

Evaluating YU

JSS STUDENT COUNCIL RELEASES OFFICIAL REPORT

The following is a special report sponsored and endorsed by the JSS Student Council. HAMEVASER, as the official organ of JSS, has been designated to present it publicly.

It is to be understood that neither the Editor-in-Chief nor the Governing Board of HAMEVASER, nor the Student Organization of Yeshiva, co-sponsor of HAMEVASER, bears any responsibility for the contents of this report. Sole responsibility rests with the JSS Council which authorized this study.

The newly-elected 1969-1970 Governing Board hopes to comment on this project in its forthcoming issue.

—MICHAEL BASHEVINK
Supplement Editor

To the administration and faculty of Yeshiva College:

It has come to the attention of the James Striar School Student Council that student discontent at Yeshiva College is a very real and disturbing phenomenon. Being a representative body and therefore empathizing strongly with the student body, the Council, on November 21, 1968, created the JSS Administration-Faculty-Student Relations Committee to probe what the students feel to be areas of "academic and religious neglect (with emphasis on the latter)" as they affect the JSS student.

Since the Council has sought to present the concern of the JSS student as a whole person, rather than a compartmentalized individual, the committee has investigated both secular and religious affairs. In short, we have looked at the total Yeshiva College environment as it affects the JSS student. Those areas outside the special sphere of JSS but still affecting the JSS student have been the subject of committee investigation simply because no one in whose special sphere they might be has concerned himself with them. Further, the committee has divided the report into two parts, the first dealing with Yeshiva College itself, and the second part dealing with the direction and philosophy of the university as a whole, a subject of great concern to the JSS student.

After four months of extensive investigation, the committee compiled the following report, which was unanimously passed by the JSS Student Council on March 27, 1969. The second report is soon to be published.

The committee enjoyed the indulgence of every administrator and faculty member directly concerned with its research, with the exception of Dr. Belkin. Although Dr. Belkin's secretary originally promised the committee an appointment in December, various delays have resulted from administrative considerations and demands upon Dr. Belkin's time and health. We were recently informed by Rabbi Miller that we would have an appointment with Dr. Belkin before Pesach; we have since been told the appointment will have to wait until after Pesach. Although we await the appointment, we have decided to report at this time.

In this vein, we would like to point out to Dr. Belkin that the students of JSS feel strongly about the difficulties involved in speaking with the *Rosh Yeshiva*. While building the university is certainly a full-time job, we suggest that many of Dr. Belkin's strenuous activities be delegated to other administrators to permit the *Rosh Yeshiva* to spend time with the students. We feel this is an essential step in bridging the gap between the administration and the students.

LIBRARIES

On a more mundane level, a chief source of student dissatisfaction has been the libraries. Professor Dienstag bemoans the condition of his library, but asserts that with the exception of staff inadequacies (due to the scarcity of good Judaica librarians), library deficiencies should be elimi-

nated in the new library building. This opinion is also held to some extent by Professor Zeides. Rather than voice any misgivings about their optimism, we choose to await their expected improvements.

It must be stressed that Professor Zeides personally tries to alleviate all student problems. However, we must express our disappointment in the Pollack Library in one area not expected to improve in the new building: staff. Despite Professor Zeides' continuing concern with student grievances and his assertion that after repeated student complaints, he had warned his employees against unbecoming behavior and told them that he would stand for "no nonsense," discourtesy continues.

Secondly, the inadequacy of the Pollack Library staff is fairly obvious. While Professor Zeides has attributed the lack of professional librarians at Pollack in part to his "unpleasant experiences" with professional librarians, we would ask that he give good thought to what is responsible for such incompatibility. We would not like to think that professional librarians simply do not mix with our library.

REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

Another area of complaint has been the registrar's office. In response to a questionnaire recently distributed to the JSS student body¹ by the committee, 43% of the students responding answered that they had at some time or another had difficulty with the registrar's office. This figure includes 28% of the freshman class. The most frequent complaint was plain discourtesy on the part of the employees, with one new employee singled out in particular not infrequently. Other major sources of frustration were inordinate red tape and registration difficulties. We would ask why such a proliferation of information directed to so many offices is necessary. We bid Professor Silverman make the necessary reforms in an office whose importance to the students must not be marred by constant antagonism and aggravation.

ACADEMIC QUALITY

A more important outcome of the questionnaire response is addressed to both administration and faculty. Students were asked to characterize Yeshiva College academically as poor, fair, good, or very good first as they had anticipated before entering and secondly now. Ninety-five percent of the students responding said they had anticipated the quality to be either good or very good. However, only 48% found it to be so now (52% rating it poor or fair). We should mention that such a change in opinion did not occur with regard to "religious studies." It should be abundantly clear that after the JSS student stops reading the University's public relations publications, he ceases to believe them. His response to the question "How would you rate YC's quality in... academics?" demonstrates a rampant dissatisfaction with our educational state of affairs. This, in itself, is an indictment of academic neglect.

The unique workload at Yeshiva College is a patently accepted cliché. Dean Bacon has sought to alleviate this problem somewhat by instituting the Five Year Honors

1. A three page questionnaire was distributed to all JSS shiurim at the end of last semester. Of 237 students, 148 (63%) responded. Only Senior A-2 is not represented in the sample, which also includes a representation of absentees on the day the questionnaire was distributed. Full data from the questionnaire is now in the JSSC minutes.

Not all students returning the questionnaire responded to all questions. However, only those questions to which the overwhelming majority responded are included in this report.

Program. In our interview with Dean Bacon, the committee inquired as to the benefit of a compulsory five-year program at Yeshiva College. The Dean replied that such a suggestion some years ago had been met by "riots" on the part of students.

In our questionnaire, however, in answer to the question "What is your opinion on making Yeshiva College a five-year college?" only 32% of the students answered "No." Furthermore, if only those with a substantial degree of experience at Yeshiva College are taken into account (i.e., sophomores, juniors, and seniors), the percentages run "Yes"—51%, "No"—31%, and "Indifferent"—18%. Clearly, the vast majority of JSS students are either in favor of or indifferent to a compulsory five-year program. In view of the facts, the committee urges Dean Bacon to entertain reconsideration of a compulsory five-year program in an open forum of faculty, administration, and students.

JSS SALARIES

Although the committee has been denied access to the JSS salary scale, we are appalled of the fact that our *rebbeim* are paid on a scale a good deal lower than that of the college. And though we have been made to understand the economic considerations involved, that the salaries of our *rebbeim* compare quite favorably with those of other *yeshivot* and that they are paid on time (unlike some *yeshivot*), we must resent the attitude that our *rebbeim* are part of an educational "market," as more than one administrator has put it.

We also resent the fact that other instructors at YC, who do not begin to compare with our *rebbeim* in terms of education and background in their respective fields, receive higher salaries. Indeed, in view of the disconcerting fact that secular instructors receive higher salaries than *rebbeim*, it is not difficult to understand why religious instructors of secular academic capabilities have chosen secular fields rather than *chinukh*. We wonder how such a salary differential fits in with our centrality-of-Torah concept. We know that this situation is not one with which the administration is pleased. We simply urge that more effort be expended to uncover new sources of instructional funds. This, we feel, is of primary importance. If salaries could be raised, instructors could have fewer jobs and spend more vitally needed time with their students. The Student Council implores the administration to do all within its power to raise salaries of JSS instructors and thereby better *rebbeim-talmid* relations in the James Striar School.

JAMES STRIAR SCHOOL

The committee would like to take this opportunity to express its appreciation to Rabbi Besdin for his unflinching sensitivity and reply to student problems. His constant efforts to improve the JSS program have made the school the outstanding success that it is. Nevertheless, our questionnaire has revealed what the committee feels to be some disturbing facts about the JSS student.

First, it is obvious that despite dormitory rules, the JSS student would seldom attend *shacharit* minyan. The average JSS student attends morning minyan less than two times weekly. He attends *ma'ariv* minyan less than three times weekly. This does not necessarily mean that stricter minyan rules will improve the situation. We feel that the problem is much deeper. Consider, for instance, that despite the existence of a JSS guidance program, 45% of the JSS students stated that they have no religious authority at Yeshiva College in whom they can confide. Further, more than 23% have no religious authority at Yeshiva College or at home in their own communities.

And, on a more essential level, the questionnaire pointed to more disconcerting

facts. The committee asked the question, "How does your present observance compare with that with which you entered?" followed by the four areas of *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, *l'fiim*, and sexual morality. It is reasonable to assume that since *Shabbat* and *kashrut* observance are largely matters of learning, the JSS student should be expected to improve. Disturbing is the fact that a full 10% of the students responding answered "less" to the question of their *Shabbat* observance. Consider further that 11% of the students are putting on *l'fiim* "less" frequently now than when they entered. To write off these students as "bums" is to be *m'ayesh* on individuals who were originally admitted to JSS on their commitment to Judaism. We submit that unless a concerted effort is made by JSS to reach these students, their number will increase disturbingly and militate against the original goals of this institution.

The committee views the abovementioned problems as not simply the results of JSS inadequacies. It is clear from the questionnaire data that while JSS has succeeded to a miraculous extent academically, it has shown sorry results in reaching the JSS student at the gut level. However, we feel that these results are to a very great extent the manifestations of the influence of Yeshiva College as a whole. The JSS student spends the great bulk of the day living outside his *shiur*. The entire college must bear responsibility for these religious problems. The committee therefore suggests the following ameliorative steps:

1. *Rebbeim* be encouraged to arrive at the college earlier in the morning and attend minyan with their students. The efficacy of such a gesture should be obvious.
2. *Rebbeim* be encouraged to take a more active interest in the every-day lives of their *talmidim*. Higher salaries would provide more time for this.
3. The administration persist in its efforts toward improving the *Shabbat* atmosphere in the dormitories so as to permit the *Shabbat* to actively penetrate into the rooms.
4. The administration encourage all *Rebbeim* to more extensively concern themselves with the contemporary *halachic* and *philosophic* problems of the student body.

Of a somewhat different nature is the matter of sexual morality. While the general college atmosphere plays a large role, it must be noted that JSS has not instituted any course even remotely dealing with sexual morality as it affects the daily life of the JSS student, notwithstanding the proposed *taharat hamishpachah* course. Therefore, coupled with a general campus atmosphere of neglect of the matter is the JSS student's ignorance of it. Considering these factors, perhaps the committee should not have been shocked when it was revealed that while 64% of the JSS students have attitudes toward sexual morality that have been unchanged by JSS, 15% reported they are less moral sexually now than before they entered. Perhaps we should not have been shocked, but we could not help but be alarmed. While JSS has done a remarkable job in training its students in most areas, it has left them to learn the *halachic* facts of life at the "Bimbs." Contrary to the fantastic belief that such *halacha* is being taught in the class or is at least being absorbed osmotically, it is not. We fervently hope Rabbi Besdin will recognize the urgency of the situation and make every effort to institute the appropriate *heshbon*.

nim courses to cope with this and other such issues.

BELFER

The JSS Student Council is to be excluded from those viewing with deep apprehension the imminent addition of the Belfer Graduate School of Science to the Yeshiva College Campus. Although we appreciate Dr. Belkin's intention that the graduate school scholastically enhance Yeshiva College, we also recognize the unique religious problems such a move creates. In particular, three problems concern the committee.

First, how does the administration plan to deal with the introduction of a large number of non-Jews into the Yeshiva environment? Surely, the administration has considered the problem.

Secondly, why will the Belfer students not have their own dining facilities? Mr. Hartstein's disclosure that Parker's cafeteria is to be enlarged does not mitigate the understandable concern of many over an intermingling inappropriate to a yeshiva environment.

Lastly, while some administrators have insisted to the student body that the building will be closed on *Shabbat*, they have apparently not insisted such to the Belfer administration. This committee was informed by the present Dean of Belfer that there would be ongoing experiments that would necessitate work on *Shabbat*. A professor at the school recently stated that closing the laboratories on *Shabbat* would mean great difficulty for the chemistry department. Further, he said, it would mean an alienation of the student body because of the loss of what the professor called "academic freedom."

The committee appreciates the tireless grappling of Dr. Belkin and the administration with these problems. However, it is clear that the administrators of YC and Belfer do not see eye to eye on the issue. We therefore urge Dr. Belkin to firmly state the position of the school on the issues—that Belfer will not permit access to any individual on *Shabbat*.

Further, we ask the administration to give the additional space for the cafeteria to Belfer as its own cafeteria. We feel these steps are absolutely necessary if a true Torah environment is to remain intact on campus.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Finally, the committee seeks to pay tribute to what is perhaps the most-understaffed and overburdened department in the University. For whatever reason, whether general administrative laziness or supreme administrative confidence in the department, Mr. Hartstein informed this committee that public relations is the executor of a disproportionate amount of University functions. In effect, Mr. Hartstein told this committee that the buck must stop somewhere; he has decided his office will bear the burden. There can be little doubt that Mr. Hartstein has succeeded beautifully in keeping the image of the university polished, but he has committed a serious blunder: he has not kept pace with a growing student awareness. The result is a tremendous administration-student credibility gap.

Only recently, during his *Oneg Shabbat* appearance in Rubin Shul, Mr. Hartstein, director of public relations, was asked two very important questions:

1. How will the religious problems resulting from the presence of Belfer be overcome?
2. Why has YU's image been allowed to fall through the religious reputation of its graduate schools, particularly Einstein?

In answering the first question, Mr. Hartstein noted the fact that Belfer would have its own dining facilities. In answering the second he asserted that while we, the students of YC, claim to be "tsadikim," Einstein makes no such claim; however it does

2. As this report went to press, Dr. Miller informed us that Dr. Belkin had assured him that the laboratories would not be open on *Shabbat* and that he had issued instructions that they be closed.

keep *kashrut* and *Shabbat*. When the committee, in a later interview, informed him that we had information to the effect that there were no student dining facilities in the upcoming building, he told us he had meant faculty dining facilities. Of course, faculty facilities had no relevance to the question, nor was the questioner concerned with them. When the committee likewise informed the director of Public Relations that we did indeed know of ongoing direct violation of the *Shabbat* at Einstein, he attributed it to "administrative foul-ups." Regardless of the cause, it is quite clear that Mr. Hartstein's statement that Einstein is *shomer Shabbat* is, at the very least, distorted. This type of public misrepresentation has found professional institutionalization in the Office of Public Relations.

And in its effort to protect and nurture the image of YU, Public Relations has given prominent exposure to the YU graduate schools. Although Mr. Hartstein adamantly disagrees with the committee's observation that the graduate schools have been overemphasized in PR publications, we invite anyone to pick up a Yeshiva University public relations publication, and judge for himself the apparent comparative importance of Stern College and Yeshiva College in the scheme of the University.

Indeed Mr. Hartstein expressed to this committee his studied opinion that it is "the glory of the graduate schools" that has brought students to Yeshiva College. While we feel this statement to be obviously off-base, we cannot speak for the entire student body. However, we would like to point out that, as far as the JSS student is concerned, this is unquestionably untrue: when asked on the questionnaire, "What was the source (or sources) of your impressions of Yeshiva College before you entered?" not a single student indicated any graduate school.

Take the outlook of Public Relations, then, and add the fact that a great bulk of University functioning takes place in that office, and one begins to understand why students at Yeshiva College feel they are being overlooked because of the graduate schools. Nor is it difficult to understand student distrust of the administration. It would appear as though Mr. Hartstein has succeeded in monitoring all information emanating from the administration, even to the extent of distorting the facts from the higher echelons. One of Dr. Belkin's secretaries unabashedly informed the chairman of this committee, for instance, that Dr. Belkin makes no public statements without Mr. Hartstein being present. It is clear that whatever Dr. Belkin's intentions of improving communications with the students may have been, they have been eliminated by Public Relations' creation of the students' well founded distrust of administrative statements. The council vows its perseverance in pursuing an improvement in communications among administration, faculty, and students. To that end, JSSSC has begun action toward a permanent JSS information-gathering body to keep the students, administration, and faculty informed of vital issues and their implications, compensating for any Public Relations deficiencies and/or distortions.

In short, we wish to inform the administration and faculty of Yeshiva College that the JSS Student Council not only stands ready, but is actively implementing plans to right the grievances of our students in harmony with the concurrent efforts of the administration and faculty, in whose realms these grievances predominantly lie. Let anyone think the Council's estimation of student dissatisfaction over-blown, we cite the following data: When asked "Would you send your son to Yeshiva College?" 41% of the JSS freshmen answered "Yes." In the sophomore class, the figure dropped to 36%. In the junior class, the figure was 27%. And the senior class yielded 25% "Yes." The figures should speak for themselves. *Day Pchikim b'vayom...*

In accordance with halakic considerations, the committee offered the right of reply to all persons quoted, directly, or indirectly, in this report. With the exception of those incorporated into the report itself, all replies received follow:

From: Dr. Arthur Komar, Acting Dean
Belfer Graduate School of Science

"Lastly, while some administrators have insisted to the student body that the building will be closed on *Shabbat*, they have apparently not insisted such to the Belfer administration. This committee was informed by the present Dean of Belfer that there would be ongoing experiments that would necessitate work on *Shabbat*."

This is a correct quote—however, out of context it implies that the laboratories are opened indiscriminately. In point of fact that is not the case. For those experiments which require continuous operation and monitoring over a period of several weeks or more, provisions have to be made in advance in order for the monitor to obtain access to the laboratory. Every effort is made to assure that the operation of the laboratory is consistent with Jewish Law.

From: Dr. Irving Borowitz, Associate
Professor of Chemistry, Belfer

The laboratories are now, and have been since we came here, closed on *Shabbat*. That means that there are no classes, mail delivery, etc. There are on-going experiments, which require some people to come in on that day as on any other day, including Sunday. Experimental science, as carried out anywhere in the world, must be done on a continuous basis. If a total prohibition on work on *Shabbat* is placed on the Belfer School, I personally believe that the future growth of experimental science (Chemistry, Physics) here would be greatly curtailed.

I propose that the laboratories be kept closed as they are now but that people be allowed to come in on *Shabbat*, according to individual conscience and free choice. I believe that the personnel of the Graduate School have a respect of the Orthodox Jewish law and traditions and that they would only come in when it was felt to be absolutely necessary to do so. If such a policy were maintained, a feeling of mutual respect and goodwill would ensue and the erosion to Orthodox Jewish values at Yeshiva would be non-existent.

From: Prof. Solomon Zeides, Librarian,
Pollack Library

I am quite concerned over the excerpt you offer in the area of Pollack Library. I am certain that I made it very clear to you at the time that we have done everything in our power to eliminate student grievances towards members of our staff. Every human being has an off moment. You will recall also, that I mentioned that "It takes two to tango" and, quite possibly, the student may be wrong. I can personally tell you of many instances where students have acted in the most disrespectful manner. It was agreed, I recall, that, should any instance arise in the future, the matter would be adjudicated by both parties with the members of your committee and I sitting down. This has never come to pass. A blanket criticism that our staff displays unbecoming behavior cannot be considered valid since no specific instances in these several months has come to my attention through you.

You make another statement which requires proof on your part. Your statement "the inadequacy of the Pollack Library staff is fairly obvious" is absolutely, unequivocally without basis. On this point, again, I must request "chapter and verse" where the weakness exists before I could possibly entertain your argument.

The matter of professional librarians is a matter that only a person who is acquainted with the problem of what professionalization entails could determine. I feel that the question of competency in judging this particular area is a problem which I

personally am most qualified to pass judgment on. The writer of your comment is not. On this matter of professionalization, I refer you to the speech by Dr. Ivar Berg, of Columbia University, before the American Orthopsychiatric Association, recently.

Since your statement is a matter which carries the name of the Faculty and Administration, as well as students, I feel that the contents of this particular item should be reviewed and ascertained as to reliability before it is offered to the public. The statement now offered, in my opinion, is woefully immature and will reflect negatively on JSS.

Your opening statement that Prof. Dienstag bemoans the condition of his Library, etc., etc., but believes that these deficiencies will be eliminated in the new library building is a point which I cannot accept. No matter where I have had the Pollack Library situated (and we have had situations where the books were on the floor due to lack of space, and where more electric bulbs were not functioning than were, in giving the student enough light) the student was always primary in my mind. I don't pass the buck, I stand ready to prove that the Yeshiva College student is better off at Pollack Library than the average student in New York City in his or her respective Library.

The new building will offer more reading space and many comforts, but let us not delude ourselves into thinking we will not have many more problems than before. Our job is to make the Library serve, and a fancy window or brick is secondary, as long as the roof doesn't leak.

For the moment, I must reject this criticism as a totally irresponsible evaluation.

From: Mr. Sam Hartstein, Director of
Public Relations

I appreciate your sending me the few notes of your interview. Any similarity between what I said and what appears here is purely accidental. It is pointless to review what I did say and what I did not say since it would mean going through the whole song and dance act all over again. Whether I failed in communicating to you or whether you have seen fit by choice to misinterpret what I said remains for the gods to answer.

The questions you indicate were asked at Rubin Residence Hall were not asked. If you bothered to read the questions and your answers you would see the ridiculousness of it all.

Regarding the fact that many students came to YU because of the graduate schools, I am still prepared to put money on the line and let the students themselves judge. How many pre-med students came to Yeshiva College because of the hope of some day being admitted to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, how many students came with the expectation of getting *semicha*, etc., etc.?

The committee thanks the following administrators and faculty members for their cooperation:

Dean Isaac Bacon
Professor Morris Silverman
Rabbi Morris Besdin
Rabbi Israel Miller
Professor Jacob Dienstag
Professor Solomon Zeides
Dr. Abraham Duker
Dr. Arthur Komar (Belfer)
Mr. Alan Macdonald (Belfer)
Mr. Sam Hartstein

Special thanks are due to Professor Nathan Goldberg for his help on the questionnaire. We are indebted to David Feldman and Neal Tobar for their untiring efforts for the committee. Of course, we seek to emphasize that only the committee and *ipso facto* JSSSC are responsible for the views expressed in this report.

The James Striar School Student Council
Committee on Administration-Faculty-Student Relations:

Eugene Lebowitz
Harvey Mayerson
Howie Shub
Andy Solomon, Chairman
Ralph Suiskind