,

The YU Commentator, in its latest edition, published an article entitled: "To the Silent Majority: We Need Your Voice," which bothered me for a particular reason. In the article, the author takes multiple swipes at the Editor in Chief of The YU Observer, quoting two of her articles, a recent editorial and an opinion piece on women's roles in Orthodoxy from earlier in the year.

As an opinion editor of The YU Observer, I would normally encourage students to respond to opinion pieces they disagree with. However, in this case, the author did not actually argue with any of the points that my colleague made in her article about women's roles. Instead, he launched an ad hominem attack on my colleague by stating: "she reveals that she no longer identifies as Orthodox... As hard as it is to admit, the administration does not need to conform to any other set of values and adjust itself to fit you." Firstly, she does not explicitly mention that she is no longer Orthodox, but rather attended a Conservative synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. What's most concerning, however, is that the author's argument here essentially is that since my colleague doesn't fit the mold of a classic YU student, her opinion should not matter.

This is a criticism that I have heard on campus a lot, specifically in regard to the LGBTQ student movement. Many students are arguing that since LGBTQ students only make up a minority of the student body, their needs are unimportant and do not need to be addressed. Not only is this argument flimsy, but it is also quite frankly inappropriate in its strident dismissiveness.

Returning to the article in question, I was genuinely confused as to the author's main point. Based on the title of the article, it would appear that he wanted to encourage all students to voice their opinions, even if they are the majority opinion. However, he later concedes this thesis by stating: "There's no need for us to start a ruckus when YU's stances fit us fine." He then further states: "Modern Orthodoxy has worked for us our whole lives, there is no reason to fight about it now." Why exactly would the majority of the students need to raise their voices when the system works in their favor?

Additionally, the author states: "Countless editorials in both of the papers seem like they were selected by throwing darts at a board to randomly select what the writer is going to bash YU for this week." Yet, he only cites examples of editorials from The YU Observer. While this may be coincidental, it is very careless and suspiciously telling to make the above statement and then cite an example from only one of the student newspapers.

To me, it appears that this article was written with nothing more than the intention of attacking the Editor in Chief of The YU Observer, as it did not contain any substantive points to prove its thesis. To the author: in the future, before writing a piece, please consider whether or not the arguments you are presenting are appropriate to be published in a public forum.

— Phillip Nagler (YC '20)

# Macs Propel Themselves to the NCAA Division III Tournament with Defeat of Purchase Panthers in Skyline Championship

By CHANA WEINBERG

The unstoppable Yeshiva University Maccabees men's basketball team defeated the SUNY Purchase Panthers in the Skyline Conference championship game on Sunday, March 1, by the score of 86-74. The Macs, who are undefeated in conference play for the first time in program history, clinched a spot in the NCAA Division III tournament for the second time in university history. The Macs have now won 27 games this season, the most in Division III.

The selection show for the DIII tournament, at which the Macs' tournament opponent and the game's location will be released, will take place at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, March 2. The tournament begins on March 6.

Gabriel Leifer (SSSB '21) was named Most Outstanding Player, finishing the game with a triple-double, scoring 16 points, pulling a career-high 24 rebounds and dishing out 12 assists. Reflecting on the win, the three-time

*"The crowd was awesome. When we got down early they were always with us, so hats off to them."*

Ryan Turell (SSSB '22)

Metropolitan Basketball Writers Association (MBWA) player of the week said, "It means a lot, but we have a lot of unfinished business in the tournament."

While Leifer continued his season-long dominance on the glass, Ryan Turell (SSSB '22) put on another show with his offensive consistency and efficiency as he led the team with 29 points on 50% shooting from the field. Turell averaged 22 points a game during the regular season.

"It was just a great effort. It was just an amazing experience," said Turell after the win. "The crowd was awesome. When we got down early they were always with us, so hats off to them."

Continuing his breakout was Eitan Halpert (SSSB '21) who had 19 points on 7 of 9 shooting from the field and 3-5 shooting from behind the arc. But it was his defense that stood out during the conference clinching win as he constantly beat the ball down the court on defense. The box score indicated that he had one block and two steals.

"I am so happy for our guys," said

Athletics Director Joe Bednarsh. "They worked really hard all year to get here and deserve this honor. I'm excited to see where they're going for the tournament and hope we get to host it here! These are amazing kids and amazing players and I'm so proud of them and our coaching staff."

Besides being the longest active streak in DIII, the Macs' 27 straight wins is the longest win streak in YU history, surpassing the 17-game win streak of the 2018-19 season. Additionally, the Macs received national recognition as they became the first YU team in history to be named to the Division Three top 25 ranking put out by d3hoops.com, finishing the season at number 15. The Macs are also ranked second in the NCAA Division III Atlantic Region, the highest ranking in program history.

EMAIL SYSTEM,  
continued from Front Page

Following the implementation of the new email system, email lists sstud@yu.edu and ystud@yu.edu will be replaced with berenevents@yu.edu and wilfevents@yu.edu, respectively. Stone explained that just as the sstud address is for Beren students and ystud for Wilf, the same students from each current list will receive emails from the replacement addresses.

This longstanding issue of student discontent with the email system was described in an April 2012 Commentator opinion piece expressing frustration with the "merciless barrage of studs." The piece was followed by a news article announcing plans to introduce an events calendar to replace ystud emails, an initiative that was not fully implemented.

With 167 undergraduate clubs on the two campuses and official guidelines requiring two events per semester to keep official club

status, the current sstud/ystud system serves as the main medium for event advertising and is often the first avenue through which students find out about events.

"The current waiting time for emails to go out on the sstud list-serv is quite frustrating," said Sara Verschleisser (SCW '21), co-president of SURGE, the Martial Arts Club and YU on Organ Donation. "I have sent emails that have taken almost three days to be approved, sometimes being approved after the events or deadlines they were

meant to announce. It's nice to see the effort taken to improve the student listservs, but the new policy does not address the concern of most club heads — the amount of time it currently takes for our emails to be sent out."

Stone expounded on the implementation date of this new policy, explaining that the "process involves partnering with the IT department to make necessary changes — we are hopeful to do so within the next week."

Commenting on the new

policy changes, YCSA President Leib Weiner (YC '20) expressed, "It's really exciting to see a change to something that has been bothering students for a while. I'm sure this will be an ongoing process to further refine the student email experience and help keep them updated on events."

## Citing Human Rights Investigation, Beren Student Court Declines LGBTQ Club Case

By AVI HIRSCH

The Beren Constitutional Council has decided against taking up a case by The YU Alliance against the Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC). According to the Alliance's petition to the Constitutional Council, student council presidents — including SCWSC President Aleeza Katz (SCW '20) — discriminated against the group when they decided to abstain from a vote to approve the club on Feb. 9. The YU Alliance is an off-campus organization catering to LGBTQ undergraduate students at YU, and its application for official club status is currently in the hands of the university administration.

In the petition to the Beren Constitutional Council, The YU Alliance argued that the student council presidents' decision to abstain from the vote on the status of a potential LGBTQ club on campus had violated the non-discrimination policy of the Beren Constitution, which the group called "an unprecedented move." Citing Article IV of the constitution, the Alliance maintained that

"council presidents inherently discriminated against The YU Alliance on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity." The petition was submitted on behalf of the Alliance by Molly Meisels (SCW '21), president of the group, in an email to Chief Justice of the Beren Constitutional Council Shana Adler (SCW '20) on Tuesday, Feb. 11.

Eight days later, on Wednesday, Feb. 19, Adler informed the Alliance in an email to Meisels on behalf of the justices of the Constitutional Council that they had decided to "not hear this case before the student court." They explained that they had been "made aware" of a report pending before the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) "charging the institution with discrimination against the YU Alliance," and thus would "allow the New York City courts to decide how this issue should be handled."

The day before the Constitutional Council responded with its decision, The Jewish Week had reported that on Friday, Feb. 14, the Alliance filed a report with the NYCCHR alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation following the student council's

decision to abstain from approving the club. In their report, the Alliance noted that "no other prospective club was subject to this." A NYCCHR spokesperson declined to comment on the investigation, pursuant to the agency's policy.

*"The YU Alliance is immensely disappointed by the Beren Constitutional Council refusing to hear our case."*

The Board of The YU Alliance

In an email responding to the Constitutional Council's dismissal of their petition, the Alliance expressed confusion at the decision of the justices, arguing that the NYCCHR report was irrelevant to their petition and that by rejecting their case, the Constitutional Council was failing to enforce accountability. Clarifying their decision, the justices explained that since the claim the Alliance had filed to the Constitutional Council cited the "same incident and the same reasoning" as their report to the NYCCHR, and since "the

wording of both the clause in the Beren Constitution and the New York City law code is nearly identical," they had decided that it would "not be appropriate" for them to take the case. They further emphasized that the decision is "final,"

urging the Alliance to "realize it was made by fellow students who thought through all the information we were presented with."

"We considered the constitution," explained Katz regarding the student council presidents' decision to abstain, "and the reason why we felt confident and comfortable abstaining was because we did not feel it violated the non-discriminatory policy or the general constitution in any way."

"The YU Alliance is immensely disappointed by the Beren Constitutional Council refusing

to hear our case," wrote the board of The YU Alliance in a statement to The Commentator. "We believe that SCWSC giving alternative treatment to The YU Alliance because of the fact that it serves LGBTQ students is a clear violation of the Beren Campus Constitution."

Added the Alliance, "By declining to enforce the non-discrimination article of the Beren Constitution, the Constitutional Council has rendered that article effectively meaningless. While we recognize and appreciate that the Constitutional Council has the right to decline to hear cases, we feel that by doing so here, it has let the student body down."

But Katz stands by the decision to abstain. "If we believed that it could have been seen as discriminatory and that that was our goal, to shut down the club, to shut down the conversation, then ... we wouldn't have made that decision," she commented. "We value our students and we would not try to violate anyone's rights."

Yitzchak Carroll and Elisheva Kohn contributed to this story.



Morgenstern Hall

THE COMMENTATOR

*SECURITY UPDATES,  
continued from Front Page*

cards for spouses of alumni and students, and those who wish to attend *minyan* regularly — in the Glueck or Fischel *batei midrash* only — can apply for a Minyan ID Card, which “will need to be approved by both Rabbi Menachem Penner or Yosef Kalinsky and University Director of Security,” according to the website.

In addition to the new alumni and other visitor restrictions, the new policies indicate that all students and visitors will be required to carry identification with them on Shabbat. “All holders of valid Yeshiva University ID Cards wishing entry to the campus buildings and synagogues during the Shabbat and Holidays will be required to present their ID Cards to the Security Officer,” the website states. “All visitors will be required to present their valid government-issued photo IDs, Minyan IDs or Alumni/Alumni Spouse/Student Spouse IDs to the Security Officer.” The website also links to a “Shabbat ID policy ruling,” a *halakhic* ruling from RIETS *rosh yeshiva* Rabbi Herschel Schachter permitting the carrying of ID cards on Shabbat within the *eruv*.

Yeshiva College alumnus Daniel Shlian (YC ‘17) lives near YU’s Wilf Campus in part due to the presence of YU-run *minyanim* — some of which take place in locations that will soon be limited to current YU students only. “Tefillah be-tzibbur is a crucial component of my religious life,” explained Shlian, “and these changes are making me profoundly distressed about my current living situation.”

“In addition,” Shlian added, “it’s important to highlight that there are only two facilities near campus with standing women’s sections throughout the week: Rubin and Morg (in fairness, an ad hoc mechitza is consistently available in Glueck). Restricting access to these locations means, essentially, that women in the community are being told they are only welcome in shul on Shabbat, which is extremely distressing.”

Shlian explained that in October of last year, he had spoken with administrators including Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky and Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum regarding these issues, and left

the meeting with the impression that the prior points would be addressed. “I remain hopeful that some changes will be put into place,” concluded Shlian, “but am disappointed that the new policy made it onto the official YU website prior to any communication of minyan relocations or additions.”

Sy Syms School of Business alumnus Etan Neiman (SSSB ‘17), who also lives in Washington Heights, was similarly concerned about the upcoming changes. He explained that he recently met a student in a YU dormitory lounge to counsel him as part of YU’s new MVP program. With the new policies set to take effect in the coming weeks, he worried that he “will soon be burdened in helping further students should this published policy ultimately go through.”

“The Office of Alumni Affairs has been working in concert with YU’s security office to ensure that the interests of alumni are protected, while understanding that

but according to sources the requirement has been rarely and inconsistently enforced.

In late October, the listing of *minyanim* on YU Zmanim was updated with a message warning students that since alumni will no longer be allowed in dormitory buildings, late night *maariv minyanim* that used to take place in the Morgenstern Hall *beit midrash* would be moved to the second floor of Glueck. These *minyanim*, which take place between 10:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. week-day nights, were then moved once again to a room in Zysman Hall, which prompted a negative reaction from female *minyan*-goers, as a *mechitzah* was not readily available in the new location.

Even after these *minyanim* moved, however, the new security protocols that had seemingly prompted the location changes did not go into effect. But despite the fact that no new protocols were yet in place, YU’s website was updated no later than early

completely up to date. It does seem as though the higher-ups do not effectively communicate new policies to security guards, which adds to a sense of frustration.”

No later than Feb. 18, a few weeks after the updates were removed from the website, they were back online, this time with an “Effective March 1, 2020” heading. No later than one week after this, the date was updated to reflect the current expected rollout date of March 15.

The long and troubled rollout of the new policies, with no formal communication from YU, has spread confusion among alumni regarding when the new restrictions will be implemented and what exactly they will entail. “Since the rumors started trickling in last August about a partial ‘alumni ban,’” explained Neiman, “I have been increasingly frustrated and confused by a lack of formal communication to alumni.”

Shlian was similarly frustrated by communication problems regarding the new policies. “[A]lumni, to my knowledge, have not been made aware of even the general contours of the policy as it stands now, let alone specifics,” he said. Regarding the new alumni ID cards, he added that “at no point were alumni made aware of the new card requirements via any formal process by the university.”

Regarding the lack of communication to alumni, Burkat explained, “Our plan has always been to communicate the new policies with alumni in the weeks before they went into effect, and our communication plan was adjusted to reflect the new March 15 implementation date. We still plan to make sure alumni are apprised of the new policies this week, which will give frequent alumni visitors nearly 2 weeks to obtain their new ID’s, a procedure which only takes a matter of minutes.”

As of the time of publication, Apfelbaum did not respond to The Commentator’s requests for comment on the new security policies.

“Universities should celebrate when an alumnus is on campus, not actively cut back on their access,” Neiman asserted. “This entire experience has been upsetting and will strongly factor into any involvement with YU’s fundraising and community.”

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*The long and troubled rollout of the new policies, with no formal communication from YU, has spread confusion among alumni regarding when the new restrictions will be implemented and what exactly they will entail.*

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the safety of our students is of the highest priority,” explained Director of Alumni Affairs Dina Burkat in a statement to The Commentator. “Alumni will maintain access to all non-residential spaces on campus, and minyan times/locations have been added and adjusted in order to accommodate the new regulations.”

The rollout of the new security protocols has been haphazard, beginning with some alumni claiming that for several hours on Sunday, Aug. 25, security guards had prevented them from entering YU dormitory buildings despite no such policy being in place. Several days later, the Shenk Shul sent an email to subscribers informing them that “starting this shabbat, August 30, YU will be initiating a new security policy requiring photo ID to enter every YU building, including the Shenk Shul” and linking to the ruling of Rabbi Schachter. Shenk Shul Shabbat newsletters beginning that week and continuing until this past week’s newsletter have included the new Shabbat ID requirement,

January with an early version of the new visitor policies, including the alumni restrictions and the Shabbat ID policy. At the time, multiple security guards stationed at the dormitories explained to The Commentator that there were no new security policies in place yet despite the updates on the website. When asked to clarify the website update, a security guard in the central security office on the Wilf Campus falsely stated that the updates were already in place, only to be subsequently contradicted by Apfelbaum. When The Commentator reached out to Apfelbaum for comment on the website update — which included no timeline for when the policies would be implemented — the pages were quickly removed from the website.

According to Shlian, this was not the only area in which security guards were misinformed. “Different security guards seemed to be on totally different pages regarding the new requirements for the [Alumni ID] cards,” said Shlian. “Some seemed fully unaware of any changes, while some were

# After Comeback Victory, Men's Basketball to Continue Historic Season in Skyline Championship Game

By **DANIEL MELOOL and CHANA WEINBERG**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on February 29.*

With a hard-fought win over the Farmingdale State Rams, the Yeshiva University Maccabees secured a spot in the Skyline Conference Championships for the third consecutive year. The top-seeded Macs will host the second-seed SUNY Purchase Panthers on Sunday, March 1 at 1 p.m. in Max Stern Athletic Center. The two teams are playing for more than just the title, as the winner will get an automatic bid into the NCAA tournament.

The Macs came into the game already having faced and defeated the Rams twice during the regular season, once by a 7-point margin and once by 27 points. Both teams played aggressive defense in the first five minutes, limiting the total points scored to 8, 6 of which were scored by the Macs. This was

the second-fewest opening points scored in a conference match-up this season.

After the opening minutes, both teams found offensive rhythm, bringing the score to 17-14 at the

first five minutes, as Farmingdale plowed its way back into the game. The Farmingdale comeback was actualized when Rams senior guard Anthony Miller, Jr. hit a crowd-silencing three pointer to

NCAA Division III. This streak is also the longest in YU history, surpassing the 17 game win streak of the 2018-'19 season. Additionally, the Macs received national recognition as they became the first

Solomon, the creator of the Jewish parody band Shlock Rock and an avid Macs fan, from his home in Beit Shemesh. "They have finally mastered the motion offense and they get stops on defense. And they are playing for the Jewish people."

Bednarsh sounded off on how this Macs team is unique from last year, when the Macs lost in the Skyline Championship against Farmingdale. "I think [the players] have all brought in to the message that [Head Coach] Elliot has brought on. They care about the letter more than the number [on their jersey]," said Bednarsh. "They want that W. And you see, every game someone else steps up. And it's a beautiful thing."

"It's a bunch of selfless basketball between everybody here," said co-captain Dani Katz (SSSB '20). "We don't care about numbers in terms of our own selfish or personal ideas. We just care about getting a win as a team. Just play for everybody. Play like it's your last game. If you don't give your full effort then why am I playing?"

*The two teams are playing for more than just the title as the winner will get an automatic bid into the NCAA tournament.*

ten minute mark. But that was the closest the Rams got in the first half as Yeshiva pulled away, ending the first half with a 14-point lead, at 43-29. Their offensive prowess was encapsulated by a deafening dunk by Ryan Turell (SSSB '22) and assisted by Gabe Leifer (SSSB '21) at the 5:30 mark, which got the crowd of 950 spectators out of their seats.

The crowd was "as loud as I've ever seen it," Athletics Director Joe Bednarsh, who has been working at YU for 27 years, said about that moment.

The exuberant spectators were quieted by a strong second-half start for the Rams. Farmingdale freshman Dominique Senat scored 8 of the Rams' 13 points in the

put Farmingdale ahead 52-49 with eleven and a half minutes to play.

The Macs and Rams exchanged points until the end of the game, with the Macs eventually gutting out a 74-69 win. Turell led the team in scoring with 22 points, and Eitan Halpert (SSSB '21) followed close behind with 17 points of his own, 12 of which came off three pointers. Leifer pulled down nine rebounds and dished out five assists to go along with nine points. The Rams' defense held three-point specialist Simcha Halpert (SSSB '20) to a season-low 3 points, making his younger brother's breakout performance critical in this win.

The team has now won 26 in a row, the longest active streak in

YU team in history to be named to the Division Three top 25 ranking put out by d3hoops.com, finishing the season at no. 15. The Macs are also ranked second in the NCAA Division III Atlantic Region, the highest ranking in program history.

The Macs are drawing attention from the broader Jewish community as well. "Coming to these games is an opportunity for my boys to see the YU team and see YU and the Jewish guys act with great *middot* but with athletic ability," said spectator Yakir Wachstock, a Holliswood, New York resident who was at the game accompanied by his three sons.

"They are a pleasure to watch. It's good basketball," said Lenny



The Macs' Pre-Game Huddle

# Inspiration Through Music: An Interview with Tani Polansky

By AVI LEKOWSKY

*Tani Polansky is a man who hears music speak to him! Whether you recognize him from his music, the Times Square Kumzitz, or the Brotherhood of the Bands, his music has touched people from around the world. On the verge of releasing a new album, The Commentator got the opportunity to sit down with him and find out his backstory.*

**Avi Lekowsky:** Give us a little background about yourself.

**Tani Polansky:** I grew up in Woodmere and moved to Israel with my family when I was in seventh grade, which was really challenging. I ended up bouncing from school to school, community to community, meeting all different types of people. By the time I finished ninth grade, I'd been in around six schools, including a *Breslov* yeshiva in Beitar, a *dati leumi* (religious Zionist) school in Bet Shemesh and a *yeshiva* in Mea Shearim which I loved, because there was so much joy and dancing and music. It was of the more open-minded of the Chareidi places I'd been. When I was in tenth grade, circumstances forced my family to move back to America.

I finished up high school in Darchei Torah — not so typical YU. I went to Rabbi Shmuel Brazil's yeshiva in Israel for about a year and a half after that. That yeshiva was where music really started for me. Rabbi Brazil is one of the most underrated composers of the Jewish world. He wrote [the tunes for] Shalom Aleichem, Bilvavi and many classic songs we sing today. The yeshiva was bursting with music, *chassidus* and the pure joy of those who were free to express their Judaism in their own unique way. The first song I ever made was during that period. It was one of the hardest days I had there, and [I] ended up writing [the song] at the *Kotel*. Through my tears and *Tehillim*, I began reading and singing *Mizmor L'David*, which evolved into one of my favorite *niggunim* (tunes). I came back to the States and decided to go to YU — once again, not an ordinary move from someone in my background. I didn't know anyone coming here, but from day one, I was welcomed into the community, became a part of multiple student organizations — as well as the Camp HASC and NCSY worlds — and began really exploring music and Jewish leadership here. I'm currently in the RIETS/Ferkauf program here, and gearing up for PhD applications while working for NCSY and on my album!

**AL:** You mentioned R' Shmuel Brazil's yeshiva and how you picked up a lot of musical interest there. However, your latest single, "Long for the Day," sounds very different than his type of work. So how did you get there? What was the journey like?

**TP:** "Long for the Day" is a different kind of song than the rest of the music I've been producing. I wrote "Long for the Day" with my NCSYers, and left it on the back burner. One day, I was in the hospital with a family member who was going through a really rough time. The lyrics to that song popped into my mind, and I thought the line "*You can destroy or rebuild your world, the choice is up to you*" was something they really needed to hear. When I sang it, nurses came in from the hallway, and we started singing and jamming out to it; the look on their faces when we finished said it all! With the help of my parents and a dear friend we produced it and it sort of just came out sounding like a country-rock record! Once I started recording that, I realized I couldn't slow down; I had a ton of other songs to record. I made a fundraiser and ended up getting \$10,000 with the help of friends,

family, even random people on the street.

Part of the journey that I've experienced in seeing many things and being in different places is trying to find the *nekuda tovah* (inner good) in everything, just like Rabbi Nachman [of Breslov] says. Wherever you go, whoever you meet, you have the mission to find the good point in them and help bring it out. I've been in many different communities and [have played] many different genres over the course of my life. I've drawn inspiration from all different zones... whether it's country, pop, folk, alternative or even gospel. You'll hear "Soulful Living," which has a slightly more electronic sound, and then there's "Elokai," which is a whole different world.

**AL:** You have an album coming out soon — "TeFEELah" — where'd that name come from?

**TP:** I came up with that name when one of my rabbis, Rabbi Daniel Katz, taught me that the way you pray is the way you live. Whether in *shul* (synagogue) or out of *shul*, *t'fillah* (prayer) has the capacity to be — and is supposed to be — such a transformative, deeply personal and moving experience. Every time we yearn for something, every

time we cry, dance, sing, these moments all have the potential to be moments of prayer. *T'fillah* is the emotional expression of our deepest selves. And I know that when I'm not feeling it, I know I'm not tapping into my truest self in the right way. We have to find ways to open our hearts, and music is one of the deepest ways to do that. *Niggunim* are

*We have to find ways to open our hearts, and music is one of the deepest ways to do that.*

Tani Polansky

deeper than words, which is why they were brought into the *Beis Hamikdash*. It's truly an expression of the *neshama* (soul); music is the language of the soul. Music has to inspire people, and I truly believe this music has the capacity to do that, as my friends Shlomo and Zach of the band Zusha sing so beautifully: "*niggunim hayotzim min halev, nichnasim el halev*," (songs that come from the heart

will penetrate the heart). It can really be challenging to be different, especially in our Jewish communities where conformity is preached as a virtue and the development of individuality isn't emphasized enough. These of course come from good intentions, but we often see it manifest in our music. And I'm doing what I can to change the status quo.

**AL:** What's up next for you? Anything else you want to plug?

**TP:** My second single, "Soulful Living," will be out on March 13th, and the album, "TeFEELah," should be out in the next few months. Make sure to stay tuned to my social media channels to find out more. I'm really excited to let you guys know what I've been working on! I also want to plug a message. A year ago, I had all this music that I didn't know what I was going to do with. I decided to go all out and make this fundraiser, and I hit that goal. If anyone can take any lessons from this, it would be to not give up on your dream. I went for something, and with enough work, it ended up working out. It doesn't always work out, but eventually you will hit something, and you've got to go for it. The last thing I want to plug is *your* dream. Don't be afraid to go for it!



Tani Polansky

TANI POLANSKY

# The Coronavirus is Here to Stay For Now

By MALKIE RUBIN

Over the past two months, the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak has spiraled out of control. Increasingly, people outside of China, where the virus originated, have started to display its symptoms. In response, countries around the world have imposed travel bans, quarantining millions and isolating hundreds of sick people in an attempt to stop the spread of the new virus. However, as of Feb. 23, 2020, there were 78,000 cases of COVID-19 in at least 29 countries, including a spike of cases in Italy, Iran and South Korea, as well as an ongoing outbreak on a cruise ship off of Japan. We are likely facing a pandemic or may already be experiencing one. The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "Our window of opportunity [for containing the virus] is narrowing so we need to act quickly before it closes completely."

Other public health experts think that the window has already closed. They fear that new developments in this outbreak suggest that containing the virus may no longer be possible. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, remarked that once several countries have widespread transmission, spillover into other countries is inevitable. One of the top officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Americans on Feb. 25 that health experts foresee the novel coronavirus that

has killed thousands spreading in the United States. "We expect we will see community spread in this country," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will

at least 29 countries. South Korea has now reported the most cases of the coronavirus outside of China, with 602. The country's president, Moon Jae-in, has put South Korea on its highest level alert over the outbreak, giving cities the ability to impose their own containment measures. Italy is also "now home to the biggest COVID-19 outbreak

they were in contact with were traced and isolated, leading the virus to be contained. However, since the spread of COVID-19 is similar to how influenza spreads, it is very hard — if not impossible — to trace every single person that an infected person had been in contact with and quarantine them before they spread the virus.

contain the virus to mitigating its harm through reducing the spread by teaching people proper hygienic practices and caring for the very sick. Recent outbreaks in Germany, France and the U.K. demonstrate that high-income countries with advanced medical resources may be able to control the virus spread, at least for now. However, as the virus moves around the world and there are increasingly more infections, even high-income countries are likely to struggle with containing the virus. We have to prepare for this and quickly, for a pandemic that could spread across the world.

However, our systems are better prepared to protect than ever before. Although the CDC does not currently recommend the use of face masks for the general public, they recommend that the sick or non-hospitalized patients under investigation wear masks when around other people. Health care personnel should wear personal protective equipment (PPE), including respirators, when caring for confirmed or possible COVID-19 patients. As of now, the possibility of contracting the virus in America is still very low. The best way to prevent contracting the virus would be to maintain proper handwashing hygiene, avoid traveling outside the country — especially to China — and for people to cover their mouths when they cough. These safety precautions can minimize risk if the virus starts to spread throughout the United States; following them is the best way to protect you and your family from the coronavirus.

*Public health officials must accept the fact that the coronavirus has already spread, and need to move into a new phase of preparing for a pandemic.*

happen and how many people in this country will have severe illness." On Feb. 25, Trump put Vice President Mike Pence in charge of the Coronavirus response.

Public health officials must accept the fact that the coronavirus has already spread, and need to move into a new phase of preparing for a pandemic.

What makes the coronavirus so contagious is that it spreads by human to human transmission, just as easily as the flu. As a result, once a few humans become infected with the virus, the chances that others will come in contact with an infected person increase rapidly. Symptoms of the coronavirus include coughing, fever and shortness of breath. At this point, the outbreak could continue spreading at a rapid pace, moving into new regions and across the globe quite quickly, given the increasing mobility and travel within and between societies today.

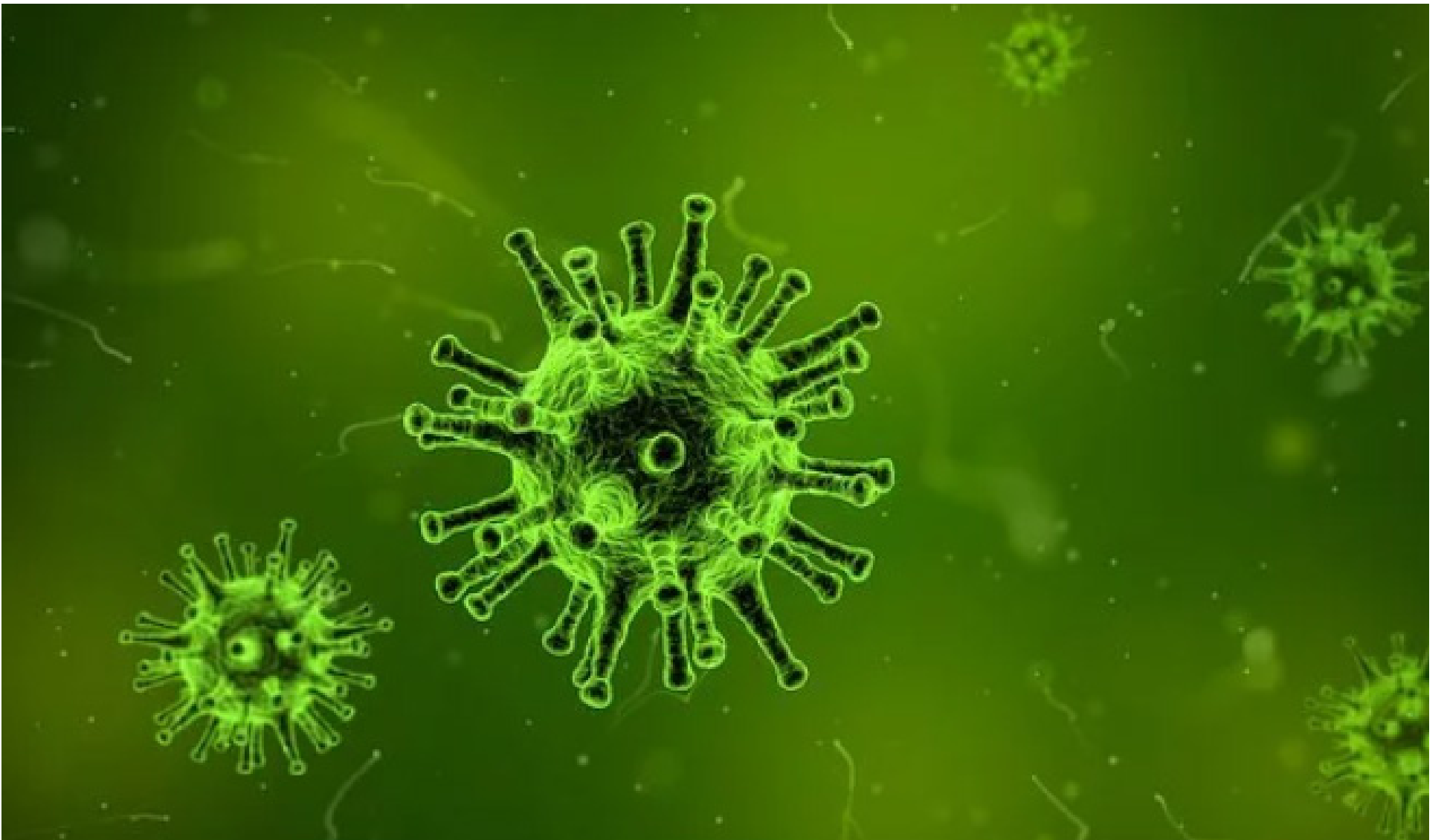
As of Feb. 23, there have been more than 1,800 reported cases of COVID-19 outside of China in

outside of Asia." So far, 132 people have confirmed infections, including at least two deaths. Italy has imposed severe measures to try and stop the spread of the virus. Sporting, religious and cultural events are being canceled as well as university classes. Many people have been fined if they tried to enter or leave areas where the outbreak is present, including 11 towns in the Lombardy region.

There are many reasons as to why we may soon see a rapid rise in infections. One is that the virus is very contagious and some people can infect others before they start to show symptoms or very early in their illness. Researchers currently believe that one infected person generally infects two to more than three others, which would make the COVID-19 more contagious than other coronaviruses like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). When people began to show symptoms of the SARS virus, they were immediately isolated, and those

Another reason the coronavirus is turning into a pandemic is that countries are still only looking for the disease in people who have traveled from China. But the virus has already spread beyond this region. Diagnostic testing should be conducted on citizens from other countries, including Iran, Italy and South Korea. Even though the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains that the risk of spread of the coronavirus is low, it is beginning to change its screening strategy to look for people with the virus who are not necessarily traveling from China. The CDC will begin to use the national flu surveillance tracking infrastructure to test patients who have flu symptoms for COVID-19 in five cities across the United States.

Currently, the coronavirus has a very low fatality rate, namely, around 1 to 2 percent. However, that small percentage can cause many deaths if COVID-19 continues to spread around the world. Public health experts say that countries need to move from trying to



The coronavirus has already spread to multiple countries across the world.

PIXABAY

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

*Editor’s Note: The following collection of articles detail the suspension of The Commentator after it was threatened with censorship by the university administration over its coverage of minyan attendance. This threat followed previous run-ins — including a ban on the traditional Purim issue of The Commentator — in 1958 between The Commentator and members of the administration particularly Dr. Simeon Guterman, dean of Yeshiva College, and Rabbi Moshe Tendler, assistant dean of Yeshiva College. Unlike 1958, The Commentator is currently not funded by the student government and thus cannot be censored by the university.*

From the Archives (March 24, 1958; Volume 23 Issue 11) — Ten Students Are Suspended From Dormitory

By COMMENTATOR STAFF

Ten New York City residents have been suspended from the dormitory for one week because of “unsatisfactory” minyan attendance. Thirty other students, most of them from out of town, received “suspended suspensions.” This means they will be evicted

if their minyan attendance continues to be “unsatisfactory.”

The suspensions were issued by Rabbi Moshe Klein, dormitory supervisor. He explained that attending minyan two times a week would be considered satisfactory by his office.

When the suspensions were first announced, student leaders proposed that the students involved, instead of being

suspended, be compelled to attend seminars on the importance of t’fila b’tsibur.

The proposal was rejected by the administration. However, a seminar is being organized on a voluntary basis to discuss t’fila.

The Assistant Dean, Rabbi Klein’s immediate superior, told *The Commentator* he was in accord with the suspension policy. He felt that the religious guidance program this year had been “adequate.”

Student leaders pointed out that the suspensions were in direct violation of Residence Hall Regulation VIII in the handbook issued by the administration. This regulation states, “Repeated failure to attend services renders the student liable to disciplinary action by the student court.” The supervisor’s office, student leaders said, had ignored the court completely in this matter.

From the Archives (March 24, 1958; Volume 23 Issue 11) — An Editorial: Compulsion

By ABRAHAM SHAPIRO and THE COMMENTATOR GOVERNING BOARD OF 1957-8

Recently, we have had the occasion to witness the lack of direction of the administration’s dormitory policy in a clear light. On Sunday, March 9, about 40 dormitory students were notified to see Rabbi Klein before 4 p.m. Tuesday concerning their imminent suspension from the dormitory. Unsatisfactory minyan attendance was the cause of this suspension, which was to last for one week.

No warning whatsoever preceded the notification, unless one feels that a mimeographed circular, distributed at the beginning

of the term, stating that residence in the dormitory is dependent on satisfactory minyan attendance is, sufficient. It must be kept in mind, however, that such circulars have been regularly distributed throughout dormitory history, and since their terms had never been carried out, students had become accustomed to disregarding them. When students about to be evicted pointed out to the dorm administration that they had not been adequately warned, the answer they got was “we did not want to make this seem like a threat.” Why the administration should be so afraid of verbally warning students after they had already threatened them in mimeographed circulars, which they knew would be disregarded, escapes us. Furthermore, since the one-week suspension simply puts

residents on notice that further delinquency of attendance will be followed by permanent eviction, it is as threatening as any verbal warning could have been.

We must also keep in mind that by taking eviction into its own hands the administration has violated an agreement it signed with the Student Resident Court at the beginning of the year giving the Court jurisdiction to decide on suspension of residents. Even if we postulate the premise that the administration occasionally acts upon, that a signed agreement is adhered to only as it suits them, the student should not be told at the time of his suspension that the agreement was abrogated.

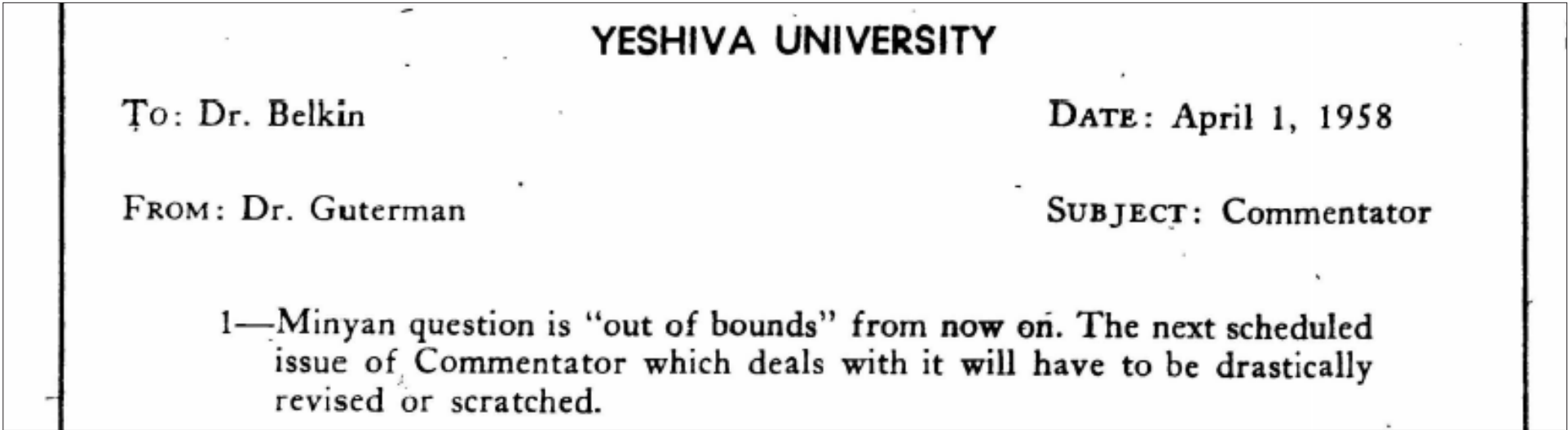
Friday, March 14, a small announcement was put on the dorm bulletin board. It read simply: “Any

student wishing to participate in a seminar to discuss minyan and Tfila B’tzibur will please notify Rabbi Klein as soon as possible.” This announcement followed an action on his part which pleasantly surprised us. Out of the 40 who got notices, only 10 were actually evicted, the rest receiving “suspended suspensions” upon presenting him with at least a plausible excuse for their absence from minyan. Of course, if their attendance does not pick up within the next two weeks, they will also be served with an eviction notice.

The administration’s contradictory actions cannot but lead one to wonder. Why couldn’t the seminar on minyan have been announced previous to the suspension? Doesn’t the administration want the suspended residents to

know about it? Or is it just another belated, half-hearted attempt at a desperately needed religious guidance program? These questions are now added to the ones we have been asking for years: Does the administration seriously think that a staff of resident assistants just out of college (in fact, some of them are still undergraduates) with no professional training in guidance can assist the troubled resident in the solution of religious problems? What are the aims of religious education — to see that the student is forced to go to minyan in his short college stay, and then, with the compulsion removed, never go again? Might it not be much more

Continued on Page 10



A memorandum sent from Dr. Simeon Guterman to then-YU President Samuel Belkin notifying him of the potential censorship of The Commentator.

THE COMMENTATOR

From the Archives (April 2, 1958; Volume 23 Issue 12) — An Editorial: Governing Board Suspends Publication

By ABRAHAM SHAPIRO and THE COMMENTATOR GOVERNING BOARD OF 1957-8

The right of *The Commentator* to print articles, news stories and editorials on any problems which are not limited to the college has been denied by Dr. Simeon L. Guterman,

dean of Yeshiva College and concurred in by Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of the university. A memorandum to this effect printed on page two of this issue specifically denies the right of this newspaper to mention a university problem which has caused much comment and many letters to the editor.

*The Governing Board has voted unanimously to suspend publication of The*

*Commentator under this ruling. If the ruling is not rescinded there will be no Commentator.*

It is the feeling of the Governing Board that *The Commentator* is more than just a newspaper put out by a few individuals to print only college affairs. Rather, *The Commentator*, the only student newspaper in the University above the high school level,

represents the student body of the University. College students attend R.I.E.T.S., T.I., or J.S.P. and also live in the dormitory. The board is obligated to print editorials reflecting the viewpoint of student government and also to print the opposing viewpoints expressed by students.

This is the responsibility of our newspaper; it cannot be questioned, nor will we evade it.

*COMPULSION,*  
*continued from Page 9*

beneficial if, instead of outward compulsion, professional religious guidance brought about minyan attendance from *inner* feeling?

We do not claim that religious guidance will solve the minyan problem entirely. Minyan has been a thorn in the side of the dormitory authorities as far back as anyone

remembers, and their continued failure to solve this problem is basically due to their treating it as a separate one. When will the administration realize that minyan is only a symptom of a larger problem: the fact that synthesis, as found in Yeshiva University, is synthetic. The student cuts corners wherever he can, simply because it is physically impossible for him to do good work in both departments [religious and secular] and still

maintain his balance. The administration itself has defined satisfactory minyan attendance as twice a week, a substantial concession to the thesis that regular attendance will produce students who attend classes in a lethargic, half-asleep half-awake, state.

We urge the administration to go one step further, and to realize attendance requirements must depend on the status of the individual. Some students may very

well be able to go more than twice a week, and some may not be able to go even that much. We are confident that an individual approach towards the minyan problem will go far towards making the administration realize that maybe it isn't *the* problem after all. In fact, an individual approach towards all the problems of the university is the only way we can envisage to resynthesize synthesis. Let the individual student opinions be heard! Let his

presence be felt! Let him realize that he is not just another cog in the university machine! Rather, let the university make the student feel that it is aware of his problems, and is not interested only in presenting a facade of meaningless regulations to the outside world.

*The university exists for its students, not vice versa.*

## A Comprehensive Analysis: YU Enrollment Data

By JACOB ROSENFELD

For the Spring 2020 semester, the Yeshiva University undergraduate population has remained mostly stagnant, rounding off at 1,865 full-time students. Compared to Fall 2018, this semester represents a loss of 99 students, a 5% decrease.

The Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) continues to grow with a small 1.5% increase in enrollment on both campuses from Fall 2018 to Spring 2020. This is a peak for Syms, as it reaches its highest-ever number of total students and the highest-ever percentage of undergraduate students, with 697 students representing 37.3% of the undergraduate student body. On the Wilf Campus, the ratio is even greater, with 518 of 1021 (50.1%) undergraduate male students attending

SSSB. This is in stark contrast to Yeshiva College (YC), which actually decreased by 40 students for an 8.4% change. Stern College for Women (SCW) had lower enrollment compared to Fall 2018, losing 69 students for an 8.6% loss.

Trends in the Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) program continued from over the past six years (the beginning of available data), with a decrease across all the morning programs. Notably, James Striar School (JSS) enrollment decreased by 29% from Fall 2018 to Spring 2020. Over the same period, Isaac Breuer College (IBC) enrollment fell by 21 students, nearly 10%. Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP) enrollment, however, rose from Fall 2018 to Spring 2020 by 1 student, reversing a trend of falling enrollment dating back to 2014.

In addition to this data, The Commentator

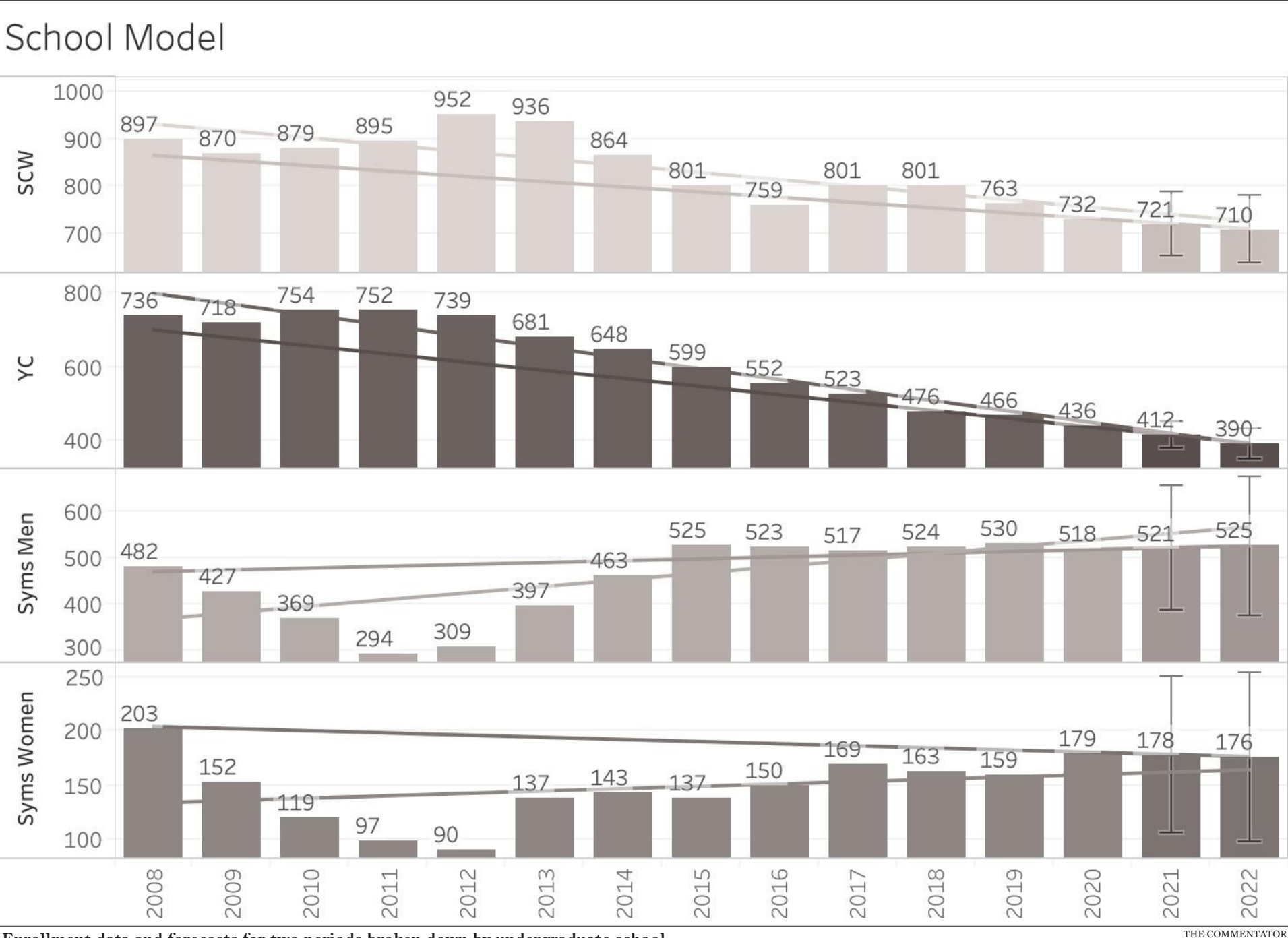
examined data regarding full-time students from 2008 to the present. This analysis employed the multiplicative forecasting model created by the software provider Tableau, which has a 95% prediction interval, to forecast future enrollment rates.

According to the model, total undergraduates are predicted to fall to 1,810 students by 2022, which would represent a 2.9% drop in enrollment. All UTS programs are expected to shrink over the next two years with the exception of the Stone Beit Midrash Program (SBMP), which is expected to stagnate at 265 students.

The model also predicted decreases to the populations on both campuses of about 1.5% per year. This forecast fits with the model's prediction of individual schools' enrollment decreasing, except for the male SSSB program.

Upon further analysis of specific schools, some mitigating factors become apparent in the model. While it appears to predict future YC and SCW enrollment relatively precisely, SSSB enrollment for men and women varied greatly with a 25% and 40% margin of error, respectively. Accordingly, these numbers are not statistically relevant.

"Yeshiva University's enrollment is consistent with declining national trends relating to undergraduate enrollment," said Chief Enrollment Officer Chad Austein. "[W]e are projecting a robust incoming class of first-year students along with new students studying in Israel as a part of our S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program, which will inevitably result in strong numbers in years to come."



Enrollment data and forecasts for two periods broken down by undergraduate school. THE COMMENTATOR

# Hillel Rogoff and the Fight for Secular Studies in RIETS

By YOSEF LEMEL

For the past 49 years, Yeshiva University has held an annual lecture series titled the Hillel Rogoff Memorial Lecture. Not many students, however, are acquainted with the life story of Rogoff. Rogoff, an early alumnus of Yeshiva, was a consequential figure in American-Jewish history. Fortunately, Rogoff's time in RIETS is detailed in "The Story of Yeshiva University" by Rabbi Gilbert Klaperman.

According to Klaperman, Hillel (Harry) Rogoff — after emigrating to the United States at the age of 13 from Minsk, Belarus

— was one of the first three students — Akiva Matlin and Aaron Abromowitz being the other two — of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS). These students wished to continue their Torah studies after their graduation from the Etz Chaim elementary school, an institution which later merged with RIETS in 1915 into the Rabbinical College of America under Dr. Bernard Revel. Matlin's father, Rabbi Moses Meyer Matlin, assembled and personally taught the three young men in his apartment in 1896. This informal assembly grew into a yeshiva that was officially founded in 1897 by Rabbi Yehuda David Bernstein at the Mariampol Synagogue and named after the

late Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor.

In the following year, Rabbi Nahum Dan Baron arrived in America from Slutsk, Lithuania to be the *mashgiach* for the young yeshiva. The 45-year-old, short, red-bearded rabbi took care of the basic needs of students, providing them with food and clothes. Rabbi Baron was also an early advocate of secular education in the yeshiva. At the time, the directors of RIETS did not allow students to attend high school and college while pursuing their religious studies; however, some students, including Rogoff, wished to expand their secular knowledge base. Rogoff appealed to Rabbi Baron who granted him permission to attend high

school and college.

During his time at City College, Rogoff veered away from Orthodoxy and neglected his religious studies. He joined a Socialist club in 1905 in the East Side of Manhattan; a movement which was — as Klaperman put it — "for the Orthodox Jew was synonymous with all evil." In the following year, Rogoff joined the editorial staff of The Jewish Daily Forward — a Socialist-leaning newspaper — after the Editor-in-Chief, Abraham Cahan, heard about Rogoff's leadership in the Socialist movement. (Cahan was previously one of the first teachers in the English Department of Yeshivas Etz Chaim before being ousted when his Socialist sympathies were discovered. He certainly had much in common with the young Rogoff.)

Meanwhile, in 1906, the directors of RIETS threatened to withhold stipends from students engaging in secular studies. The students consequently went on strike which only ended after a change in leadership, when Rabbi Moshe Zevulun Margolies — a man sympathetic to the pursuit of secular knowledge — was appointed head of RIETS. The directors of RIETS then made promises to initiate a secular curriculum. In 1908, however, 15 student protesters were expelled after demanding the actualization of the directors' promises. The expulsions only caused more students to walk out of the yeshiva. The yeshiva, in danger of being shut down, asserted that its mission was the pursuit of Torah and *hokhma* (secular knowledge) "according to the spirit of the times." According to Klaperman, throughout these controversies a slogan often used by those opposed to the study of secular knowledge was, "Look what happened to Rogoff."

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*Over 100 years after the RIETS protests, the presence of Hillel Rogoff is still felt at Yeshiva University.*

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According to Klaperman, Rabbi Baron "in all probability... sided with the students in their struggle against the directors." He was subsequently replaced in 1908 and returned to Slutsk never to see the yeshiva again. Klaperman suspected that Rabbi Baron was forced out by the directors due to his association with the Rogoff.

Rogoff continued to be one of The Forward's most prolific writers, penning articles on topics ranging from the Yiddish theatre to Socialism to American history, sometimes using the pen-names Yitzchak Elchanan or Ger Toshav. He even ran for Congress on the Socialist Party ticket in 1926 and lost. He later was appointed the Editor-in-Chief of The Forward, a position he held from 1951-64. Rogoff passed away on Nov. 20, 1971. At the time of his death he was the second-oldest Yeshiva alum. (The oldest alum at the time was Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism.)

On Dec. 14, 1971, with funding from the Rogoff family, Dr. David Mirsky, Dean of Stern College for Women, directed the Hillel Rogoff Memorial Lecture Series, inaugurated with a lecture on Yiddish poetry by Dr. Irving Howe of Hunter College. Ever since, the lecture has been a YU tradition, attracting speakers such as Elie Wiesel, Abba Eban, Robert Alter and Chaim Potok. Last year, the tradition continued with a presentation by Ezras Nashim, an all-female emergency medical services agency based in Brooklyn. Over 100 years after the RIETS protests, the presence of Hillel Rogoff is still felt at Yeshiva University.



Hillel Rogoff

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Bioethics in Practice

Dietary Supplements — Helpful or Harmful?

By BARUCH LERMAN

As I was scrolling through Facebook one night, I came across a meme depicting a scene in which a woman in Whole Foods insisted that her items be entered by the numbers on the barcode, instead of by a scanner, since, as she said, “I don’t want lasers to touch things I am going to eat.” After laughing for a good 30 seconds, I started thinking about the larger trend of health food crazes and fad diets that run in the same vein as this story. Even if this story itself is not factual, it is similar enough to common experiences with health crazes that it is 100% believable.

What exactly are the bioethical implications of health crazes and fad diets? There are several: the first issue is the little to no regulation in the field of “health products” and the second is whether such health products actually work in execution. The second issue is much easier to address. Most experts agree that the modern health crazes and fad diets are bunk and, in fact, are often harmful. Proper nutrition — especially for a growing child — is essential, and when those needs are not met irreparable damage, and perhaps even death, can result.

An example of the effects of this lack of safety regulation can be seen from the

Prohibition era in the United States. Jamaica Ginger, colloquially known as “jamaica ginger,” was a medicinal product that contains 80% alcohol by weight and was sold over the counter before Prohibition. During Prohibition, the Federal Government made this variety of ginger available by prescription only, but allowed stores to sell an over-the-counter-version that had a much higher ginger to alcohol ratio. Due to the high ginger

supplements” are not approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA’s informational website states, “Federal law does not require dietary supplements to be proven safe to FDA’s satisfaction before they are marketed.” Additionally, the FDA states that, in general, the first opportunity to take action against a company that produces a harmful product is only “after the product enters the marketplace.” At this point, the

other unaddressed risks. For instance, the FDA states, “Taking a combination of supplements, using these products together with medicine, or substituting them in place of prescribed medicines could lead to harmful, even life-threatening, results.” Additionally, some supplements can have unwanted effects before, during and after medical procedures. An example is “bleeding” that can be caused by supplements containing “garlic, ginkgo biloba, ginseng, and Vitamin E.” Additionally, supplements containing kava or valerian “can increase the effects of anesthetics and other medications during surgery.”

Health supplements can be helpful, as many of them provide needed nutrients to people who otherwise would not be able to get them. However, there is a need for much more oversight of the industry, or else a horror story like ginger jake may happen again. Producers should also be required to print clear labels and information on how different supplements react with common supplements and medications. This would hold the producers accountable and ensure that their products are safe. If supplements are truly working like medications to prevent and heal illnesses, then they should be regulated like drugs to ensure the safety of consumers.

*If supplements are truly working like medications to prevent and heal illnesses then they should be regulated like drugs to ensure the safety of consumers.*

content, the federal government thought that it would be impossible to be used as a recreational alcohol product. Distributors of the ginger changed the recipe to make it more palatable by adding tricresyl phosphate (TCP). Due to the low level of federal regulation, they were able to get away with it. However, there was an unintended consequence — TCP was actually a slow-acting neurotoxin. Due to the low level of federal regulation, many Americans were paralyzed in their hands and feet.

Similar to Jamaican Ginger, many of today’s health products, and “dietary

product may have caused injury to a consumer. This is shocking! The laws surrounding dietary supplements — everything from protein powder to vitamin supplements — do not ensure that products are safe to consume prior to their distribution, leaving the general population at a huge risk. Additionally, the FDA reports of multiple cases where action has been taken by the FDA due to unsafe products being sold. These products had “to be recalled because of proven or potential harmful effects” only after they were sold on the market and potentially harming people. Beyond the lack of regulation, there are



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# A Modern History of the Wilf Student Constitution

By **DANIEL MELOOL**

The Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) has released a tentative text of the updated Wilf Student Constitution, incorporating various amendments that have been passed over the past few years. The changes come amidst the recent controversy surrounding the eligibility of Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) to succeed Ariel Sacknovitz (SSSB '20) as YSU President.

It was unclear if Greenberg would be allowed to serve as YSU President since he was serving as a resident adviser for the seventh floor of Rubin Hall. Article II, Section 10(1) of the Constitution bars resident advisers from serving as members of the General Assembly, of which the YSU President is a part. The issue came before the Student Court until Greenberg announced he would resign from his position as RA to assume the presidency. The Student Court, thus, did not formally rule on the question of whether this clause applied to successive presidents or only elected presidents as the case was declared moot before it could be adjudicated.

The case also renewed frustrations over the proper interpretation of the Constitution as Chief Justice Phillip Dolitsky (YC '20), wrote for a unanimous court, "We write here to raise awareness to what we saw as the bigger issue than a contested presidency; a poorly designed and outdated Constitution."

To help clear misunderstandings regarding the Constitution, The Commentator looked into its history.

The Commentator spoke with Adam Zimilover (YC '14) who served as Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) President in 2014. According to Zimilover, the current Constitution, which was written in 2014 and voted on by the student body the following May, heavily amended the previous version by removing many positions and committees that were seen as unnecessary. After reviewing the archives of The Commentator and The Guide For The Perplexed — the now-discontinued undergraduate student directory — The Commentator has confirmed that the pre-2014 Constitution was ratified in 1995. The authors of the old Constitution are unknown since the Wilf Constitution — unlike the Beren Constitution — does not list its authors.

Before the 2014 amendments of the Constitution, all the Jewish Studies programs, except the Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP) — which was represented by SOY (Student Organization of Yeshiva) — had their own councils — like the James Striar School Student Council (JSSSC) — in the student government, previously known as the Student Union. The 2014 Constitution eliminated these councils and consolidated the student governments of MYP, Irving I. Stone Beit Midrash Program

(SBMP), Isaac Breuer College (IBC) and the James Striar School of General Jewish Studies (JSS) under SOY. It also changed the name of the Syms Council from Sy Syms School of Business Student Association (SSSBSA) to Syms

2020 Constitution, the president of each council has the power to fill any vacancies that may arise in their respective council. The person appointed to the position must then be confirmed by a majority of the General Assembly. The 2014

*"We hope to improve upon [the Constitution] as much as possible and have it accessible for the full student body's use."*

Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21)

Student Council (SYMSSC), without eliminating any positions or changing any of the qualifications to serve on the council.

The 2014 Constitution also dissolved various standing committees, such as the Publicity Committee, Blood Drive Committee, Communal Affairs Committee, Library Committee, Out-of-Town Committee and Shabbos Enhancement Committee. Article VII, Section 3 of the pre-2014 version of the Constitution, which made the Yeshiva University Computer Society (YUCS) the official computer and technology resource of the YU student body, and Section 4, which governed the operations of MorgMart — a now-defunct shop which was located in the Morgenstern Hall lobby — were also repealed in 2014. A mention of The Guide For The Perplexed in Article VIII Section 3, was also removed in 2014.

While many of these changes were successful, there were many changes that were not completed. The committee that supervised the passing of the 2014 amendments sought to eliminate the Executive Council from student government. However, the Executive Council is mentioned six times in the 2014 constitution. The old Constitution also included a Student Senate, something the 2014 Constitution was supposed to remove, but mention of it remained in Article II Section 10(1) and (2) which explains that a Student Senator may not serve as a member of the General Assembly.

This brings us to the current 2020 Constitution which includes the various amendments that were passed in Spring 2018. YSU President Zachary Greenberg provided The Commentator with a tentative copy of the updated Constitution.

Article XIII, Section 2, which stated that the text of the Constitution would remain unedited, and all amendments would be "addenda to the Constitution," was repealed in the Fall 2018. In the past, a student running for YCSA Secretary/Treasurer had to be "at least a junior" and "a full-time student of the Yeshiva College for at least one semester prior to taking office." The latest amendments to the Constitution remove these prerequisites, paving the way for any student in Yeshiva College (YC) to run for the position. Under the

College Experience Program are also enfranchised for the elections of YSU President and VP of Clubs along with SOY President, Vice President and Public Relations Secretary.

The 2020 Constitution abolishes the position of YSU Vice President of Class Affairs and shifts the line of succession to the Vice President of Clubs if the YSU President is unable to carry out his duties. Although the Vice President of Class Affairs position was removed from the list of YSU positions in the Constitution, the full description of the role and responsibility of the position — outlined in Article II, Section 4 — remains in place. Greenberg has recently appointed Ami Malek (YC '21) as Vice President of Class Affairs, even though the description of the position was removed from the body of the Constitution, since it is still listed as an elected official.

The aforementioned updates to the Wilf Student Constitution, and the historical analysis provided, will hopefully contextualize and resolve all quandaries from this

point forward. However, a big part of resolving any complications regarding the Constitution will be how keen the student council is willing to follow the procedures that the Constitution implements. The General Assembly is obligated under Article XIII, Section 1 to form an Amendments Committee, which under Article XIII Section 2 "shall convene a Constitutional Amendments Convention each semester." Greenberg told The Commentator that a committee has convened twice this semester to implement the new changes and propose new amendments for this semester. (Note: The author of this article has been invited by Greenberg to partake in the committee.)

"The constitution has not been updated in nearly 6 years. I am glad to say that my committee and I are working towards fixing it and getting it up to date," said Greenberg. "We hope to improve upon it as much as possible and have it accessible for the full student body's use."

## Constitution



## of the Yeshiva University Undergraduate Student Government



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## From the SOY President's Desk

# Be Happy, It's Adar

By YONI BROTH

In my years here at Yeshiva University, during the spring semester, I have always felt a sense of *"mishenichnas Adar, marbim b'midterms"* — when Adar enters, we increase our midterms. However, as we all know, the actual phrase of this parody is the Gemara in Ta'anit 29a: *"Mishenichnas Adar, marbim b'simcha"* — When Adar enters, we increase our happiness. This is the goal of Adar, as it can serve as a building block for the excitement of Purim, one of the most exciting days of the year, and really get our spirits up. But again, because we are all swamped with midterms, we never actually feel Purim approaching, and it blindsides us as we are about to fast on Taanit Esther. Only then do we realize that we need to truck on down to the local supermarket to pick up some candy and cookies to give out for *mishloach manot*. Only while we are fasting do we realize that we need to make plans for the Purim seudah and that Rabbi Simon has been trying to collect money for *matanot la'evyonim*, and only then do we realize that we should have looked at the megillah to try and understand what the holiday of Purim is about.

Now, this is not without reason. Many acharonim, including the Chayei Adam and Magen Avraham, quote the idea that if you have a court case against a non-Jew, you should try and have it done in Adar because of the fact that Adar is a month of happiness. As it says in the megillah, *"v'hachodesh asher nehepach la'hem miyagon l'simcha,"* and the month which was turned

unto them from sorrow to gladness (Esther 9:22). Applied to our discussion, just like we should arrange our court cases and be judged in Adar in a way that is favorable, so too we should be judged on our midterms in Adar favorably.

However, I think that we also need to take the statement at face value. In these past two years, it has been so hard to feel the *"mishenichnas Adar, marbim b'simcha"* because of the fact that we don't see the big picture on a day to day basis. We get so bogged down with tests and all of our other work, and we are so focused on the moment that we are living in, that we forget that it is already Adar and we are supposed to be experiencing the *simcha* of this special time.

Last year, I decided that I wanted to start the Adar joy in advance, so a friend and I decided to have "dress-up" days leading up to Purim. We had NCSY Day, Trash Day, Nerd Day and a few more, and we had a great time. The people around us, on the other hand, gave us looks of confusion. They asked why we were dressed as we were. We naturally told them that we were prepping for Purim and helping with the build-up and the hype. However, looking back, we were doing more than just building up Purim. We were actively attempting to create a joyful atmosphere on campus. We were trying to create a happier environment for ourselves and those around us. We were trying to fulfill the idea of *"mishenichnas Adar, marbim b'simcha."* Yes, there were tests, and yes, we both had tons of work to get done, but it was Adar, so we planned these dress-up days anyway.

This year, the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) is

looking to make Adar a fantastic, special time. We are working to create many programs and activities, such as a hilarious game show night, midnight madness for no reason and a poppers and kugel

not only get ourselves mentally prepared for the excitement that Purim brings on its own, and not only to remind ourselves that we have lots to do to get ready for Purim, but to bring to campus the

we should only be feeling swamped by the workload that our professors have given us. We should be energized and enthused by the fact that it is the most exciting month of the year.

*We are working to create many programs and activities, such as a hilarious game show night, midnight madness for no reason and a poppers and kugel Thursday night pump up event before Shabbat Zachor.*

Thursday night pump up event before Shabbat Zachor. We are looking into making our buildings more festive by hopefully adding balloons and streamers to the halls of Furst and Belfer. All of this, to

words of that gemara, *"mishenichnas Adar, marbim b'shimcha."* There is no reason that we should blind ourselves to the time of year just because we have shiur and classes. There is no reason that

It really is going to be an amazing time this year, and we should all be looking forward to such an awesome month, and live with the mantra: "Be Happy, it's Adar."



The 2019 Wilf Campus Purim chagiga

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

## We Hope to See You Again Soon: Reflections on the Seforim Sale

By JOSH LEICHTER

10 hours of setup, 27 hours of working behind a desk ringing people up and, at the time of writing this, 10 more hours of clean up. For four weekends in February with my fellow cashiers of the Seforim Sale, I stood behind the cash register with a smile only a can of nitrous oxide could have created and the same memorized greeting for every customer that came to us with their baskets of books. It went like this: "Hi, welcome to the Sale, did you find everything you were looking for?" We would then pause for the response, hoping it would not spark an existential discussion about how people never find everything it is they set out to find. After all, those conversations were best left for the pizza breaks we'd take in the back on Sundays at lunchtime.

But after this greeting and finding the customer's name in our Shopify system, I found the conversations to be eye-opening and the

interactions to be genuine. Hearing the stories of the old-timers that have been coming to the sale as far back as they can remember, predating any current student by at least 30 or 40 years, I was privileged to observe the kind of

this tradition will always continue.

As I sit and write this after finishing the final night of the Sale, I'm thinking of those conversations with the grandparents, and the love they expressed that was so clearly the catalyst for their

remember. Because while it's easy to forget, it's not about the book we buy, but the fact that we buy them in the first place. To me, the Sale exists as a place where we should leave our preconceived notions about other sects of Judaism at

of history is closed between those that have been coming every year and those that are coming for their first time.

This may have been my first year working at the Sale but being behind that desk and seeing the faces come and go, blending from one conversation into another, it's an experience I will definitely remember. So to those that helped make it possible, I'd like to say thank you. And to those I chatted with as I bagged your books, cherish your reading. To the children whose parents bought them the books that will hopefully spark their love of learning in any way, shape or form, you are all the future torchbearers of our nation. This may mean nothing to you now, but it will one day. And to the parents and grandparents that spent the money to make that journey possible, bask in the glow, you've more than earned it. So here's to another successful Sale, and in times of division, may it always continue to be a place of unity among us all.

*This may have been my first year working at the Sale but being behind that desk and seeing the faces come and go, blending from one conversation into another, it's an experience I will definitely remember.*

introspection that we find so rarely in our culture, but which felt so at home surrounded by books that do the same. A language that is both very ancient and also recently revived after millennia of disuse is now used to write books that look to the past as a way of passing the torch to future generations hundreds of years later. The excited faces we saw and the squeals of joy we heard from children whose parents bought them The Little Midrash Says or one of the infinite volumes of Kids Speak show that

purchases. After the initial recoil of hearing the final total, they all had the same smile and uttered a similar phrase, "If it was anything else, I'd put it back. But these are seforim, so how I can say I'll put them back?" Because to put even one book back would be to weaken the never-ending chain of tradition that has gone back since the beginning of time itself, albeit in the smallest of ways. And even if you came, perused or didn't buy what would be deemed a "traditional sefer," it's still an experience to

the door, where someone wearing jeans and a t-shirt can shop alongside someone wearing a white shirt and pair of black slacks. And maybe this comes off as overly sentimental or hopelessly naïve, but I saw what I saw. It reflected the best that our community has to offer. A place where we were able to help excited beginners take those first steps on the path of Jewish learning, and where others purchased full sets of the Talmud, eager to follow along with the recently restarted Daf Yomi cycle. A place where a gap



The beit midrash on the Beren campus

THE COMMENTATOR

## Women Are Exempt From Learning Torah. So What?

By YONI SCHECHTER

Torah is the foundation of Jewish faith, the secret of Jewish continuity. It is what gives life meaning, it infuses one's life with holiness, it is a source of pleasure, it sharpens one's mind and most importantly, it is the ultimate path towards connection with God. Yes, studying Torah is one of the 613 *mitzvot*. Yet it is very clearly so much more. It is therefore very understandable that learning Torah is considered the most significant area of religious experience and the most valuable way to spend our time. It is why we as a community place so much emphasis on making time to learn in a serious and structured way, sacrificing for *limmud hatorah* regardless of the busyness of daily life. The immense weight we place on Torah study is motivated by so much more than the biblical commandment of *talmud* Torah; it is a result of the power that Torah contains and the profound effect it has on one who learns it.

The obvious question in light of this is: why, as a community, do we not extend this focus on and primacy of learning Torah to women? True, women are not commanded to study Torah. Yet the lack of women's formal obligation to learn should not affect the immense value placed on their experience of Torah, nor should the communal emphasis on the importance of spending time learning be any less. If Torah is *chochmat Hashem*, the wisdom of God, and learning Torah allows us to be intimately unified and connected with

Him, then the value and primacy of *limmud hatorah* should hold in regard to women as well. While there are certainly women who admirably view serious *talmud* Torah as a core value and driving force in their lives, as a community we sadly don't seem to view this as a focus, and we don't seem to think that the emphasis of serious and devoted Torah study should apply to women. If the primacy and importance of Torah study does not only stem from the *mitzvah* to do so, why should this be the case?

serious level, there is still a very significant amount of time before and after this period to engage in the serious study of Torah. And completely writing off those years may in itself be extreme; claiming that "household duties" should take up every second of the day no longer holds much water, as the handling of day-to-day life is more efficient than ever before. Children are in school longer, we no longer milk our own cows, churn our own butter or hand wash laundry. It may not be easy; life may get

The value and emphasis of women's Torah study should not be an idea that is difficult to stand behind. It is purely calling for Torah learning to be treated with the importance that it deserves. If we have time in our day, why not fill it with Torah? It is not as if it would be replacing a more important value or a better use of time already in place. (I don't think Netflix binge counts as a viable path to God.) These ideas should then be obvious and non-controversial, and women spending their time

Adopting these ideas in a real way would force many changes. The nature of women's learning would probably have to be more independent or *chavrusa*-based across the spectrum. The focus would need to be on building skills for serious, life-long Torah study, not just the accumulation of whatever knowledge is contained in seminary classes. There would need to be a shift in the emphasis of the value of time spent learning. Similar to the way it is expressed in the Glueck *beit midrash*, *limmud hatorah* should be emphasized as a prime way to spend one's free time throughout college, and any opportunity to maximize one's learning time should ideally be taken advantage of. We would need to be able to build a community of learners (which does exist in some seminaries) where serious learning is seen as "the *frum* thing to do," something that is expected. Night *seider*, which is just the concrete dedication of time in one's day to serious Torah study, should be just as much of "a thing" on the Beren Campus.

Most importantly, a mentality shift would be necessary. Women's *limmud hatorah* must be taken seriously on a communal level; we cannot trivialize women's *chelek* in Torah. *Talmud* Torah is directly engaging in God and His thought. It is broadening one's mind and infusing one's life with meaning. It is the most real way of knowing God. It is one of the primary foci driving our daily religious experience. An exemption from the commandment to do so should not change that.

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*The value and emphasis of women's Torah study should not be an idea which is difficult to stand behind. It is purely calling for Torah learning to be treated with the importance that it deserves.*

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A classic response to such probing is generally along the lines of "women have to maintain the Jewish home, and therefore serious Torah study is not practical." While historically this may have been the case, we no longer live in a reality in which that is a valid excuse. Even if one believes that the traditional Jewish view is for the upkeep of the home to fall solely on the mother and that that structure must be maintained, we live in an age in which young women are (generally) not getting married and rearing children in their mid-teens.

As such, young women have plenty of time to learn Torah in a serious and dedicated way before they have children to care for. Even if we were to completely write off the years in which a woman would be completely absorbed in raising children and would not be realistically expected to learn at a highly

busy; yet Torah should remain as a constant value, something worth making time for as much as possible. The fact that serious Torah study is more accessible than ever before, with endless high level *shiurim* available on the internet and a plethora of diverse learning opportunities, should only make this more of a reality.

This is not a *halakhic* issue. Regardless of one's stance on women's *gemara* learning, the serious study of Torah does not have to be *gemara* based. Torah is massive and can be studied in a serious, structured way in any of its areas, even if one is not comfortable with standardizing *gemara* learning for women. Any potential remaining halakhic hangups with women's learning have long been done away with across the Orthodox spectrum through the Beis Yaakov movement.

seriously learning should be encouraged, respected and expected.

Yet unfortunately, this is not the case. Not only is serious Torah learning for women often not encouraged, it is sometimes even mocked. The very *beis medrash* guy who places the utmost emphasis on *talmud* Torah and who sees firsthand the power it contains gives a condescending chuckle upon hearing about a woman learning in night *seider*. The same guy that spends hours every day delving into the depths of Torah rolls his eyes and quickly goes to the next resume if a potential shidduch option is described as "having tremendous *hasmada*, an intense motivation to learn Torah." This should be shocking to us, and the fact that it is often not treated that way is concerning and demands serious reflection as to why.

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# Why I Love the Opera and Why You Should Too: A Guide for Beginners

By AHARON NISSEL

Most people, especially young people, feel that opera is not for them. That they just don't "get" it. That it is just long, lame and boring. That it is just fat women with horned Viking helmets. That it is just an elitist enterprise for stuffy old white men to enjoy in their plush, gilded box seats. And most people think they certainly don't have the money to pay for an opera ticket. While these concerns are certainly valid and understandable, they stem from certain misunderstandings about the fundamental nature of The Opera.

But they would be wrong. Historically speaking, opera actually evolved in part as a popular art form. It developed as entertainment for the masses, who were seen by aristocrats as being unable to comprehend the complexities and intricacies of high-class theater.

You certainly don't have to be an expert in the music or the singing (very few people in the audience actually are; most are just pretending) to appreciate it. You just need to be open to the production and enjoy the theatricality of it all. Opera is bigger than Broadway. The sets are bigger, the orchestras are bigger, the theater is bigger, the audience is bigger, the theatrics are bigger. And opera singers don't use microphones.

The point of opera is not just the music, or just the singing, or just the staging, but how the entire production comes together as a holistic, extravagant sensation. The audience is meant to get lost in the entire opera. But what does that mean? It means an awareness of the interplay between the various factors that form the operatic gestalt.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, is the music. Most audience members do not know the fancy Italian words that describe the notes and melodies. Most audience members probably can't even name all the instruments in the orchestra! The ultimate goal is not to be wowed by the complexity of the composition or the particulars of the music, although that may be a result, but to be consumed by the emotion that lays behind it. To realize when the music gets louder or softer, and faster or slower. These are things one can notice without knowing all the jargon. In fact, a deep knowledge of the technical aspects of the music and singing can actually detract from the experience, leading to an overly critical view.

Watch the orchestra; note the sea of violin bows swaying in sync. Just being aware of the music is more important than understanding the nuances therein. The libretto (lit. "the book," the words, and therefore the plot, of the opera) is meant to reinforce the

literally brought on by a real horse. (The Met Opera has a lot of big money thrown at them and they don't always know what to do with it). You are meant to lose yourself in the grandness of sets and in their immense opulence.

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*The point of opera is not just the music, or just the singing, or just the staging, but how the entire production comes together as a holistic, extravagant sensation.*

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emotional nuances of the music. In earlier operas, librettos were written separately from the music, although that trend changed in the 19th century with the work of (anti-Semitic) composer Richard Wagner. The lyrics of the music will not be so relevant, especially if you don't speak the language being sung. While you might only pick up a few key words and phrases here and there, the lyrics and plot are less integral to the opera experience, so that's okay.

Naturally the singing is also an essential component of the opera. A basic knowledge of the Fachs system, which categorizes Opera singers' vocal ranges, is helpful, but certainly not necessary. Instead, focus on the difficulty of the singing, such as the length of notes or the smoothness of the sound (or even a deliberate jagged sound). Notice the intense emotions that pour out of the singers' voices and how the singing matches the emotional flow of the music. Note that opera singers are singing in massive auditoriums for thousands of people with no microphones. It's a Herculean feat. Also, if you check your program, you'll see that opera singers are an incredibly diverse group. The current production of *Le Nozze de Figaro* at the Met Opera features singers from Venezuela, Czech Republic and Alabama!

The spectacle aspect of the opera is certainly my favorite part. An opera stage is massive, and, because the audience can be four or five levels up, needs to be very tall. This means that the sets must occupy an immense amount of space, horizontally and vertically. The result is incredibly elaborate and exaggerated sets that take your breath away. Take, for example, the street scene in Act II of Puccini's *La Boheme*. The current staging at the Met Opera by Fraco Zeferrelli features a two-story set with close to 250 performers on stage. When the diva Musetta shows up in a horse drawn carriage, she is

What must be emphasized is that opera is both a passive and an active experience. You remain seated for the duration of the performance, still and observant, but you must also be actively aware of everything that is going on. In a sense, the opera experience is an exercise in mindfulness. Be aware of the music, and the singing, and the set and every little detail. See how it comes together, and then get lost in it all.

As far as prices go, while it's true there are tickets that can go for upwards of \$400, but most opera houses also have options and programs for us plebeians. The Met Opera offers tickets for as low as \$25 in the family circle (the highest seating level), and offers rush tickets the day of the performance for \$25 for orchestra seats that could normally cost hundreds of dollars. Additionally, if you register as a student, which is free to do with a valid student ID, you can purchase orchestra seats to select shows in advance for just \$35.

And while yes, there will be plenty of people wearing tuxedos and ball gowns at the Opera, it certainly isn't at all mandatory — you'll also see some people wearing jeans and a t-shirt. That being said, I personally would recommend wearing your Sunday best. Enjoy, just for a few hours, the lavishness of the opera and the feeling of pretentiousness that goes along with it. Glide up the curving staircases, dragging your arm up the gold banisters. Turn it into an experience and enjoy yourself.

Choosing an opera is an art form in and of itself. Most operas last several hours. The Met Opera website is very clear about how long each show is, and exactly how long and how many intermissions there will be in a given show. Some performances will have two intermissions, some will have none. Some productions give you more intermission time then you know what to do with.

It's recommended that beginners start with a well known show (*La Boheme*, *La Traviata* or *Tosca* are classics that are performed time and time again) because, well, they're the classics. Personally, I'd recommend that beginners stay away from more contemporary stagings, such as highly stylized or minimalistic productions. While these are certainly important to the opera canon as an art form, they diverge from the traditional grandeur of opera and generally don't resonate as much with newer audience members. Take a look at production photos to make sure it's a staging that piques your personal interest. Most important when choosing a show is identifying that it is something that interests you. Also, you may want to listen to the music in advance, just to familiarize yourself with the sound before going in.

You'll probably want to read the plot in advance, too. Most classic opera plots are simple, and not particularly compelling. They are certainly high in emotion — grief, love, hatred — but they are generally not meant to be over-analyzed or thought too hard about. Trying to understand every nuance in the plot can actually detract from the overall experience. In this vein, the dialogue is not particularly important either, especially given that it will probably be in a foreign language. Most opera houses will either project English translations of the lyrics from their original language, or, as the Met Opera does, will translate them on screens on the back of the seat in front of you. This can take some time getting used to, but you'll become accustomed to it soon enough.

Going to school in New York City opens up incredible opportunities for cultural experiences — the Met Opera is just a train ride away. Give it a go! No art form is for everyone, and opera is no exception. If you don't enjoy it, that's fine too.

Opera provides us with a way to forget the honking and hullabaloo of the city around us, and to take a journey to some other place and explore that world and its story. It's an opportunity to think about artistic ambition, diversity and the experience of going together to find something greater. It takes a lot of motivated, creative people to put together an opera. But the show is only complete when an audience has seen it. Now it's time for you to make your entrance.



The Met Opera has a lot of big money thrown at them and they don't always know what to do with it.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# A Touro Take: My Experience Working at the YU Seforim Sale

By ELYANNA SAPERSTEIN

YU has been at the center of my underdeveloped religious consciousness ever since I can remember having an underdeveloped religious consciousness. It's where my rebbeim came from, where the people I admire studied and where the biggest Jewish ideological debates today are fought. I personally don't come from a Modern Orthodox family or background — my brother wears a black hat, and a couple of years ago you would have found in me in my post-Bais Yaakov right-wing Modern Orthodox-machmir high school, and later seminary. Even now, I attend Lander College for Women, a college known as a bastion of the yeshivish world. It therefore surprised most people where I spent my February nights — proudly wearing my YU Seforim

Sale staff sweatshirt and manning my beloved section, “scholarly and academic works.”

The mess that I call my own *hashkafa* — a mad mix between the chareidi and modern orthodox ideals in an attempt at a truth — is beautifully reflected in the books of

in the entire seforim sale. To the best of my knowledge, I am the first and only student to work at the Seforim Sale from my institution of higher learning, and one of the few Seforim Sale staff members not currently attending YU (shoutout to Yael Cohnen). Despite

doubt many other students had to face unique to my situation like, “how do I get into a YU building? What if security stops me? Where even are the buildings?” To my surprise, people were friendly, security wasn't an issue as long as I had my license and everyone seemed eager

passionate about Torah, experienced new and nuanced perspectives, spent lots of time around incredible (and controversial) books and am being paid in seforim (which is obviously the best perk).

I want to take this opportunity and platform to say thank you to my friends who encouraged my love of books (and wrote ridiculously long emails to various Seforim Sale admins to try and get me an interview) and to the people who encouraged me to apply to the Seforim Sale despite going to the “wrong” school. Most of all, I am grateful to all the people who decided to look outside the YU bubble and invite me into their world filled with Torah, books and the wonderful experience that is the seforim sale.

*Elyana Sperstein is a senior studying marketing at Touro College.*

*Even now I attend a college known to be a bastion for the chareidi world. It therefore surprises most people where I spend my February nights — proudly wearing my YU seforim sale staff sweatshirt and manning my beloved section, “scholarly and academic works.”*

my section. Books with conflicting ideas and ideologies juxtaposed on each other as if in a dialogue, all in a quest to uncover truth. From treatises on Halacha and its process to biblical criticism and rabbinic responses, the academic section has the privilege of being one of the most diverse sections

my outsider status, I feel distinctly at home in between the stacks of books, their singularity mirroring my own experience.

It's been a fascinating experience to be able to participate in an activity usually reserved for insiders of a highly-specific university community. I had anxieties that I

to help me find whatever I needed. It seems that a shared love of books is a strong binder. And along with the unique downsides of working at the Seforim Sale as an outsider (like trying to fit my very non-YU schedule into Seforim Sale slots) there are amazing upsides too. I have gotten to know people truly



It therefore surprises most people where I spent my February nights — proudly wearing my YU seforim sale staff sweatshirt and manning my beloved section, “scholarly and academic works.”



Marc Stern, Chief Legal Officer at the AJC, spoke to YU students at an event.

SRULI FRUCHTER

## Partisanship and Our Jewish Identity

By SRULI FRUCHTER

Whether from the media or our experiences, we see that political conversations can quickly turn from productive to polarizing. At Yeshiva University, however, we are able to collectively transcend our party lines when dealing with our unique commonality: our Jewish identity.

In a 2014 religious landscape study, Pew Research Center reported that 64% of American Jews identify as or lean toward Democrat, 26% of American Jews identify as or lean toward Republican, and 9% did not lean either way. Further analysis from this particular study showed the disparities of Jewish support regarding specific issues like abortion and environmental regulation, for example.

Coupling those findings with the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) 2019 survey, "American Jews on Antisemitism in America," affirms that our Jewish identity transcends partisan lines. For instance, the survey showed that 88% of Jews found anti-Semitism to be a problem in America, and 84% of Jews deemed saying "Israel has no right to exist" to be an anti-Semitic statement. These two examples indicate the Jewish unity can be found when confronted with threats against our existence as a people and Israel's existence as our homeland; these are two fundamental factors of our Jewish identity.

The reality of non-partisan Jewish identity is one I personally experienced on Tuesday,

Feb. 18, at an event titled, "President Trump's Order on Anti-Semitism."

I had the distinct privilege of inviting Marc Stern, the Chief Legal Officer at the AJC, to delineate the legal ramifications of President Trump's executive order on anti-Semitism, passed in December of 2019. Held within the intimate setting of Furst Hall's 206 classroom, this event successfully unraveled the complexities surrounding the President's order. I initially presumed that an event tackling this national controversy would limit the diversity of our pool of attendees, isolating students like political discourse often does. However, the event drew YU students from all dimensions of the political sphere.

Organized primarily between the Jacob Hecht Pre-Law Society and Yeshiva University Political Action Club (YUPAC), the event was also co-sponsored by the Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA), Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) and the Political Science Society. Additionally, the event received unique "tri-partisanship" when the YU Democrats, YU Libertarians and the YU Republicans joined in co-sponsoring it.

During the event, students of various political and ideological affiliations leaned in as Stern simplified and sifted through the facts and fallacies surrounding President Trump's executive order. He further broke down the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism, a critical component to understanding the President's order.

Stern went on to broaden the conversation to confront challenging questions facing the Jewish community: *When does anti-Israel rhetoric cross the line into anti-Semitism? Is BDS anti-Semitic? Are Jews a race, a nationality, an ethnicity, or a combination of the three? How do we navigate the legal system in combatting rising anti-Semitism on the college campus and the world around us?* All of these pressing questions were answered from a place of genuity, not a political agenda, and the attending students seemed to recognize that.

When my fellow YU students embraced this event and the nationally contentious issues it addressed, they nullified the unwarranted partisanship regarding Zionism and anti-Semitism. This, however, should not be conflated to insinuate that all Jews must be politically in-sync; such a notion is far from the truth and is very dangerous.

Similarly, Gallup's 2019 report "American Jews, Politics and Israel" revealed that, despite 95% of Jews having "favorable views of Israel," there were still disparities in their perspectives on former Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton, former President Barack Obama, and current President Donald Trump, for example. The point is less so to focus on the intricate details on Jewish political opinions, and more so to acknowledge that the foundational aspects of our Jewish identity — our history, our nationhood and our Zionism, to name a few — remain strong, intact and non-partisan.

Partnering with the AJC and various YU clubs created a space where the diversities within our student body were trumped by our identity as Jews. During that evening event, whether Democrat, Republican or Libertarian, students were joined together by

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*Partnering with the American Jewish Committee and various YU clubs created a space where the diversities within our student body were trumped by our identity as Jews.*

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Jews, like all people, can ideologically or philosophically differ on the correct approaches to combatting anti-Semitism or resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for example; the plurality of ideas within our Jewish perspectives is healthy and necessary. AJC's aforementioned survey captured the difference of opinion Jews have with broader

our collective identity as Jews, disregarding our political affiliations and ideologies. In today's political climate, we see that many issues have unnecessarily become politicized; we must ensure that our Jewish identity is not one of them.

# Sounds Good! How Streaming Services Came to Be

By AVI LEKOWSKY

As Generation Z-ers, we have experienced many forms of music listening. Born into the rise of the CD era, now, the current Gen Z-er likely has at least one music streaming subscription filled with playlists for every imaginable mood. For many streaming enthusiasts, the platforms have become almost social media-like, where fellow users can follow one another and broaden their auditory interests. But current streaming platforms are a culmination of years of innovation and creativity. These services, once thought to be the end of the lucrative music business, now account for the majority of the music industry's revenue.

While proto-streaming services originated in the '90s, the industry really began to take off in the early 2000s, when radio stations made their streams available online. Over time, online stations catered specifically to a user's music genre started to emerge. But the biggest shock to the music industry happened during a 60-hour coding marathon: Napster. The program allowed people to freely share their favorite songs from any artist they

wanted — putting a huge dent in the music industry's profits and forever changing the way people conceived of music. Eventually, after a series of tumultuous lawsuits, Napster was forced to close their operations. But Napster's novelty paved the way for future streaming services

Shortly after the fall of Napster, The Pirate Bay launched to assist users to easily acquire music. The Pirate Bay offered users the ability to illegally acquire copied entertainment ranging from games to music. While many lawsuits have been filed throughout the years, surprisingly The Pirate Bay continues to operate today

However, for users seeking a legal route to acquiring music, iTunes allowed people to easily purchase music for \$0.99. The quickness and simplicity of iTunes alone drew many people away from the file sharing life. Within the first week of launching, over a million songs were sold and iTunes quickly became the preferred way to buy music.

While CD sales reached a peak of \$13.2 billion in sales in 2000, in 2019 CD Sales were down to \$1.8 billion; however, while iTunes offered a legal way to acquire music, piracy was still the easiest way to

grow a music library with minimal effort and no hit on a users wallet.

Enter 2008, when listening to music through sites like YouTube and Pandora was already gaining momentum. More significantly, however, 2008 marked the beginning of a new era of music: Spotify.

services such as SoundCloud offers a slightly different service catering less to established musicians and more towards the up and coming artists. Many big names grew out of the platform, lending the term "SoundCloud Generation" to refer to artists such as Bryson Tiller,

innovative marketing campaigns and creative new ventures.

The competition amongst streaming services has led to rising revenues for music label companies. In the first 6 months of 2019, music streaming brought in \$4.3 billion of revenue, an increase of 26% from the prior year. That accounts for about 80% of the music industry's money!

Streaming music has been so successful that according to Warner Music's filing, many services will be looking to raise their prices soon. Why would streaming companies feel comfortable doing this? Well, because they can! All-in-all, \$10 a month is not a lot to spend on music (a number cut in half if you're a college student). A quick search online shows that CD's generally sell for around \$10-\$15, so to have virtual access to millions of songs pretty much anywhere is still a bargain. Plus, once people get used to that convenience, it's hard to go back. While the extra few dollars may be marginal to subscribers, cumulatively however, streaming services will be increasing their annual revenues by the millions.

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*These services, once thought to be the end of the lucrative music business, now account for the majority of the music industry's revenue.*

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Founded by Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon, Spotify began development in Stockholm, Sweden in 2006 as a response to the growing piracy problem the music industry was facing. The concept behind Spotify was to offer users a sleek interface and an à la carte option of playing music. Initially, Spotify was only available in European countries but quickly expanded to the global market. Today, they boast of having over 270 million active monthly users.

But Spotify's success ushered in a new era for the music world: the streaming wars. While YouTube and Pandora are established streaming competitors, newer

Lil Pump and Chance the Rapper. However, Spotify's biggest competitor came in the form of a service formerly known as Beats Music.

After being acquired by Apple in 2014, the Beats Music platform was repurposed for the launch of Apple's newest music platform: Apple Music. Featuring a star-studded launch, major ad campaigns and initial exclusive streaming rights to albums from artists like Taylor Swift and Frank Ocean, Apple Music, like its predecessor iTunes, came out the door swinging. However, even with the capital that has been poured into Apple Music, Spotify has still been able to maintain its lead through



Streaming services are becoming a major source of revenue for the music industry.

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