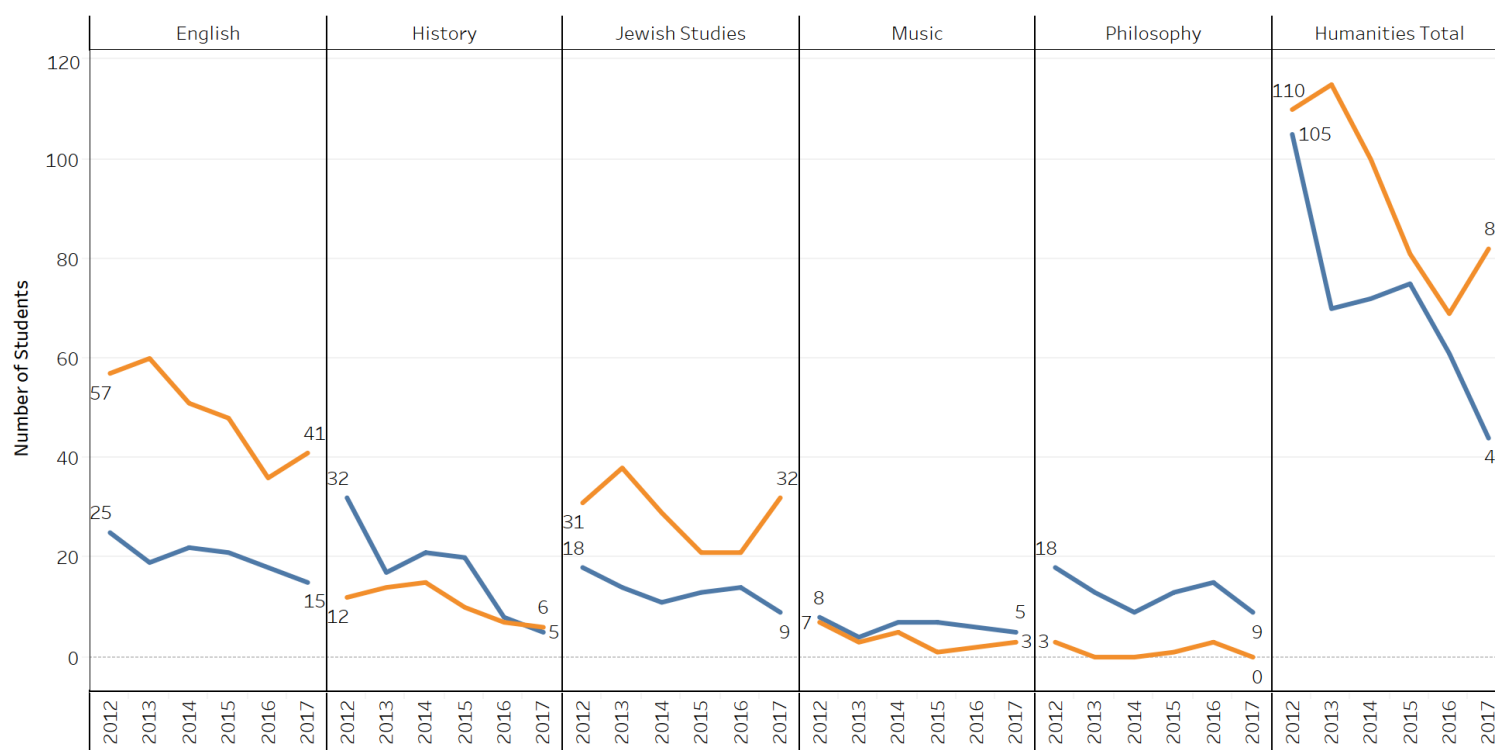




Number of Students Declaring Majors in Humanities Drops 58% Since 2012

Campus
■ Beren ■ Wilf

2012-2017: The Humanities at Yeshiva University



By Avi Strauss

Humanities majors at Yeshiva College have declined by 58% since the Fall of 2012, a review by *The Commentator* has found. Currently, there are just 44 students with a declared major in one of the humanities, representing just 4.7% of all declared majors on the Wilf campus.

In Fall 2012, there were 105 declared majors in the humanities on the Wilf campus,

representing 12.8% of declared majors on the Wilf campus.

Generally considered a fixture of higher academia, the humanities encompass disciplines that cover human society and culture, and their development over time. The Wilf campus features six humanities majors, in English, History, Music, Philosophy, Language, and Jewish Studies. Studies like Art History and Religion are offered as well, often as components of YC's Core curriculum, but students cannot earn bachelor's

SEE HUMANITIES, CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Media Studies Major: Small But Strong

By Ilana Kisilinsky

The English department at Stern is constantly changing and evolving, trying to stay up to date so that students can get the best chance of getting the most out of their education. The one area that this modernization shines through is the Media Studies major, a branch within the English department.

The Media Studies major began in 1983. It consists of three tracks, Journalism, Advertising, and Public Relations. Each student chooses one of the three tracks and must take two classes to receive the concentration in that track. They must also take four media elective courses as well as three literature courses. All students in this major are also required to complete a 100 hour internship.

In 2017, the most popular concentration in the Media Studies

SEE MEDIA STUDIES, CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Stern College Dramatics Society to Perform Play on Wilf Campus for First Time

By Nechama Lowy

For the first time in the history of the Stern College Dramatics Society, the club will be performing in the Wilf Campus Schottenstein Theater uptown with their production of *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. In 2012, the Beren campus theater was sold and until this year, SCDS has not had a suitable alternative for their performances. Jordyn Kaufman, the previous president of SCDS, speculated that it was most likely sold for financial reasons, but it is still unclear.

For the past few years, Norman Thomas High School and Koch Auditorium have been the theater substitutes, both inadequate and inconvenient solutions, according to many members of SCDS. Koch



SEE DRAMATICS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

The EDITORIAL

Professors, Not Pundits

By David Rubinstein

Conservative student groups are misguided in hosting controversial celebrities for one-time spectacles. Conservatives' energy would be best invested in an area far more significant than political circus: academic appointments.

"TO THE QUESTIONABLE EXTENT THAT ANY OF THE ITINERANT PUNDITS CAN PERSUADE THEIR AUDIENCE, PROFESSORS SHAPE THE THOUGHT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT LEAST AS MUCH AND PROBABLY MUCH MORE."

Across the nation, conservative student groups have invited the likes of Milo Yiannopoulos, Ann Coulter, and Ben Shapiro to speak on campuses. These are not scholars. Their expertise is not in scholarship; it is in saying inflammatory things. If you're into that sort of thing, they are entertainment; their subject happens to be politics. (Compare to their liberal counterpart: late night comedy shows.) Their fans come out to hear a comfortable chord from their echochamber, and, if they're lucky, see a good ol' takedown of some snowflake who asks a stupid question. #Thuglife.

In the realm of real scholarship, though, it is well documented that the academy is stacked with far more liberals than conservatives. This should matter to conservative student groups and they should work to change this.

Here's why: To the questionable extent that any of the itinerant pundits can persuade their audience, professors shape the thought of young people at least as much and probably much more. Like a Supreme Court justice, a tenured professor is here to stay. A liberal instructor will do several things that will affect at least a generation of students.

For one, she will determine the curricula for her class if not for her department, selecting which writers are worthy of perusal and which are not. Contemporary liberal education is no friend to the canon of classical liberal literature. Authors of the "Great Books" (controversial), members of the Dead White Men demographic (uncontroversial), will have to cede much of their space on the traditional syllabus to others.

This means that if, in the best case scenario, an undergrad who is open to persuasion (or is morbidly interested in the gotcha act) attended the hour-long show brought to campus by conservative students, he will still return to the library afterwards to imbibe almost exclusively liberal reading.

More importantly, a professor pontificates to students twice a week for a semester. Because he has received an extended education, he is a scholar, an expert. These credentials make the opinions he shares in class even weightier. It is one thing to spend an evening watching a conservative speech; it is a completely different thing to engage, every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, week in, week out for twelve weeks, with a learned instructor who hammers home a non-conservative point.

This week, Young America's Foundation and YU College Republicans will welcome Dennis Prager to Yeshiva University in the latest round of political circus. Meanwhile, the faculty here has a noted liberal bent. At YU, like at Berkeley, Middlebury, and elsewhere, conservatives have missed the mark.

How to influence academic appointments is a difficult question to which I do not propose a solution. But I do propose that an answer can be found if instead of trying to make headlines, conservative student groups tried to make headway in this challenge.

It is time to focus on education, not agitation.

FROM THE SAME PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU

BEN SHAPIRO



GET READY FOR

DENNIS PRAGER

MONDAY
DECEMBER 4TH
8:00PM-10:00PM

@ YU

@ WILF-BELFER HALL ROOM 103 WEISSBERG COMMONS

DENNIS PRAGER IS AN AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE AND
NATIONALLY SYNDICATED RADIO TALK SHOW HOST,
COLUMNIST, AUTHOR, AND PUBLIC SPEAKER.



brought to you by
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The COMMENTATOR

2017-2018

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The Commentator is the student newspaper
of Yeshiva University.

For 82 years, The Commentator has served
students and administrators as a communicative
conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating
undergraduate social, religious, and academic
beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable
reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader
Jewish and American communities.

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

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





1 December
That eye of the storm of the semester when midterms are done, several weeks remain until finals, and Chanukah and snow days are right around the corner.



2 Baby Corn
A real thing. Nothing like those cut up normal carrots which exist under the facade of "baby carrots."



3 New Plastic Snapple Bottles
Finally Rav Schachter talmidim can drink Snapple. *Ve'hameivin Yavin.*



4 Venmo
It's like social media for our bank accounts. We've come very far in 2017.



5 Hook and Loop
If you haven't seen a certain trademarked company's plea video yet, drop what you're doing and watch it right now.



6 Donuts in the Stern Caf
Currently the biggest controversy on the Beren Campus, to be rivaled only by the debate over the *kashrut* of the Dunkin Donuts itself.



7 Melave Malka 2017 Tefillin Mirrors
According to one source, the cheapest gift ever given in the history of gifts. Geshmak!

7 UP 7 DOWN



1 Facebook Recipe Videos
Everyone watches this stuff in my class, and it's starting to creep me out. Please stop.



2 The 185th St. Bagpiper
Little known fact is that he actually learned all his sick skillz from the Yeshiva University Belz School of Jewish Music.



3 Dennis Prager
To all those wondering: No, we didn't not secretly invite someone to spark controversy and bring in articles. We hope this clarifies things.



4 Christmas Music
Like Sefardi Selichot, it starts much too much before the holiday.



5 LinkedIn Requests
I swear I got a request last week from a guy with eleven straight consonants in his name.



6 Plaza Re-Reconstruction
Does anyone else have serious déjà vu every time they walk down 185th?



7 President Trump Opening Water Bottles
Someone should tag our President in a meme reminding him to stay hydrated.

Letter to the Editor:

To the Editor,

I have personally experienced the obscurity surrounding Honors Program requirements which Benjamin Koslowe criticized in his recent editorial. Of all the issues Koslowe raised, my ignorance of the 108-credit residency requirement has frustrated me the most. Although I became an Honors student by going through the entire standard procedure, I did not learn that I would need to complete 108 credits in residency until my second semester in YU. Due to my interest in taking a certain class outside YU, I was filling out a P-10 form and suddenly found a reference to the Honors residency requirement in the small print. Confused, I contacted my former college advisor, who said that enrolling in the Honors Program did not mean graduating with Honors, and that I could drop out of the program without writing a thesis or completing 108 credits in residency.

Considering how the Honors Program obscures the residency requirement, my story should not come as a surprise. Recently, when I asked visiting high school seniors on their Honors Day, not a single one had heard that they would need to spend four years in YU. Even admitted students do not receive this vital information: the Honors acceptance letter does not mention the residency requirement, nor does the requirements page it links to.

However, while my experience might validate Koslowe's call for simple transparency, the editorial overlooked a much more pressing problem: that the residency requirement stifles Honors students academically. Forcing Honors students to spend four years in YU demotivates them from taking external classes and virtually bars them from studying abroad for a year. Contrary to the program's stated goal of "providing an exceptionally broad...education," this policy forces students to forgo the many classes that they cannot take in residency. If the policy aims to extend students' undergraduate study to a full four years, then demanding 108 credits from any accredited university—with 84 in YU—would accomplish the same goal.

From recent conversations with Honors program faculty, I have discovered that in the past, students who wanted to study abroad managed to negotiate a waiver. Under this solution, their time abroad counted as residency. However—perhaps due to the residency requirement—very few students have ever attempted this. I personally did not know of the waiver option when I considered study abroad, nor, I assume, do most Honors students. No official document suggests that the program would offer an exception, which at least disheartens students from considering study abroad. In any case, I find it striking that a student's enrollment in the Honors Program should hinder this option, even if a theoretical loophole exists.

Academic stymieing aside, the Honors residency requirement discourages the production of Honors theses. From my conversations with professors and friends I conclude, as Koslowe does, that the requirement for 108 credits in residency dissuades students from completing a thesis, not vice-versa. Primarily because they do not want to spend four years on campus, Honors students exit the Program prematurely. Thus, by postponing graduation, the residency requirement undermines one of the Honors Program's capstone aspirations. Eliminating this restrictive requirement would motivate more students to finish their honors courses and thesis, boosting the program.

When I raised these issues with a member of the Honors Student Council, he said that because the number of required honors courses had just decreased, the program's administration preferred to let the other requirements stand. Yet I must question the wisdom in maintaining detrimental policies for the sake of rigor. Given the above, eliminating the residency requirement—or at least modifying it—would enrich the Honors students' academic experience. At the very least, it would encourage them to stick to the program.

Yishai Eisenberg, YC '19

Letter to the Editor:

To the Editor,

In an article that appeared online Thursday afternoon titled "Shapiro, Prager, and Bringing Real Debate to Campus," the author, who is Chairman of Yeshiva University's Young America's Foundation chapter, made a number of claims. Chief

SEE LETTER, CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

Inside Look at Standardized Test Scores and GPAs of YU's Incoming Students Since 2015

By Avi Strauss

The Commentator has obtained information from the Office of University and Community Life on the GPAs and standardized test scores of the past three cohorts of First Time On Campus students (FTOCs), printed here.

The statistics contain information on classes of FTOCs going back to Fall 2015, and also makes distinctions between the general cohort of students, as well as Honor's enrollees in YU's three baccalaureate colleges. Additionally, they contain the first set of data on incoming students who have taken the new SAT, which removed the vocabulary components of its critical reading section, among other changes.

On the whole, the information points to a slight edge for male standardized test scores, and a slight edge for female students' GPAs. These differences were most pronounced between Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women students.

SAT scores on the old SAT remained relatively equal across undergraduate programs and campuses, with the exception of a 72 point increase in Syms-Womens' scores from 2015 until now. However, due to the fact that Syms-Women students are the smallest group of undergraduate students at YU, averaging just 44 students a year since 2015, it is more likely that average scores would fluctuate over time.

The Honor's SAT scores at the liberal arts colleges fluctuated slightly, while the Honors Syms Womens' scores declined 52 points, to 1346, in 2017.

The biggest drop came in the average SAT score of a Syms-Men Honors student, which declined nearly 100 points, from 1424 to 1327.

SAT	Yeshiva College	Stern College	Syms-Men	Syms-Women	Honors Yeshiva College	Honors Stern College	Honors Syms-Men	Honors Syms-Women
Fall 2015	1317	1205	1200	1146	1458	1434	1395	1398
Fall 2016	1305	1195	1195	1162	1446	1456	1424	1342
Fall 2017	1305	1210	1189	1218	1453	1420	1327	1346

In terms of the new SAT, data is only available for FTOCs in Fall 2017. For this cohort, YC students scored an average of 1214, while Syms-Men averaged 1207. On the Beren campus, the women of SCW and Syms-Women scored 1254 and 1137, respectively.

ACT scores for all FTOC cohorts in all undergraduate programs has remained essentially flat, varying by +/-1 point from year to year, with the exception of a 2 point drop, to 25 from 27, for Stern College for Women students this past year, and a two point jump, to 26, for Syms-Women from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.

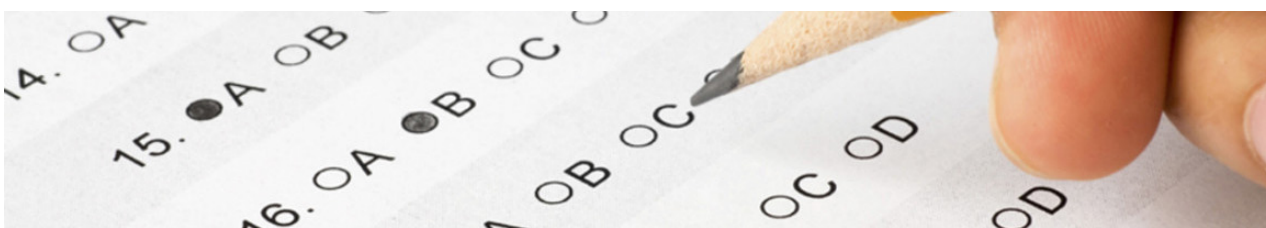
ACT	Yeshiva College	Stern College	Syms-Men	Syms-Women	Honors Yeshiva College	Honors Stern College	Honors Syms-Men	Honors Syms-Women
Fall 2015	28	26	26	24	33	33	32	31
Fall 2016	27	27	25	26	32	33	31	30
Fall 2017	28	25	26	26	32	32	31	31

The average GPA of FTOCs at Syms-Men has risen dramatically since last fall, from 88.6 to 93.1. The average GPA of FTOC's at Syms women, however, saw an inverse change, dropping 4 points from 92.1 to 88.1.

In the past two years, SCW's GPAs have edged YC's in both the regular undergraduate program as well as honors, by around 1.6 and 1.0 points, respectively.

GPA	Yeshiva College	Stern College	Syms-Men	Syms-Women	Honors Yeshiva College	Honors Stern College	Honors Syms-Men	Honors Syms-Women
Fall 2015	91.2	90.9	88.2	90.0	95.2	95.1	93.9	94.1
Fall 2016	90.0	91.5	88.6	92.1	94.7	96.4	93.7	94.1
Fall 2017	90.9	91.9	93.1	88.1	94.1	95.1	93.1	92.3

The averages of Honors students on the Wilf campus in both Yeshiva College and Syms declined slightly since last year, by 0.6 points to 94.1 and 93.1.



Beren Enrollment up 8% From Last Fall, YC Reclaims Majority in Wilf Undergraduate Programs

By Shoshy Ciment

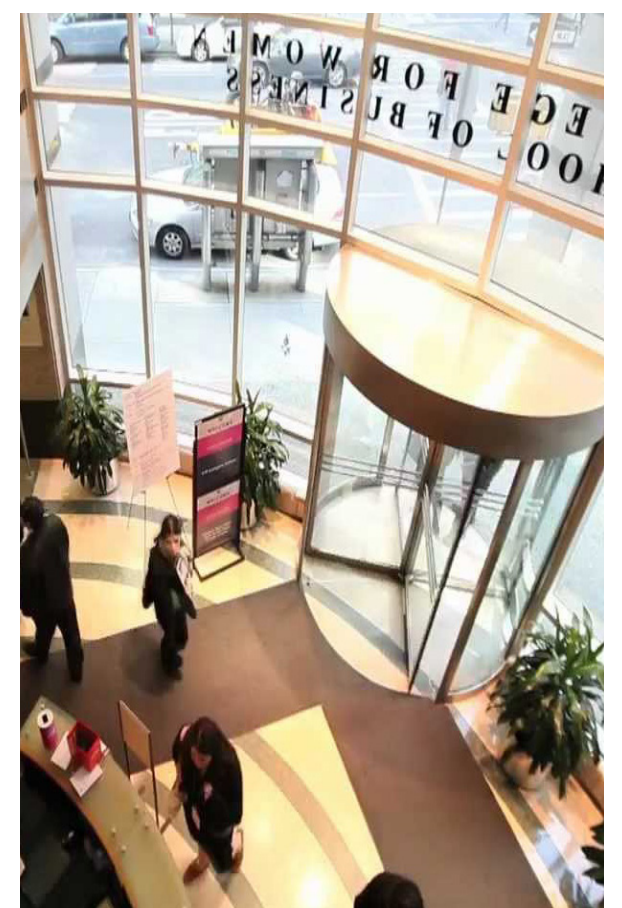
Enrollment on the Beren Campus has increased by 72 students since the fall of 2016, marking an 8% increase in overall Beren enrollment. This increase counters the downward trend in Beren fall enrollment since 2013 and also marks an increase of 96 students since the spring of 2017.

There were 909 full-time students registered on the Beren campus during the fall semester of 2016 and 981 students were registered on the Beren campus this fall. The increase, mostly due to growth in both Sy Syms School of Business and Stern College for Women enrollment, is in part attributable to the introduction of the Katz School's new program for an associate degree in Management. The program, which was launched this fall, boasts a first-time enrollment of 11 students on the Beren campus.

"Although each one of these women surely has a somewhat different story to tell about having chosen our university, I do believe they have been attracted by our mission and by our successes," remarked Dean Karen Bacon, the Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences, when asked about the increase in Beren enrollment. "And the more we explain our mission and tout our success, the more attractive we will become to women looking for a quality education in an inspiring environment."

Whereas last spring, enrollment in the Sy Syms School of Business overtook enrollment in Yeshiva College on the Wilf Campus for the first time ever, Sy Syms enrollment on Beren still remains secondary to enrollment in Stern College. As of this fall, Yeshiva College has bounced back to the primary school of enrollment on Wilf, overtaking the Sy Syms School of Business by just six students.

Total Wilf campus enrollment remained essentially flat, dropping from 1075 full time students, to 1063.



Mysterious Bagpiper Shares His Music and Convictions with the Wilf Campus

By Shoshy Ciment and Benjamin Koslowe

On Tuesday, November 14, an unidentified man sporting a red and black bandana, a black sweater, and jeans began playing the bagpipes on the 185th street plaza on the Wilf campus just after 12:00 and continued for close to an hour, disrupting *seder* and classes and piquing interest from the student body. The man, now identified as a Verizon Wireless employee named “Jerry” (“Gevaryah” in Hebrew), showed up again on Wednesday, November 15, during his lunch break, drawing an even larger crowd.

Holding a leather-coated Hebrew/English *JPS Tanach* in one hand, Jerry appears to be trying to inspire the students of Yeshiva University. “By me playing, I’m trying to show you my heart,” he said. “A lot of times we try to hide that. Man looks outwards, but *Hashem* looks at the heart. But wisdom has to guide the heart.”

On Wednesday, November 15, Jerry, who styles himself with a braided beard and bushy ponytail, began bagpiping again at roughly 12:05. From around 12:30 to 1:00, Jerry, a self-described “pipe major for the police band” (though “not a police officer”), stood by the intersection of 185th street and Amsterdam Avenue and, briefly laying down his wind instrument, spoke with a crowd of students. The lunchtime crowd was in flux and consistently numbered around 10-15 students. Jerry had students read yellow-highlighted English-translated verses, mainly from *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, in his *Tanach*, after which he would profess life lessons to those listening.

Jerry quoted *Yirmiyahu* 20:9 several times. He eegeted, “*Hashem* is an impassioned God. You don’t realize it. Everything that you feel, He feels it more.” He offered similarly enigmatic words regarding fire- and passion-themed verses from *Bemidbar*, *Devarim*, and *Shir Hashirim*. He emphasized the need to “put

[immorality] to death,” to have “courage and faith,” and to “keep your mind steadfast.”

The presence of the mysterious bagpipe man drew varied reactions from Yeshiva University students and faculty.

“He’s definitely different from what you see everyday on the YU campus,” remarked Yonah Stromer, a third-year Yeshiva College student majoring in Psychology.

by a quirky person playing the bagpipes alone,” considered Professor Aaron J. Koller, an Associate Professor of Bible at Yeshiva College who was teaching when the tunes commenced. “It was a good exercise in finding meaning in the apparently random.”

Jerry plans to come to the Wilf campus every day to spread his message with music and conversation. “I can’t hold it in anymore,” Jerry told, describing what



“Most people here just try inspiring people with *niggunim* that they sing or play on guitar and they may or may not succeed -- he could probably hold a crowd of NCSYers at attention with his bagpipes and the way he really makes eye contact with you.”

“It somehow seemed appropriate for the discussion of the theology of the Book of Esther to be interrupted

compelled him yesterday to begin playing the pipes near YU. “I’ve waited long enough, and I won’t stop until I finish my purpose.”

“That’s why I’m here,” Jerry explained. “Each of us has a purpose. The script is written, the movie’s playing out. Find your role. Stick to the script.”

YU Opens Online Store for Maccabee Apparel and Swag

Home Suggestions Privacy Signup for Free Products Tools Returns

THE OFFICIAL ONLINE STORE OF THE

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MACCABEES



THEYUSTORE.COM

Athletics Staff Blue & White Club Order Status FAQ Contact Us View Cart Gift Certificates

By Aaron Szydlo

Yeshiva University students are able to purchase YU apparel and swag online through a new website. The online store gives students the opportunity to buy Yeshiva University themed bags, watches, and gear, among other things.

In addition to sweatshirts and athletic bags, the new store features YU Maccabee onesies, bibs, aprons, tents, robes, and flip-flops. The website will also allow users the option to customize their own items with logos of their choice.

Greg Fox, Associate Director of Athletics, and Joe Bednarsh, Director of Athletics, have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to bring the new YU store into fruition. While Yeshiva University had an online store in the past, it was outdated, limited, and hard to locate.

According to Fox, this new website is user friendly and has an enormous inventory. “Yeshiva University has partnered with the company Advanced Online to carry the

website into the future,” said Fox.

Additionally, Fox and Bednarsh have been working with the Yeshiva University Marketing Team in order to promote the website on social media to spread the word.

“The branding will be better and the site will be picture-driven which should make navigation more exciting and allow us to showcase more photos of the athletes,” said Bednarsh before the site was launched. “The new site will also integrate better with social media and allow us to give recognition to our athletes more often and widely.”

Fox also expressed confidence in the quality of the new store. “This new website will really legitimize us as a Division III school,” he said.

Bednarsh said the new website aims to improve the browsing experience as a whole by allowing its users to visit stats pages for any team, an option that did not exist before.

While the store had a soft opening in the beginning of October to work out some kinks and to ensure that all of the logos were uploaded properly, the store had its official

grand opening at a later date.

Students on both Wilf and Beren campuses are expressing their excitement about the new store. “The new website takes astronomical leaps and bounds over the previous YU store of the past,” remarked Yeshiva College Senior and basketball team member Jamie Cappell. Sy Syms School of Business Senior Suri Brach echoed this sentiment. “This new website adds so much to the culture of YU. I think people are going to get excited about being here and attending school events.”

Yeshiva College Junior Jacob Saks proclaimed, “In my two years at YU, I had no clue where I could find a school t-shirt. This new website should be awesome.”

Editor's note: This story has changed since it was originally published online to reflect the opening of the store, which occurred shortly after it's online publishing.

New Kosher Dairy Restaurant Expected to Open on Beren Campus

By Esti Kuperman

A new restaurant is set to open on the Beren Campus just a few doors away from the already popular Paprika. Basta, a new dairy restaurant, will be opening in the next few weeks.

Basta is expected to take a new twist on traditional dairy eateries. Owners Raz and Avi provided an inside look on what people can expect at the new restaurant. The food, which will be made fresh daily by a chef on premises, will be derived from old cooking styles and will be a mix of Israeli, French, Italian, and Mediterranean cooking. The menu will include a choice of dairy foods like fish, pizza, and pastas, all made from fresh ingredients. Raz explained that he wants people “to enjoy good kosher food that they never tried, that they never felt.”

Basta is under the same ownership as Paprika but will be using completely separate facilities.

Whereas Basta will have a more casual feel during the daytime, nights will be more intimate as a sit down restaurant with music and the feel of Jerusalem hospitality, explained the owners. Raz says the food will be “delicious and high end.”

Before Paprika opened this year, there were few local dairy restaurants for Beren students to choose from. Tiberias, previously the only dairy option, offers expensive dairy cuisine which is often difficult for students to afford on a budget. At the start of the fall semester, Paprika introduced new kinds of food options to students on Beren, like the popular Toastie (a panini pressed sandwich where people can pick their meat). Now, with the opening of Basta, this trend towards new and affordable dishes is expected to continue.

The food at Basta will be cooked on the spot by sous chefs Eden and Chai. Eden will be in charge of everything made cold, which includes first and second courses. Chai will be in charge of the hot line, anything that is related to hot cooking such as sautéing, pan, grilling, griddle, and pasta.

The restaurant will also include pizza, which will be made with high quality mozzarella cheese and tomatoes in an oven made from a combination of wood and gas. The



owners hope to have a daily special dish on the menu, but it will be dependent on the market they get. Additionally, people will have the opportunity to personalize their pizza, which will be made fresh.

Although it is not currently part of the caf card plan, the owners plan to be added eventually.

“I’m really excited about the new restaurant that is opening up,” exclaimed SCW Junior and Beren Student Life Committee Food Chair Anat Jacobson. “It is always fun to have new opportunities in the constant search for food.”

“The demand on quality kosher food is really bad,

specifically over here,” explained Raz. “People don’t understand the meaning of kosher food.”

Raz believes that Kosher food has the ability to be as tasty and exciting as non-kosher food. “Over here, it’s become a label: kosher food is regular food,” he explained. “So over here we’re going to combine it with exploding flavors in your mouth, a good vibe of the seating, and the place itself.”

A soft opening is expected between December 1 and December 3. Basta is expected to be open to the public around December 10.

Nefesh B’Nefesh Looks to Strengthen Ties with YU, Hosts First Ever Aliyah Shabbaton On Beren

By Uri Shalmon

For the first time in Yeshiva University history, the Israel Club collaborated with Nefesh B’Nefesh to plan and execute an inter-collegiate Shabbat Ha’Aliyah on the Beren Campus. Beginning on the night of November 3, the Shabbaton featured four inspiring guest speakers who shared their Aliyah experiences, Q&A sessions, and words of Aliyah-related Torah.

There were 32 non-YU students who attended the Shabbaton, hailing from colleges across the tristate area such as Princeton, Queens College, City College, Rutgers, and Maryland. About 200 students participated in the Shabbaton, creating a turnout much higher than expected. Josh Sussman, Project Manager of Overseas Programming for Nefesh B’Nefesh and the man behind the scenes of the entire Shabbat, expressed his astonishment. “We were thrilled with the turnout and amazed and excited about the level of engagement throughout the Shabbat,” he said.

The Friday night discussion sessions were widely attended. Each of the four group breakout sessions dealt with a range of ideas relating to Aliyah, from practical advice to Aliyah in the Torah. There was also a Tisch Friday night.

“I really enjoyed the Tisch Friday night with Rav Yair [HaLevi]. He was a moving speaker who brought energy to the whole Shabbaton,” explained Brandon Berman, a Cornell graduate and one of the inter-collegiate students who attended the Shabbaton. “It was a very interesting and cool experience being a non-YU student at a Shabbaton like that; people were welcoming and open to us, which was really nice.”

On Shabbat afternoon, room 101/102 in 245 Lexington was packed with students for the “My Aliyah Story” panel. Students, many of which had to stand in the back due to the large audience, listened to each panelist tell their story and address Aliyah-related questions and concerns.

“The turnout at the Shabbaton surpassed our expectations, but what really excited me was the

“ONE OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE YU ISRAEL CLUB HINTED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF ORGANIZING A SECOND SHABBATON IN RESPONSE TO THE ENTHUSIASM OF NEFESH B’NEFESH TO CONTINUE THEIR NEWFOUND CONNECTION WITH YU AND THE POSITIVE RECEPTION FROM THE ATTENDEES.”

attendance at all the sessions throughout Shabbat. Every room was jam-packed!” explained Ezra Kapetansky, the Young Professionals Community Manager for Nefesh B’Nefesh in New York City. “You could feel the energy from the students that they really wanted to be there, talking about life in Israel.”



Though the Office of Student Life normally rents out rooms in The Court Hotel on 39th and Lexington for Shabbatons at Beren, it rented rooms in The Wolcott Hotel on 31st and 5th for this Shabbaton. Because of the New York City Marathon occurring that Sunday, the 5th, many hotels were booked to capacity, including The Court, so OSL had to find a different housing option. The Wolcott Hotel, though smaller and more outdated, did not put a damper on the weekend. “It didn’t take away from Shabbat programming too much and I still really enjoyed myself,” said Ariel Saadon, a senior in YU and a Beren Shabbaton frequenter. Nefesh B’Nefesh put up the non-YU students in The Park South Hotel on 28th and Park.

One of the presidents of the YU Israel Club hinted at the possibility of organizing a second Shabbaton in response to the enthusiasm of Nefesh B’Nefesh to continue their newfound connection with YU and the positive reception from the attendees. “When planning this event in conjunction with YU, our goal was to bring together Aliyah-minded students in a supportive, inspirational and informative environment to learn more about the various possibilities of Aliyah,” said Sussman. “We look forward to partnering with YU again on similar events to keep Aliyah on the front burner of discourse at YU specifically and in the broader community in general.”

New ZBT Fraternity Chapter Opens on Wilf Campus

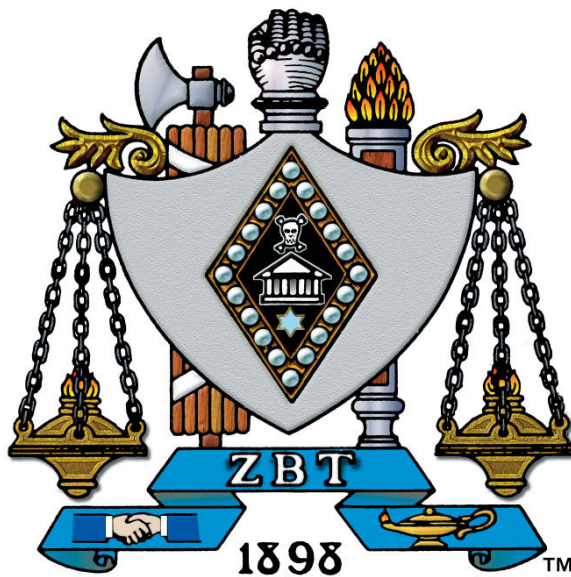
By Elana Luban

A new chapter of the Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) fraternity recently opened on the Wilf campus, raising the amount of fraternities on campus to two. A chapter of the fraternity

**"INSTEAD OF FIXING
SOMETHING BROKEN, WE
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NEW FROM THE GROUND UP!"**

AEPi has existed on the Wilf campus for years.

When asked why they created the new chapter, both Joshua Shapiro, founder and president of the new chapter, as well as Liam Shapiro, ZBT's recruitment director, agreed that "instead of fixing something broken, we wanted to build something new from the ground up." Joshua also noted that although everyone at the university is Jewish, and therefore already have much in common,



most students do not have an outlet in which to make new friends and join a social environment outside of a strictly educational setting.

According to ZBT's website, the society was founded in 1898 and became America's first official Jewish fraternity in 1903. Explaining how ZBT stands out from other fraternities, Liam stated, "You could call it pluralism—we are accepting of all types of people and religious levels." For example, he said, "We have brothers who keep Shabbat, and brothers who don't."

While Joshua acknowledged that the word "fraternity," for many, may carry negative associations and stigmas, he said, "We're just a group of guys trying to do our part." Every semester, each chapter of ZBT picks a specific charity for which to raise funds. He also explained that fraternity events are never for the sake of "fun" alone, but also for social networking, tightening bonds between fraternity brothers and their friends, and creating new friendships. "What we're doing is welcoming people into our fraternal community—events are a vessel for us to expand social relationships by extending invitations to people who are interested in joining."

HUMANITIES, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

degrees in those disciplines.

Humanities majors declined on the Beren campus over the same span, albeit less dramatically, dropping to 82, from 110, an overall drop of 25%.

The news of this decline comes just months after YU President Dr. Ari Berman, who has a master's in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and a Ph.D. in Jewish Thought, both humanities disciplines, was criticized by some for not referencing the humanities in his investiture speech in September, while focusing on the evolving disciplines of STEM.

Part of the decline can be attributed to the overall shift in students enrolling in the Sy Syms School of Business instead of Yeshiva College, which for a short period actually surpassed Yeshiva College as the majority undergraduate program on the Wilf campus this past spring.

The current number of students on the Wilf campus, 1,040, is nearly identical to the overall number in 2012, which was 1,048.

There are currently 102 students on the Wilf campus without declared majors, the lowest number of undeclared students in in at least five years.

To some degree, the decline in the number of students majoring in the humanities on campus reflects a national trend. From 2012 to 2015, the most recent year in which national data is available, the share of American students declaring their "first major" (primary major) in the humanities declined 9.5%, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The Yeshiva College Deans believe such trends are apparent and perhaps magnified on the Wilf campus. "This is a national pattern," said Yeshiva College Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Joanne Jacobson, "a reflection I think of [understandably] growing anxieties among students—and their parents—about making a living in a time of economic uncertainty and change."

Sharing a similar sentiment, Associate Dean of Operations and Student Affairs Fred Sugarman remarked, "Basically, with the cost of college being so high, parents and students are asking for majors which deliver careers."

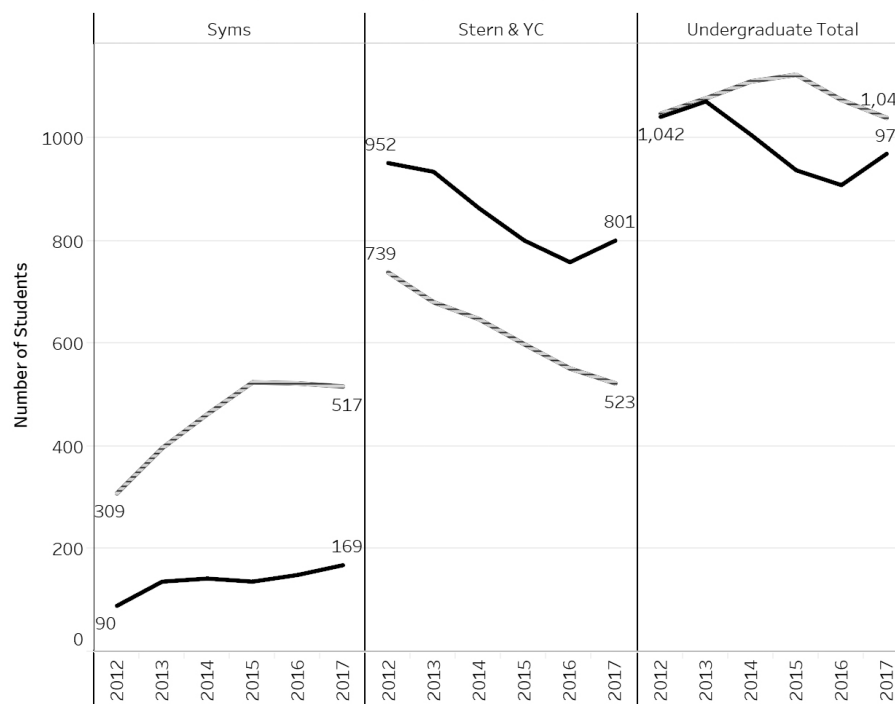
Nonetheless the Deans, both of whom have doctoral degrees in English, believe the humanities represent a viable path to a career.

"The fact is, a liberal arts degree in the humanities is excellent preparation for most careers, and many employers to whom I speak say that they are looking for graduates who are culturally sophisticated, and can think critically—outside the box—and that humanities grads can be ideal for them," said Jacobson.

Data on the job prospects for humanities majors backs up this claim. In 2013, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the unemployment rate for college graduates with whose terminal degree was a bachelor's in the humanities was 5.4%, just marginally higher than 4.6% unemployment rate across all disciplines.

Campus
■ Beren ■ Wilf

2012-2017: Undergraduate Population per School



Moreover, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, humanities graduates from the class of 2015 were employed at higher rates than those in the class of 2014, which can be attributed in part to employers seeking the "soft skills" related to written and oral communication that many humanities majors possess.

Regardless of their major, Wilf campus students are obligated to take several Core courses, many of which are taught by humanities professors and focus on interdisciplinary studies related to history and English. Syms students must take four Core courses, while YC students are required to take seven.

All YC students are obligated to take courses in the Core course categories of Contemporary World Cultures, Interpreting the Creative, Cultures Over Time, and Human Behaviors and Social Institutions, in addition to the introductory writing course. Exemptions are not given for these foundational courses, which often involve seminar style classes with heavy reading and writing components.

Students entering YU's business school as opposed to YC appears to be both a cause and symptom of the decline, as greater numbers of students opting to pursue coursework with clearer paths towards future employment. Many students have simply chosen to major in areas like accounting and finance while the share of students majoring in STEM has increased slightly as well.

Currently, STEM represents 60% of all declared YC

majors. In 2015, 37% of the bachelor's degrees awarded in American schools were in Science and Engineering fields, according to the National Science Board. This count included the social sciences, which means including majors like psychology and economics. Those majors constitute an additional 29.5% of declared YC majors, but have declined 31%, to 123 students, since 2012.

These trends indicate a greater focus by YU students on pre-professional studies, like the pre-health fields, and areas associated with the acquisition of "technical skills" like the ability to understand financial statements or analyze data.

In this regard, Dean Jacobson noted most YU students spent their K-12 education in costly private schools, which place certain stresses on students when it comes to deciding on a major. "College is expensive, and YU draws on a community in which parents have already spent a great deal of money on private education and want to make sure that their children can make their way professionally, and that they can afford the same way of life," she said.

Still, despite the pressures that have led students to other courses of studies, Dean Sugarman reiterated the importance of a liberal arts education. "The liberal arts puts you in touch with your humanity. Liberal arts make college an exploration of one's basic beliefs and self-awareness."

DRAMATICS, CONTINUED
FROM FRONT PAGE

Auditorium is used as a classroom during the year, lacks a stage, and is not set up to be used as a theater. Unlike Koch, Norman Thomas does have a stage, but it is a large auditorium without lighting, and does not belong to Stern. Further, the high school had extremely strict rules regarding rehearsal time and did not allow SCDS to store props overnight.

Immediately following the sale of the Beren campus theater, there was a lot of speculation as to why SCDS was not immediately offered use of the Wilf campus theater. At the time, rumors spread that the contract between the donors of the theaters and Yeshiva University stated that female students could not use the Schottenstein theater. However, that rumor was proven false last year when, Jordyn Kaufman, SCW '17, proposed to Katz Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon and Dean of Student Life Dr. Chaim Nissel that the women should move to the uptown theater.

"I demanded to see the contracts," Kaufman explained, "and I was told they would go check it out. They came back explaining that it doesn't state that and agreed to start talking logistics."

With Dean Bacon and Dean Nissel on board, the path to obtaining usage of the uptown theater became more manageable. However, there was still communication and logistics to be resolved with the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society and their director, Lin Snider.

Initially, there was a degree of apprehension amongst members of the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society about sharing the space. However, Kaufman recalled that "one thing [Dean Nissel] strongly stated multiple times was that the men do not own the theater, the university does." While the administration wanted to ensure harmony between YCDS and SCDS, it was ultimately up to Dean Nissel and Dean Bacon, in consultation with other administrators, who would be able to use the theater.

Dean Nissel eventually took over the process and proceeded to sit down with the directors of both societies to discuss details of an arrangement. There were multiple meetings between the Deans and both Dramatics Societies, leading to an agreement giving each club access to the Schottenstein Theater for one semester of the academic year.

In addition to gaining access to the Schottenstein Theater, Rebecca Epstein, stage manager of this year's performance and the president of SCDS, explained that last year, SCDS members discovered that their previously tight budget was immensely lower than the amount they were supposed to receive. An unnamed source in SCDS approximated that the budget was about \$1,000, the majority of which was used to pay for the substitute stage, which only made the financial situation more dire. However, last year it was revealed by Dean Nissel that SCDS had an endowment fund made in their name of \$10,000 of which they were entitled between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a year—money SCDS had not been aware of until then. *The Commentator* attempted to clarify the ambiguous source of the funds and the reason it was unknown to SCDS by discussing the matter with Dean Nissel. However, due to turnover in the YU Budget Office and unfamiliarity in the sourcing from Dean Nissel's office *The Commentator* was unable to receive clarification. Though it remains unclear why this information was only recently revealed and why SCDS does not receive all of the money, this year OSL has worked with SCDS to ensure they obtain their proper funding. This higher budget has allowed SCDS to hire additional crew members, purchase more props, and ensure proper maintenance of the theater.

Epstein, Syms '18, explained the one setback in the process of utilizing the money. "Because we've never had a budget, we had to have a discussion with OSL about not only obtaining the endowment, but how we will use it." SCDS has always operated under OSL and the budget has been negotiated with them. When Epstein first approached OSL asking for money, OSL was skeptical "because the budgeting committee never gave us any money," and though they were aware of the endowment, "it didn't really matter, because we still had to get permission to use it." However, she added that "we've always operated on a really tight budget, something really crazy low, so that there's any money is amazing."

Epstein, who was in the play last year as well, expressed excitement at the transition to the Schottenstein Theater. "Last year we were in Koch and did not know until two



weeks before [the performance] that we were performing there. It was crazy and so stressful and no one would give us any information. When you don't even know dimensions of the stage, it's really hard to rehearse. You can see that we rehearse specifically for this stage."

Reuven Russell, the Artistic Director of the society who has been with SCDS for 12 years, expressed how being in a real theater raises the bar for the performance. "The lights makes us look better, even just the space makes us look better."

According to those organizing the program, the students have been extremely dedicated and enthusiastic about putting the performance together. Russell stressed that "it's not easy to travel all the way uptown at the end of the day at rush hour, and it's a little bit of a burden. But once we're here and working, it's great."

Epstein expressed a similar sentiment, stating that it is "frustrating to take shuttles from Midtown because there's a lot of traffic so we end up starting rehearsal much later and it's hard to get people to stay past 10:30." Additionally, Epstein continued, "the lighting for the theater is so incredibly intricate, and originally, we didn't realize we had to hire someone to do lights so we did hire Rabbi Krug, but it was much later in the semester. We were here last week till 2 AM just doing lights and he's still here every night."

When asked how the men of YCDS are handling the situation, the female cast had very positive feedback. Professor Russell and Epstein happily noted that "the boys have been very nice about it and a couple have even been here to help out." Yoseph Boniuk, the technical director for YCDS who has been helping with the lights, expressed how he's been a liaison to the SCDS cast, and the "girls are wonderful to work with." He did share how not all male students share this sentiment. "Half the boys are glad the girls are uptown, but there are those among us who are not pleased and think the boys should have a play each semester, and it's unfortunate that we have to share spotlight. It's unfortunate that we can't each have our own theater and each have a play each semester, but I'm glad the girls are in it." At the end of the day, however, he did add that "I believe every member of YCDS thinks that the girls should have their own play and have their own theater."

Yaacov Siev, a member of the YCDS' cast last year,

recalled that "in the beginning there was a lot of uncertainty about how it will play out in terms of who will be performing each semester and how will the girls be able to learn how to use everything." He elaborated that, "in the beginning there was a little adversity to it, especially in the greater Yeshiva University community, there's more adversity especially coming from the more 'yeshivaey' aspect. Maybe because Schottenstein was only for boys for so long and people have been so stuck on that and can't break out of that mindset." He ended on a positive note, concluding that, "I now see that everything's coming together in fruition, we're starting to see that maybe this will work out and maybe we can coexist."

Though the stage time is being split, resulting in only one performance per year for each club, Siev explained how this was not a huge adjustment as "last year there was only one play. So maybe people who have been here longer might be annoyed but, so far [as I have been here], there's only been one play per year." An unnamed source from SCDS explained that the reason behind this was "when a source in the OSL found out about the discrepancy of budgets between SCDS and YCDS, the budget for the males was hugely slashed and YCDS decided to only do one show a year." While in the past SCDS also performed every semester, at this point, they too had lessened that to once a year.

Being in the uptown theater this year has proven to be a refreshing and exciting change for the members of SCDS. Ahava Sherman, a senior and cast member of *Our Town*, looks back laughing at how "last year, you could not even tell where the stage started and ended. We actually had to build the sets, and, while I appreciate how heimish it was, it's so much better to be on a real stage." As the performances approach, Liorah Rubinstein, a cast member and Vice President of SCDS, reflects on how being in the uptown theater differs from the past years. "You just walk in[to the theater] and immediately feel enveloped by this experience knowing that there's real lighting, a real stage, and real prop rooms. The energy is totally different, not only because we're using a real theater but for the first time, we have online ticketing and four performances." For the cast of SCDS, these additions have added to the authenticity of the production and created a genuine atmosphere of a real play.

Wilf Campus Housing Office Holds First Ever Open Forum

By Ben Strachman

On November 20, the Wilf Campus Housing Office held an open forum in which new initiatives for housing this year were introduced and residents of housing were offered an opportunity to share their thoughts on resident life. Jonathan Schwab, the Director of University Housing and Residence Life for the Wilf Campus, led the open forum.

The event was the first of its kind for the office and roughly 30 students attended the event, a third of which were Resident Advisors. The forum began with Schwab sharing new initiatives the office began this year, including new “floor shabbatons,” in which residents of every floor in the dorms will have their own miniature shabbaton with their roommates on campus over the course of the year with separate meals and activities over shabbat. Schwab also stated that the housing office is evaluating the viability of installing microwaves and mini fridges into some or all dorm rooms on campus, which could potentially lead to a raised housing fee.

The majority of the 50-minute long forum was dedicated to hearing suggestions from students, which ranged from recommendations on how to expand floor parties and events to complaints about dorm heaters and laundry machines, among many other topics.

The event was well received by attendees, who felt that they had ample opportunity to give input. According to YC student Doniel Weinreich, “Lots of students seem to have questions, suggestions, and issues they’d like to raise with all kinds of things related to campus life, but don’t know where or how to raise them, or are otherwise inhibited. Open fora like this don’t just give students the opportunity to raise their points, they actively seek the students’ feedback. I think the event was a success.”

According to Schwab, the idea of holding an open forum for housing residents was suggested by an RA as another way of offering students who live in the dorms an opportunity to provide feedback. He said he felt the event “went really well...it was really helpful that people did come and give us important feedback.” Schwab also stated that he is following up on many issues and suggestions raised in the forum, and noted that the feedback he got during the event led him to prioritize certain issues that were discussed,

such as showers in the dorms.

Schwab said he plans on holding open forums of this kind in future semesters, emphasizing that residents are encouraged to give him feedback at any time. In another move to hear students’ thoughts, the housing office has distributed surveys to all dorm residents to analyze how they have enjoyed their experience in housing and other floor events.



From The YCSA President's Desk - It's Broken, So Fix It

By Eitan Lipsky

One of my favorite TED talks that I can remember watching as an adolescent was a presentation by Seth Godin. Godin, an author who primarily writes on topics pertaining to the advertising industry, spoke about the idea behind his since-defunct website, ThisIsBroken.com. His talk centers around the notion that for a host of reasons, we very often encounter frustrating circumstances in our lives that are the product of not thinking about the best way to fix them. As an example, Godin displayed a picture of a trash can in an office room that was constantly overflowing with tissues and the like. While the janitorial staff responded by coming in more frequently to empty the trash can, Godin poignantly noted that there was a much simpler and more complete solution to this problem. It would only take a recognition of this room’s surplus of trash production to indicate that it would be wise to purchase a larger can and thus change the overflowing trash situation once and for all. However, due to lack of sufficient thought put into this problem, no one did so.

Let me give an example a little closer to home that I think we all can relate to: the Belfer elevators. Anyone who has ever attempted to ride the elevator in Belfer Hall is well aware that there is a major flaw in their operation. If one enters the Belfer Hall lobby around 3 pm on a typical weekday, he will encounter a hoard of people waiting anxiously for any of the elevators to arrive in the lobby to take them to their desired floor in the building. This is where the problems begin. More often than not, one will find that all three elevators are somewhere on the upper floors of the building. When they eventually do come down, in many cases they are headed down to the basement instead of being ready to take people to the upper floors. This reveals a deeper problem; the basement, which houses the the mailroom for all students on campus and is only one floor below the lobby of a 16 floor building, can only be accessed by elevator. In addition to the logistical (and most likely algorithmic) difficulties, there are also mechanical problems, as quite often there is one (or more) elevators closed off due to an issue in its functioning.

Now, while it is pretty satisfying to get these

frustrations off my chest, there is a particular reason why I have chosen to raise this issue here. This same person who is waiting interminably in the lobby in hopes that he won’t have to climb the thirteen flights of stairs to get to his class on time would be sure to note that the main



topic of conversation of the people in the lobby is about this very frustration. Likewise, most of the small talk that I have heard from the diverse population of people who have joined me on my almost daily Belfer elevator rides has been about how broken the elevators are. Yet, nothing has changed about this system during my three years on campus to make it better, and I imagine that the problems began well before that.

The question is why is this so? Why do we accept this frustrating reality of broken and inefficient elevators, choosing to mutter under our breath rather than trying to make a change? If the collective population of elevator-users would band together and petition the university to make a new reality of convenient elevator travel, I believe there is a high likelihood that something would be done. But instead, we choose to accept the current reality, leading to unnecessary frustration and inefficient living.

What does any of this have to do with student council? In an initiative spearheaded by the Student Life Committee (SLC) and its proud leader, Jesse Silverman, the student councils released the first issue of our new monthly newsletter in November to the Wilf campus. This green double-sided information sheet outlines each

council’s recent activities, as well as those of the SLC and the Office of Student Life. The idea behind creating the newsletter was first and foremost to keep students up to date on what new things are happening, but there was also something more that we hoped to accomplish with this shift towards greater transparency.

Often times, students have gripes about particular experiences here. These are the types of things that one can pick up on as he hears one of his peers passionately retelling a frustrating experience over lunch, or watches a disheartened student plod around campus. In addition, students often have creative ideas about how to make things better. Frustrations and ideas are good. It is important to recognize the areas that can be changed for the better. However, keeping these thoughts in the theoretical and not taking action towards making the change is resigning towards a lengthy wait for the elevator instead of addressing the issue head on.

The Wilf student councils wanted to inform the uptown student body of our actions to let them know that we are attempting to bridge this gap; we are looking for parts of the undergraduate experience that are left wanting and trying to take concrete steps towards making them better for everyone. The student council presidents, collectively and within their respective councils, attempt to represent the voice of the student body and to create change. Each student who attends the university pays a sizable student activities fee which is primarily given to the student government for this very purpose of making desired changes on campus. Our student newsletter, entitled Your Voice, is there to serve as a reminder of this mission for both your elected government members as well as for you, the Wilf student body. The best way to make the most out of your student government is by creating a relationship with it. Reach out and let us know about what needs to be changed. Work with us to create initiatives that will help the student body at large. See the broken aspects of the student experience, and use the resources available to you to fix them. We look forward to the next newsletter reflecting this joint effort of the student body with its dedicated representatives.

And hey, maybe we’ll even be able to get the elevators fixed.

Iron Fist and the Failure of the Gray Area

By Samuel Gelman (Houston, Texas)

Editor's Note: *Contains spoilers for Daredevil Seasons 1 & 2, and Iron Fist Season 1*

For the last ten years or so, television and movie audiences have become obsessed and fascinated with complex characters that operate in gray areas. Gone are the days of heroes who are morally superior and friendly to all. Viewers no longer seek someone to look up to when watching a film or television show. Instead, we want to see anti-heroes: flawed, imperfect, and struggling characters who will at some point struggle, and maybe even succumb to the dark side; characters that can just as easily become an angel or a devil. Walter White (*Breaking Bad*), Pope Pius XIII/Lenny Berardo (*The Young Pope*), Don Draper (*Mad Men*), Batman (*The Dark Knight*), and Louie (*Louie*) are all the heroes of their stories while exhibiting traits of the classical villain.

The trend is becoming so popular that some TV shows and movies are going further, creating entire worlds made up entirely of gray areas where no one side or character is necessarily right or wrong. Shows like *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld* have created entire universes where, aside from a few specific exceptions, no one character is considered the "hero" or "villain." Morals have been thrown away to make room for interesting and complex characters. Instead of telling the viewers who is good and who is bad, film and television writers simply give them the characters, their goals, and the ways they try to achieve those goals, allowing the audience to decide who they wish to root for on their own. Even *Star Wars*, the epitome of the conflict between the light and the dark, now seems to be drifting in that direction as characters are beginning to question who they fight for and why.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Marvel, a powerhouse in the movie and television business, would try to benefit from this creative field. Their best work showcasing this creative choice comes from *Daredevil*, in which Daredevil and the Punisher, our two "heroes," both display anti-hero and even villainous traits. There are moments when the audience is forced to question whether Daredevil's vigilante approach to justice is actually good and right, while the Punisher will brutally kill anyone he considers a criminal, no questions asked. In addition, the main villain, Kingpin, has redeeming, hero-like qualities. His love for Vanessa and tragic childhood create an aura of sympathy around him, making it more difficult to root against him than your average classic villain.

This brings us to *Iron Fist*, the fourth series in the Netflix Marvel lineup that also includes *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*, *The Defenders*, and *The Punisher*. *Iron Fist* follows Danny Rand, a young billionaire who returns to New York City after being presumed dead for 15 years. During those 15 years, Danny trained with monks in K'un-Lun, mastering kung-fu and gaining the mystical power of the Iron Fist so that he could help them defeat the Hand, a mysterious organization of ninjas, drug dealers, and immortal beings. However, when Danny returns to New York City, he discovers that his city has been infiltrated by the Hand and that he must now use his abilities to save his city.

Like *Daredevil*, *Iron Fist* tries to bring its characters into the gray area. In the later half of the show, Danny is introduced to Bakuto, another master martial artist who helps him capture Madam Gao, a high ranking member of the Hand. However, Bakuto later reveals himself to be a member of the Hand as well, but not the evil faction that Danny has been fighting all along. This is also when Danny discovers that his girlfriend and sparring partner, Colleen Wing, has been working for the Hand this entire time. The two of them try to explain to Danny that the monks that raised him have been feeding him lies, that the Hand is really a force for good, and that the people he has been fighting all along are the extremists. This is a shocking twist as the Hand has been the main villain so far.

Now, there are a lot of problems with this show: the lack

of a set and unique tone (which warrants its own article), the uninspiring, uncharismatic lead, its many similarities to *Arrow*, etc. But this "twist" was the most confusing and off-putting flaw as it not only betrays the narrative, but also fails to create the gray area it is clearly aiming towards. For starters, it is never really explained. There is clearly a conflict between Bakuto's Hand and Madam Gao's Hand, but it is never fully developed. Furthermore, there is no evidence presented to us that Bakuto is any different from Madam Gao. Colleen does not explain why she joined him and we never get to see what he is really up to. In fact, to the shock of Colleen, his best and most trusted student, he ends up being very similar to Gao, continuing her drug trade and attacking Danny multiple times.

Secondly, we are never given any reason to question Danny's understanding of the Hand. To create a gray area, we need to see both sides exemplifying good and bad traits. We never meet the monks to K'un-Lun in a fulfilling way so we don't actually know anything about them. All we see is Danny, and, since Danny is the good-guy, we assume the monks are good. At the same time, we also never see the Hand do anything good. As stated above, Bakuto never does anything to differentiate himself from "radical" Gao. All that the audience has seen from the Hand has been them destroying the city and innocent lives, making it very difficult for us to see them in any other light. You can't create a shade of gray if you just show black. You need some white as well.

However, the most compelling reason as to why this "twist" is a major problem comes from what makes Marvel projects so great: the shared cinematic universe. *Iron Fist* is part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), a collection of interconnected movies and TV shows that all

cannot see the gray of the Hand because we have already met them in the MCU. The Hand were the secondary villains in the first season of *Daredevil* and the main villains in season two. We have already seen how evil they are as they have killed many innocent people, been major sponsors and beneficiaries of the New York drug trade, and are part of a greater war for the fate of NYC. We have spent two seasons emotionally rooting against them. To ask the audience to change course without any solid evidence is just unfair.

A counter to this would be that Bakuto is lying, wants to take over Gao's operation, and become the leading member of the Hand in NYC. However, this does not fit the overall narrative. As previously noted, this is our third season with the Hand, and not once have we seen any hint of a power struggle within the organization or heard of any mention of Bakuto. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Colleen would stay in the organization if Bakuto really was as bad as Gao, and just as unlikely that Bakuto would not tell Colleen his full plan since she was his best and closest student. The fact that Colleen stayed with him for so long implies that he somehow is different from Gao. This brings us back to the fact that there is no solid evidence that he is different and ends putting us in a loop with no real answers.

It is possible that all of this will be resolved in *The Defenders* (the four way team up between *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage*, and *Iron Fist* where, once again, the Hand will be the main villain (only making it more difficult to believe Bakuto)). However, if *The Defenders* really does reveal that Bakuto was as bad as Gao all along or that he really is different, the point still stands. Despite the fact that *Iron Fist* is part of a shared cinematic universe,



exist in the same universe, allowing characters from one movie to crossover into other characters' movies. This "it's all connected" approach can be very fulfilling at times, as we have seen from movies such as *The Avengers* and *Captain America: Civil War*, where the same versions of characters such as Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor appear side by side despite each having their own independent movie franchises.

Sometimes, though, this can be a problem. Since every movie and show is connected, they all have to account for what happens in each other's projects. Every movie and TV show has to make sense in the overall narrative, while also standing on its own for those that have not seen every installment in the MCU. So, if villain X dies in an Iron Man film, he cannot then appear in a Captain America film since he is already dead in that universe. If the Washington monument is destroyed in a Thor movie, we should not expect to see it in a Doctor Strange film as it has already been destroyed. You get the idea.

Which brings us full circle. While *Iron Fist* is its own show with its own story, it does not exist in a vacuum. We

the property must be able to stand on its own just in case viewers decide not to tune in for the big crossover. Marvel, or any other film company for that matter, cannot expect fans to watch all their properties, which means that they must all be somewhat independent. All the Marvel movies and shows that focus on a single hero, while connecting to larger universe, have been independent stories for their respective heroes. *Iron Fist* should be no different.

Perhaps it won't be resolved in *The Defenders*, but instead in *Iron Fist* season two, thereby making the last few paragraphs irrelevant. Based on how the season ended, though, I would not bet on it. The show has established that the Hand is bad, and I don't think we, the audience, will accept anything different. Perhaps the monks to K'un-Lun are not as great as they seem, but that will only create two villainous organizations, the Hand still being one of them. Regardless, season one of *Iron Fist* fails where *Mad Men*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Daredevil* thrive: creating complex characters that balance the dark and the light. As this theme seems to be all the rage right now, let's hope they get their act together for season two.

An Annual Event Takes Shape: TEDxYU Looks to Become a Fixture on Campus



By Judah Stiefel

On Tuesday November 7th at 7 pm, the tickets for 2017's TEDxYeshivaUniversity event went on sale. Five minutes later, the student tickets were sold out, and a week after that, the community tickets were sold out as well, according to graduating Senior Yael Saban who has been in charge of running this year's event along with Senior Yehoshua Zirman. A final 15 tickets went on sale Tuesday, November 14th. Selling out 262 tickets, the event is expected to be more than twice the size of last year's.

The increased size of TEDxYU is due largely to the enthusiasm and success of the event last year. Junior Avery Ennis remembers tickets being resold by students for five times the original cost of \$10. "I remember students getting more and more excited for it the closer it got," said Ennis.

According to Noam Safier, who ran the original TEDxYU last year as a student alongside Esti Hirt, the event had to be capped at 100 audience members due to the fact that TEDx requires a special license in order to host events of greater than that size. This year's coordinators, Saban and Zirman attended a TED Fest conference which took place in Brooklyn this past May, allowing them to acquire a "100-plus license," lifting the 100 person cap.

According to Saban, TED Fest was attended by 500 TED organizers from around the world, who received training focusing on how to get on stage and act as a curator. There she learned to, "pinpoint passions and grow from there." Once they had a strong idea, Saban and Zirman were able to expand it. "The idea of this year is potential," said Saban, "What you have potential to accomplish within YU and throughout the world."

Last year's event was held at the Schottenstein theater, which seats just 120 audience members. Due to the increased audience size, 2017's event will be held at the YU Museum. "We chose the YU Museum which was on the smaller end of the scale to showcase what we have in YU. Having it in YU is the ideal," Saban explained, "Events like this are what have a lasting impact on students in YU. It's something beyond classes and GPA. It shows what YU really is. The people we are showcasing represent the quality of the school and the quality of the students that put it together. It's really needed around here."

Much of the groundwork of this year's TEDx talks

was laid out by the students who ran the event last year. According to Noam Safier, the event had been attempted in both of the two years prior, but had not made it off the ground. Safier described that much of the effort of previous years went into promoting the event. He decided when he took charge that, "the name TED speaks for itself," and energy was poured instead into contacting speakers.

Many elements of YU were very receptive to the idea of having a TEDx event and contributed support, enthusiasm, and funding. Safier recalls being nervous as he went to meet with the Provost, Dr. Selma Botman to ask for funding. After his request for \$1,000 was approved in short order, Safier remembers leaving, thinking he should have asked for more. Another \$2,000 was provided by the Neil's Fund, a Jewish non-for profit which supports social causes and funds other YU programs such as Project START and the YU lobbying mission to DC. The YU Events Office were also very receptive to the event. The Office of Student Life provided a loan of \$1,000 to cover the costs of the event before money was available from ticket sales.

The budget for this year's event has doubled the budget of the original TEDxYU. To accommodate this, the Provost doubled its contribution from last year, citing that it was worthy to invest in student initiative. Neil's Fund repeated its contribution as well, and the OSL and Dean Nissel backed up many of the other expenses. To cover the larger expenses, student ticket prices were raised to \$15 and tickets were sold to the greater YU community at \$30 each. Saban described wanting to make sure that the tickets remained affordable for every student who wanted to participate.

To run various aspects of the event, students were selected who appeared dedicated and who would work efficiently as a group. According to Safier, the purpose of the event is twofold. "TEDxYU is an event which showcases YU its students —its faculty, and its alumni — and creates an incredible opportunity for a Kiddush Hashem." Saban recalls Safier approaching her as a sophomore to do marketing for the event, expressing the possibility she could eventually run the event herself. Saban and Zirman recruited people who had been involved in YU and were passionate about TED, with the potential to take over in the future.

Speakers for TEDxYU were also chosen very carefully. The staff reached out to Alumni Affairs, the Office of

Communications and Public Affairs, and the Office of the President for speaker suggestions, while also sending out a form to students who wanted a chance to tell their stories. "TED was something I was somewhat obsessed with. The Kedushat Hashem really spoke to me. We showcased the university's legitimacy and professionalism." After selecting speakers, the TEDxYU team had to train them, offering resources such as working with Reuven Russell who teaches public speaking at Stern College.

One of the student speakers, Arielle Zellis, became a renowned speaker after the conference and was flown around by Yachad to speak, eventually becoming a closing keynote speaker at an inclusion conference in North Carolina. Safier believes that the best speakers practiced upwards of 80 times before the day of the conference.

The project as a whole began in the summer and took eight months to plan. Some of the more enjoyable preparations that Safier recalls were painting the entire stage at the Schottenstein Theater black with the rest of the TEDx staff, and checking out 70 impressive-looking books from the Gottesman Library, half of which related to Torah and the other half to Maddah, in order to fill the bookshelf set pieces on the stage. The most nerve wracking moment Safier remembers was when one of the student's microphones wasn't working properly and he had to make the decision to stop the speaker in the middle until it could be fixed.

As a whole, Safier remembers organizing the event as extremely rewarding. "It was definitely one of the hardest things I've ever done, but also among the most worthwhile."

Saban describes the greatest challenge she faced to be learning to put together an entire conference while working within an institution. The students who run the program each year see it as a powerful opportunity to spread YU's message. Yehoshua Zirman writes, "I think the best part of the event is that it incorporates the core values of Yeshiva University: Torah Umadda. Students, faculty, and administration are featured in a TED-style speech highlighting the the successes and inspiring the audience to exact change in their lives. The conference will feature a presentation of a [pre-recorded] TED talk by Rabbi Sacks and an introduction by President Berman. Nothing speaks more to Yeshiva University than an event like TED."

Joy, Gratitude, and the Space in Between

By Aliza Naiman

"Gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy."- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A teardrop of sweat undulates down my spine as I sit in a Starbucks tucked inside a wrinkle of Union Square. I'm sipping hot chocolate, not coffee because my dreams and midterms keep me up at night well enough. This place is providing some greatly needed respite after an intense Krav Maga class in which my nose was respectfully punched. The right portion of my neck is taut, and tomorrow my arms will surely bear badge-like bruises. On the 9th floor of a glass building I street fight, and now I sit listening to a matronly woman on my right humming along to Starbucks' genre-less playlist. It's an odd mind-game to play; the former releases angst and sharp exhales, the latter the resultant stress with rounded inhales. The two activities are antitheses; almost physical parallels to extroversion and introversion.

Joy. A crude translation of my own name, its three smiling letters form a visual onomatopoeia, if I make take such poetic license. In this chosen evening of solitude, I feel its grateful, grinning presence in my cup of cocoa.

12:00 am March 8th, 2016. Midterms, oh midterms. I'm burrowed in bed, struggling to keep my head above metaphorical water as well as off my pillow. As I ruefully submit myself to the guilty pleasure/rabbit hole that is YouTube, a forum replete with tutorials that require materials I don't even possess and impractical clips of pandas throwing tantrums, something glorious happens. It's my birthday, and my friends elatedly barge into the room holding a massive ice-cream cake, balloons, and the warmth that comes with feeling appreciated in their hands. An eclectic bunch, the twelve or so of us sit in a circle on the floor and dig in. As a true-freshman at the time, we had only known each other for six months, however, with all the newly acquired wisdom that comes when one turns a whopping 19, I knew these were *my people*. As a whimsically cliché activity, I brought out my journal read down a list of things I had wanted to achieve in my 18th year.

"Memorize my social security number like a goshdang adult?" Check.

"Find the best fries in New York City?" Check.

"Pirouette across an intersection of midtown at 3 am?" Check.

Times like these: occasions of feeling safe, seen, connected. Such wholehearted moments of recognition provide the joy that fueled me to write a long email home, in which I thanked my parents for raising me right, and for paying tuition at Stern College for Knowledge.

Something enters our lives. Something that makes our chests open and vulnerable. It could be the potential for love, the birth of a child, or even the sudden recognition that things are going too well. It's something that textbooks and our friends tell us will provide joy and copious springs of it. And it does. But how it disturbs us when, unlike in other, steadier moments of joy, we catch a slinking shadow of foreboding from the corner of our eyes. Like a cup of spilled paint water on the edges of a canvas, a fog loiters around the fresh image as it dries. Guiltily, it is repressed, reassessed, or renamed. When it unexpectedly returns, perturbing and at the most inopportune of times, it is sometimes mistaken for intuition. Images of this chrysalis experience and its worst possible demise flash through our minds.

In times of positive change and vulnerability, why does this sense of premonition cloud our ability to be present and joyous?

Daniel Kahneman, Israeli philosopher, psychologist, and Nobel laureate, is renowned for his work on happiness, judgment and decision making. His research extends to concepts of experience versus memory. In one such study, Kahneman set out to prove that one's tangible experience and one's perception of that experience are not entirely aligned. He describes this dual sense of identity as one's experiencing-self and one's remembering-self. In everyday life, including joyous situations, our experiencing-self is there, taking tactical notes for future recall. Our remembering-self, on the other hand, is what actually holds the key to our perceptions of previous events. It maintains the story of our lives, and it ultimately



decides if an experience was positive or negative, even if the reality was nuanced.

To test this theory, Kahneman conducted an experiment in which participants underwent a painful colonoscopy. The control group experienced a standard procedure, one with a peak moment of pain followed by the colonoscopy's abrupt end, while the procedure of the manipulated group was altered. Individuals in this group followed a bell-curve style of pain level. Unbeknownst to them, the procedure was thus longer, but the pain tapered off towards the end and minimal discomfort was experienced for the last few moments. Data was collected from both groups and each participant rated his/her experience. Those in the control group, with the standard procedure, reviewed their experience negatively, while those with the altered test felt

vulnerability, Brown asserts that joy is the most vulnerable of emotions, because it requires us to forgo control and temporarily forget about its inevitable termination. For example, Brown recounts that she has gazed at her blissfully sleeping child, only to suddenly be struck by a mental image of something horrible occurring to her offspring and thought "things are going too well, the other shoe must be about to drop." Like we all tend to do, this mental exercise was an attempt at armoring up to try and beat vulnerability to the punch. Particularly in new endeavors, joy also requires us to acknowledge potential failure, and face the reality that our expectations of the situation may not be met. To fully expose oneself to joy, one must endure vulnerability. When this feat seems insurmountable and we find ourselves unable to soften into the moment and let it run its course, we begin to "dress rehearsal tragedy" to stave off potential disappointment. Furthermore, when we lose our tolerance for vulnerability, joy becomes foreboding.

In such instances of foreboding joy, when contentment is inhibited by unwarranted apprehension, both our experiencing and remembering-selves go through a temporary existential crisis of sorts. Life, as a series of waves, offers hardship and disappointment as surely as it bestows upon us new experiences of joy. The struggle for constancy amongst such entropy is the attempt to assure ourselves that nothing will change, even as we acknowledge that our own remembering-selves' perceptions are biased and transient. To guarantee that our remembering-selves regard the moment as pleasantly as possible, our experiencing-selves hinders full exposure to joy as an emotion so that nothing too unsatisfactory can surprise us. It's the ultimate defense mechanism and cautionary game of "I told you so."

In moments of foreboding joy, the bridge between our experiencing and remembering-selves, as well as between joy and loss, is gratitude. When we find ourselves feeling vulnerable to the changes, we must make conscious effort to refrain from practicing for disaster. According to Brown, instead of allowing this negative intuition to swell, we must relinquish control, soften, and lean forward into the moment. *We must transfer it to gratitude.* For only gratitude, as a practice, can become the constant, comforting variable as joy morphs to challenge, and challenge into growth.

As I write this, the time of year reminds me that nothing in the minds of man is unique and that generations of philosophers have come to the same conclusions. As such, we have a long-standing tradition of practicing these values. Thanksgiving approaches, a holiday solely dedicated to practicing gratitude. As we actively connect both our experiencing and remembering-selves, it is my hope that we can create memories that leave us gratified and grateful long after the jingle-bells fade.

"OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JOY CANNOT BE FOCUSED ON THE ATTAINMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF IT, BUT RATHER ON OUR ABILITY TO ENJOY ITS DURATION, AND REMEMBER IT WITH ACCURACY."

less passionate about their discomfort. When participants were informed post-hoc of the experiment, each elected to undergo the manipulated procedure in the future, even if it was longer! Why? With the majority of experiencing-self moments forgotten, our minds depend upon our remembering-self when recalling if an experience was positive or negative. In this case, as well as many others, our remembering-self chooses based off the last memory, and not the overall experience.

It is with this in mind that we can begin to understand human joy and our relationship with it. Happiness is transient. Both our experiencing and remembering-selves understand that all experiences, including moments of joy, are finite and fleeting. The issue is when, as dominated by our remembering-selves, we all too often balk at this fact. Our relationship with joy cannot be focused on the attainment and maintenance of it, but rather on our ability to enjoy its duration, and remember it with accuracy.

So why do we seem to self-sabotage in this manner?

In her book "Rising Strong," researcher Brene Brown expands upon the nature of joy and how we sometimes shield our experiencing-selves from it.

As a psychologist primarily focused on shame and

The College Football Playoff Fiasco

By Mayer Fink

The 2017 college football season has been a complete disaster when it comes to deciding the four teams that will participate in the playoff. It has been the exact opposite of what everyone was hoping for when they made the four-team playoff format to determine the national champion. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the history and current state of the college football system or for those of you who don't know anything about college football at all, let me begin by trying to explain the history of the college football system.

Let us turn back to the turn of the century... the 20th century. At that time, it was thought a good idea to declare the best team in college football based on record as well as several other factors (some involving things such as point differential per game). Several newspapers and other forms of press started making their own form of these rankings (groups like the Associated Press and the Coaches' Poll were considered more valid sources). The obvious problem with numerous committees declaring their own national champions was there would be many years in which there was disagreement over who was the national champion. 1998 brought a change to the scene as the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) was introduced.

The BCS used math and computer analytics to determine the best 2 teams in the nation and would then have them play in a national championship game to determine the lone champion. Other good teams who were not the top rank would play in meaningful bowl games against other ranked teams in NFL or other nostalgic stadiums. However, the BCS was often accused of not selecting the correct teams to play in the national championship game. It also was not able to account for years when there were 3 or 4 teams at the top who each legitimately deserved an opportunity to play for the top prize. Additionally, with only two teams making the most meaningful game, the reality was that one loss during the regular season would eliminate your

team for contention. For these reasons, there was a big push to change to a four team playoff type system, and in 2013, the BCS system was replaced with a playoff format.

While the playoff system was good for several seasons, this season it is experiencing major issues. For example,

"WHEREAS IN PREVIOUS YEARS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM THERE WERE SEVERAL OBVIOUS TEAMS THAT WERE SHOULDERS ABOVE THE REST, THIS YEAR THERE ARE NO GREAT TEAMS."

Thanksgiving weekend saw the top 2 teams in Miami and Alabama lose to conference rivals, creating an immediate power struggle in the college playoff system. Whereas in previous years of the current system there were several obvious teams that were shoulders above the rest, this year there are no great teams. Even the presumed current top ranked team, Clemson, lost an ugly game to Syracuse earlier in the season. Another top ranked team, one-loss Oklahoma, is also not really a great team outside of their Heisman caliber quarterback, Baker Mayfield. After that, there are a slew of 2 loss teams, or teams with a better record who have not played against any tough competition this season. While all of these teams can make the argument for getting into the playoff, none of them come off as truly national championship caliber teams.

Besides for what to do when there are no obvious choices for the playoff, there is another issue that exists with the playoff system. This is the question of what to do with the other bowl games. Simply put, if you're not one of those four teams playing in the playoff then the

bowl game has little meaning. This leads to situations in which the best players on the teams don't care and show it with their play, or lack thereof. Last year, both Leonard Fournette and Christian McCaffrey, two top-tier running backs said that it was not worth their while to play in these other bowl games, and thus they didn't show up. They had little to lose by doing so, as it didn't even affect their NFL draft stock (Fournette went 4th overall to the Jaguars and McCaffrey went 8th to the Panthers). This trend will probably continue as many NFL ready players don't think it's worth it to play in bowl games that don't matter. This is bad news for the NCAA as teams will be without their best players for these big games.

I'm not sure what the future holds in college football, but one thing I don't want to see is an 8 team playoff. That would make the regular season all but meaningless, and teams with 2 or 3 losses would end up playing undefeated teams in a March Madness style tournament. While that certainly sounds fun on the surface, this system which works great for basketball would be bad for football. This kind of high stakes playoff tournament would render the college football season, much like the current college basketball season, all but meaningless. Having his three-round tournament in college football would also bring up another issue of teams playing too many games over the course of a season, as the two teams competing in the national championship would have played 15 or 16 games over the course of the year. Particularly with the recent surge of injuries that has been seen since the institution of the extra game to accommodate the four team playoff, the problem would only be exacerbated by extending the season yet again. My hope is that we overlook this awful season and that Clemson beats Oklahoma to take back to back titles, this year to earn the title of "Best of the Worst". I truly hope that this year was just an outlier, and that we have many more years with great teams playing great teams in a four-team playoff. We have a great system right now and I hope they don't change that.



The Stern Gemara Program: A Look At Where We Are Compared to Where We Started

By Shira Levy

Forty years ago, in 1977, Rav Joseph B. Solovetichik sat in the Stern College Beit Midrash surrounded by eagerly awaiting students, and gave the first gemara shiur on the Beren Campus, initiating Stern's gemara program. With Rabbi Saul Berman, then serving as the Chairman of the Department of Judaic Studies of Stern College, past YU President Dr. Norman Lamm, current Katz Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon, and current YU Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Mordechai Willig in attendance, the Rav began discussing the opening Mishna of the tenth chapter in tractate Pesachim. There were no ribbons, speeches, or ceremonies; just a teacher, the Torah he gave over, and his unequivocal support. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Rav's commencing shiur, compelling the YU community to reexamine the program set in motion by that single shiur many years ago. The Rav set the ball rolling, but where have we taken it?

By Rabbi Berman's account, the Stern gemara program's first fall semester, taught by Rabbi Willig, had a total of 60 women enrolled. This number is rivaled only by the 63 women registered in years 1989 and 2000. In the few years following its inception, the enrollment in the gemara program dropped such that in 1984 only 13 women were enrolled in the program. Since 1983 the program has averaged 24 students a semester, with an all time low of two women enrolled in 1987, 10 years after the program had begun.

When it began in 1977, the Stern gemara program consisted of an Intermediate and an Advanced Talmud course. The Advanced course met twice a week and required three hours of shiur and six hours of seder per week. At the time, the two courses were divided based on previous experience with gemara learning. Women who had been offered gemara in their high school or seminary enrolled in the Advanced course while women who had not previously encountered Talmud study enrolled in the Intermediate course.

Today, the Stern gemara program consists of four course options: two advanced, one intermediate, and one introductory course. One Advanced Talmud course, taught by Rav Moshe Kahn, meets four times a week, totaling five and a half hours of shiur each week and an hour and a half of scheduled seder time. This stands in addition to the time students are required to find on their own each day to prepare for shiur. The second Advanced Talmud course, recently added for the Fall 2017 semester and taught by Rav Ezra Schwartz, meets twice a week in the evenings for a total of two hours of shiur, and includes four hours of scheduled seder. Both Advanced Talmud classes are worth five credits, the equivalent of two classes. The Intermediate Gemara class, also taught by Rav Moshe Kahn, meets twice a week, for a total of three hours and 20 minutes, with students also expected to independently supplement shiur with seder. Given that this course is one hour more than a standard Judaic studies course, it is worth four credits as opposed to the expected three. Introduction to Talmud is taught by Rabbi Pahmer, twice a week for three credits.

Rav Kahn began teaching in the JSS program (an undergraduate Torah studies program for students with less familiarity with textual studies) in Yeshiva College in 1978, and in 1983 was asked to teach in the Stern gemara program. Despite warnings against him accepting the position, Rav Kahn decided to accept. "I felt like it was the right thing to do and just ignored the people who thought I should not do it," Rav Kahn explained, "I didn't believe I was making a mistake." Initially he shared his time between Yeshiva College and Stern College, but by 1988 he was teaching all of his classes in Stern. Rav Kahn's teaching style targets what he sees as "the two core aspects of learning successfully:" textual skills and analytical thinking about the texts. Rav Kahn says he finds "many students whose analytic ability is strong but textual skills tend to be weaker, so I try to combine both." His class is unique in the way he emphasizes "being honest and truthful to the text". Rav Kahn



Torah when Torah competes with required secular coursework. This year, however, Rav Schwartz's additional evening Advanced Talmud course alleviated some of the conflicts, allowing more students to enroll in Advanced Talmud.

Rav Schwartz, a current Rosh Yeshiva of YU, began teaching in Stern in the Fall of 2017. His Advanced Talmud class was created in response to the multitude of scheduling conflicts discussed above. Rav Schwartz's teaching style differs from Rav Kahn's, offering, for the first time, a degree of choice for the women of Stern to determine their preference. Since the beginning of the Stern gemara program, there has only been one shiur option as opposed to the multiple different options of shiurim taught by different Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbi's in the male Talmud program. Differing from Rav Kahn's style, Rav Schwartz's shiur deals mainly with analytical skills. "We try to flush out some of the various halachic nafka minas that are given," said Rav Schwartz. "We try to flush out why answer one does not look like answer two, and we try to build something upon that."

Looking forward, Rav Schwartz and Rav Kahn have similar visions of what they would like to see in the future of Stern's gemara program. They each iterated with great seriousness the importance of making more time available for Stern students to develop their learning skills and gain a wider breadth of knowledge. According to Rav Kahn, "the students need overall to have more time to learn. I think that could improve the quality of learning at Stern College." The next step for Stern's gemara program must be enabling more time for shiur and building seder into the schedule. Rav Kahn hopes to see a Stern College where scheduling is not an impediment for Torah learning. He describes the tension between academic responsibility and Talmud Torah as "very self defeating." He reasons, "why would someone come to Stern College? It's because we have Torah here! And then they can't learn the Torah they want because they have to take biology!" Rav Schwartz also underscores the importance of creating more shiur options. "There's a need for more seder time and there's a need for more shiur options. When I was the bochen (tester) of YP," he explained "I would be able to tell every prospective student I have 20 some odd shiurim divided up into 5 styles of teaching, and within each style and I have 3 or 4 different levels." He hopes Stern will eventually develop a program that is larger and deeper, making more time and resources available to the women involved.

To Rav Schwartz, however, until there are more women involved in the gemara learning, growing Stern's program does not appear sustainable. When discussing this Rav Schwartz said, "I think one of the impediments to women growing in learning is that if a guy walks around with a gemara everyone says 'wow he's frum', if a woman walks around with a gemara somehow that comes across as being less frum." Rav Schwartz believes that Stern students who currently take gemara need to speak to each other and encourage others to break this stigma and increase the enrollment in the Talmud classes. He explained how students need to motivate others to "take [the gemara course]! It's intellectually challenging, it will help you appreciate dvar hashem, it will help you appreciate that the mesorah is imminent, and help you appreciate what gedolei yisroel are." Both Rav Schwartz and Rav Kahn hope to see Stern's infrastructure grow to give more to women seeking out Talmud Torah an opportunity to participate in serious learning, but Rav Schwartz adds that internal growth among the students is vital.

Stern's gemara program has a lot to show for its growth in the past 40 years: its committed teachers, attentive and engaged students, and a vibrant beit midrash. Both Rav Kahn and Rav Schwartz describe the dedication of their students, and the rigorous level of each class, challenging the women to work harder and learn more. Still, there is much to be desired. Teachers and students alike hope to see the issue of scheduling conflicts resolved, seder time built into the courses, and greater enrollment among the women in Stern. 40 years ago, Rav Solovetichik came forward in unflinching support for a program that would become the pillar of many student's Torah learning experience at Stern College. 40 years later, both teachers and students are working hard to realize the Rav's vision. The Rav set the ball rolling, and now it is our responsibility to run with it.

"THIS YEAR MARKS THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RAV'S COMMENCING SHIUR, COMPELLING THE YU COMMUNITY TO REEXAMINE THE PROGRAM SET IN MOTION BY THAT SINGLE SHIUR MANY YEARS AGO."

feels that "to focus on analysis and not pay attention to the text...would be really doing a disservice to the students."

Since the beginning of his time at Stern, Rav Kahn has noticed consistently fewer women enrolled in the Spring semesters than in the Fall. For example, in the Fall of 1992 there were 28 women enrolled in the gemara program, and the following Spring that number dropped to 13. Rav Kahn speculates that this is due to repeated scheduling conflicts with secular classes required for the different majors on the Beren Campus -- in Spring 2017, Organic Chemistry, Elementary Education, Physiology, Anatomy, Cognitive Psychology, and Cell Biology courses conflicted with the Advanced Gemara course, preventing many students who had been enrolled in the Fall semester from continuing. Talia Edelman, a Junior Neuroscience major, recalls how she "was very excited that [she] would be able to advance [her] learning of gemara in Stern, but was disappointed to see that [she] could not take the Advanced Talmud course while also fulfilling the biology major. Any advanced biology course that [she] could register for was ... at the same time as Advanced Gemara." Rav Kahn described how "over the years students [told] me they want to take my class but they can't, they have so many conflicts."

This challenge, unique to the women on Beren campus, exists because Stern does not share Yeshiva College's Undergraduate Torah Studies system of time allotted solely for seder, shiur, or Judaic studies courses. A larger issue arises when discussing the scheduling conflicts -- Stern students are forced to make compromises in their Talmud

Coco Es Muy Buena

By Matthew Silkin

Let's talk about the history of animation. Discounting ancient Iranian pottery depicting animals reaching into trees for food, modern animation can be traced back to the early and mid-1800s zoetrope, one of those cylinders with slits that you might have seen in a museum somewhere. The gist is that by taking several different pictures, each showing a part of a motion in succession, placing them into a cylinder with a light source, and spinning it, the illusion of motion can be created. This was adapted in the very early 1900s to cartoon animation, popularized by such early animators as Max Fleischer, who created the classic character Betty Boop, and Walt Disney (come on, you know who he is). To go into a more comprehensive history from that point would make this article worth three credits and require that I assign a midterm and final, so suffice it to say that animation since then has always been about pushing the envelope of what we consider to be reality, and to create an atmosphere of the fantastical.

Which is to say that 2017 has been a tad bit disappointing in the animation department. Sure, CG has been perfected to the point of perfection, but we've been somewhat lacking in pure animation. *The Lego Batman Movie* was a good movie, sure, but it didn't really build on any ground that *The Lego Movie* already tread back in 2014. *The Boss Baby* and *Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie* were standard fare from Dreamworks, in that they were just alright and, like *The Lego Batman Movie*, didn't bring anything new to the table. To call *The Emoji Movie* a dumpster fire would be an insult to dumpster fires, and I have way too much self respect to force myself to watch *My Little Pony: The Movie*. So after I was similarly let down by Pixar's *Cars 3*, I was starting to lose my faith in animation.

And then came *Coco*.

Coco is the 19th movie released by Pixar Animation Studios, and is directed by Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina. It tells the story of Miguel Rivera, a young boy and aspiring musician in a family that hates music, who ends up trapped in the Land of the Dead on *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead), a Mexican holiday commemorating the spirits of past family members, where it is believed that the ancestors come to the Land of the Living to visit their families. To get out, he requires the blessing of a family member, and so he sets out with his new dead jokester friend Héctor to find Ernesto de la Cruz, a famous musician whom Miguel idolizes and believes is his great-great grandfather. Along the way, the movie touches upon the themes of family, death, memory, and aspiration, as

well as bringing in aspects of Mexican culture, specifically relating to *Día de Muertos*.

First things first: this movie will make you cry. The manly man within you scoffs, and will probably continue to scoff until about the last 15 minutes of the movie, where he too will break down in both tears of sadness and happiness. This is due in large part to the amazing voice work throughout, specifically Anthony Gonzalez as

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the protagonist Miguel and Gael García Bernal as Héctor. Their personalities bounce off each other well, which is important since much of the narrative surrounds their interaction. As this is a musical, credit must be given to the songs as well, specifically the song "Remember Me," which comes up in the more emotional moments of the film and absolutely deserves, at the very least, a nomination (if not a win) for Best Original Song. The movie is also hilarious, especially the various cameos by famous Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (or in some cases, Frida Kahlo-imitations) throughout. I'm sure there were more blink-and-you-miss-it moments with other Mexican celebrities; unfortunately, I don't know *that* much about Mexican culture, so I missed them, but maybe if I knew more I would have caught an additional one or two.

Speaking about Mexican culture, I learned quite a bit about it from this film. Did you know that a spirit can only enter the Land of the Living on *Día de Muertos* if their living family puts their picture on an altar called an *ofrenda* (offering)? I sure didn't, and now that I saw *Coco*, I do! I have no clue if it's entirely accurate -- I can say with about 75% confidence that *alebrijes*, or guiding spirit animals as the film presents them, don't *really* exist -- but that's what Google is for, and now that I have the concept in my knowledge I can search for more information about

it. I can't normally talk about the educational aspects of the movies I watch, usually because there are none most of the time, so now that *Coco* has that introduction to Mexican culture and customs, I want to take the time to point it out as another notch in the "Why you should stop reading this review and drive to your nearest theater to watch *Coco*" column.

But what drew me in the most, and why I spent the first paragraph going into detail about zoetropes and Max Fleischer, is the animation. This is, dare I say, the most beautiful movie I've had the pleasure of witnessing in theaters. The first moments of Miguel taking in the Land of the Dead from the bridge of flower petals is my new standard for jaw-dropping, and it never got worse from there. The details on all the skeletons was intricate, the architecture of the buildings in the Land of the Dead was breathtaking, the colors and movements of the *alebrijes* were graceful and pleasing to the eye. This movie, in a word, was gorgeous, and I cannot lather enough praise on it. I legitimately do not believe any of the other aspects of the film which I have already lauded would have been a third as praiseworthy if it wasn't for the Pixar animation team working tirelessly to bring us this aesthetically perfect movie.

If there's one criticism I have against the experience of watching *Coco* in theaters, it would be the short that accompanies it. Usually, Pixar introduces their theatrical releases with a five to ten minute short film, such as *Lava*, which appeared before *Inside Out*, or *Piper*, which preceded *Finding Dory*. *Coco* was preceded by *Olaf's Frozen Adventure*, a twenty-two minute musical holiday special starring everyone's favorite anthropomorphic snowman, Olaf. This would be perfectly serviceable at best, with two caveats: if it was about 15 minutes shorter, and if it came before literally any other Disney movie. As it stands, *Olaf's Frozen Adventure* felt like it overstayed its welcome about ten minutes in, and in comparison to *Coco*, seems like it was tacked on at the last minute. If you're going to see *Coco* in theaters, my suggestion would be to get to the theater 15 minutes late, so that you don't have to sit through all the mediocre *Frozen* Christmas dreck to get to the much-better *Coco*.

If you're still reading this and haven't immediately bought a ticket to *Coco*, I implore you to do so. It's funny, it's heartwarming -- in short, it's such a pleasure to experience. If I had thought that animation was dead, then *Coco* is the *Día de Muertos* of animation, bringing back the spirits of old animation to show them just how far their descendants have come, and the new heights that the future can reach.



The YU Dress Code: Setting a Standard and Creating a Community

By Eitan Lipsky and Lilly Gelman

By any stretch of the imagination, YU is not a typical university. Most notably in splitting up the campuses by gender and in incorporating a Torah/Judaic studies requirement into the curriculum that is necessary to graduate, the university prides itself on weaving certain central Jewish values into the very fabric of how it is structured. In light of this, it is certainly worth noting the stance that the university has taken towards its students' dress.

In a document that can be found on the university's website, most recently updated in October 2017, the Yeshiva University dress code succinctly states that "female students are required to wear dresses or skirts that are knee-length, and tops that have sleeves and a modest neckline," and that "male students are required to wear pants and a shirt." According to the document, the dress code is "in effect in the academic buildings of the University buildings at all times."

Interestingly, the date of the dress code's establishment and who decided on its terms are somewhat of a mystery. It does seem to be the case, however, that there was a time when no formal rules existed regarding dress. According to Dr. Ethel Orlian, Associate Dean of Stern College for Women, if one "looks back many, many years, there was sort of an understanding that came within the student body that one dressed appropriately...in school." Because of the different way people used to dress, Dean Orlian explained, there was no need for YU to have an official dress code. However, when the styles began to change "it was necessary to differentiate the street from the school." At this point, an unknown author or group of authors composed this set of rules pertaining to dress that, per Dr. Karen Bacon, Katz Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences "reflected the culture of the university, a Modern Orthodox Jewish University."

As is typically the case with documents written years ago without a strict set of guidelines for how to understand them, there is quite a bit of vagueness in the specifics of the rules set forth in this dress code. A requirement of "sleeves" on women's tops does not specify whether this might allow cap sleeves, or whether Stern's women might have to wear sleeves that cover past their elbows. Additionally, the characterization of a neckline as "modest" (a provision of the dress code only added within the past year) seems to leave room for plenty of subjectivity and interpretation. For men, a need for "pants" leaves open the possibility that this would allow short pants (AKA shorts) in addition to the classical school pants. Finally, the requirement to adhere to the code "at all times" leaves doubt as to whether the intention might have been to include non-school hours, and would therefore apply to those who find themselves on YU's campuses over the weekend or in the summer.

What is also extremely noteworthy about this policy is its lack of any mention of how it is to be enforced. At no point in the code does it mention who is responsible to enforce these rules, nor does it lay out possible repercussions. This leaves open the possibility that the responsibility of monitoring these policies might fall on the academic faculty, the security team, or even perhaps the student body. However, with no recourse towards those who do not abide by these rules, whoever is meant to enforce it would likely have a difficult time doing so.

After having noted several difficulties with the document's language as well as with its status as an enforceable code of rules, we now turn to the question of the nature of its policies. Doing so forces us to ask the

question, what is the overall purpose of the dress code and how is it reflected by the particulars of what types of dress it allows and disallows? To buttress the question, it must be emphasized that it is not the common practice for universities to have dress codes. If one were to retort that this dress code is a "Jewish thing", then they can turn to Touro's Lander College and note that there is no mention

or *tzitzit* for men despite their well-established status as part of Orthodox Jewish dress, seems to indicate a lack of concern for a dress code reflective of Modern Orthodox values on the men's campus in comparison to the women's.

The absence of a requirement to wear a *kippa* or *tzitzit* is also an indication of the non-*halachic* foundation of the dress code. While the female dress code does seem to

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-DEAN KAREN BACON

of a dress code to be found in their student handbook.

It would seem that the key to understanding YU's uniqueness in incorporating a dress code into its student policies is by gaining a better appreciation of our uniqueness in as an institution. While it might go unnoticed due to our familiarity with them, there are a number of policies in place, take for example the restriction against alcohol (a staple of many university students' diet) in the dorms, that are aimed at forging a culture on campus of Modern Orthodox idealism and focus on proper Jewish values. In this sense, the dress code is also a reflection of the culture that is trying to be created on campus. While the policies themselves might not be perfectly clear, and there is no real way of enforcing them, the very fact that there is a document laying out dress that would be embraced by our community as a whole is indicative of its true purpose. According to Dean Bacon, the dress code reflects the "culture of a *Torah U'Madda* Modern Orthodox institution" and that the culture is not only limited to the way we dress, but that it is "reflected in our food, in our curriculum, and our calendar. This place is a reflection of that."

This way of viewing the dress code is not meant in any way to detract from the terms of the code itself. On the contrary, in light of the code's role in setting some sort of standard of Modern Orthodox dress, the particulars become crucial. While it is often remarked that there is a double-standard of sorts surrounding acceptable dress for men versus the more restrictive approach towards women's dress, the university's dress code made sure to address both parties. The dress code, however, does articulate much more specific guidelines for the women, specifying skirt length, sleeves, and neckline, while leaving the male guidelines much more loose, reflecting a disproportionate amount of focus placed on the nuances of female dress in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community in comparison to male dress. When asked about this, Dean Orlian explained how this skewed emphasis was not intentional, and that the female dress code was put into place because it "needed to be done" with no thought of the parallel guidelines on the men's campus.

Perhaps this more open allowance for male dress can account for the indifferent attitude of UTS, the male undergraduate torah studies programs, towards the existing policy. The Dean of UTS, Rabbi Menachem Penner, replied to the Commentator's request for comment that "UTS has no particular angle on the dress code issue." Furthermore, no mention of a requirement to wear a *kippa*

align with the societally accepted *halachic* norms of dress in many Modern Orthodox communities, Dean Bacon explained that *halacha* was not a factor in determining the dress code, but rather that it was written as a reflection of Modern Orthodox values. While it is certainly safe to say that *halachic* convention regarding dress influenced the accepted values being reflected in the dress code, specific *halachic* opinions were not influential.

The dress code, set to reflect the standard of dress in Modern Orthodoxy, is also meant to create a sense of a community among the students of Yeshiva University. Dean Bacon said that, when a student chooses to attend YU, they need to ask themselves if "we want to feel like we are all together. Not that we are all identical but that we are all part of a community with some reasonable acceptable communal standards." "There is something so valuable and beautiful about feeling part of a community," she continued, and when "people come to YU, they should immerse themselves in the culture of Modern Orthodoxy and take on all the trappings," including standards of dress. That being said, the dress code at Yeshiva University should extend beyond the classroom during the academic year, to Shabboses, club events, and summer courses.

This expectation of taking part in the YU community leaves every student, teacher, and administrator responsible for enforcing the dress code. "Every single person who belongs to our community" is responsible to implement the dress code, Dean Orlian said. "There is no monitor, no officer, it is the responsibility of everyone who cares."

As with many things in the Modern Orthodox community of today, dress is a topic about which there are many different opinions, both in a *halachic* sense as well as from a societal standpoint. Despite this, however, it appears that the dress code at Yeshiva University is actually meant to unify those different views into one community reflecting the greater values which we have in common. The nuanced differences in the way we dress become irrelevant once it is recognized that as members of Yeshiva University we are creating a united environment of *Torah Umadda*. Dean Bacon described her hope that in doing so we can "get these surface and externals out of the way so that we can focus on what is important -- learning, growing, studying, developing habits of the mind and heart that will make all of us better people in the future."



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MEDIA STUDIES, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

major was advertising, marking a significant incline in its popularity since 2013. Before this year, Advertising had held the title of the least popular concentration of the three since 2013. Public Relations was consistently the most popular concentration since 2013 until it was replaced by Advertising in 2017.

Sine 2014, the Journalism concentration has steadily risen every year. There are currently seven Journalism majors, up from three in 2014.

"There is no particular pattern as it depends upon student interests, opportunities, and how the fields themselves are quickly changing," said Professor Linda Shires, chair of the English department. She explained that one of her main goals when she assumed the position in 2009, was to strengthen and grow the Media Studies major. "I believe media is expanding at all times into different areas. I'm still looking to grow by continuing to stay up to date."

One of the biggest ways Shires has updated the major is by changing the name. The major was founded in 1983 under the title Communications. While the major was and is still set up the same way with the three tracks in Journalism, Advertising, and Public Relations, Shires and Dean Bacon felt that a name change would make the major more current. They wanted the major to be about more than just the three tracks, it was about the study and understanding of the media and its role in society.

To accomplish this more well-rounded understanding of media, Shires hired Lynda Johnson to teach the Media Studies course, a requirement for the major. "They [students] know they want to go into media but they don't know [enough about] advertising or PR so I thought it would be good to have one course that would be more general, a kind of overview," said Shires.

When asked how she is continuing to expand the major Shires explained that while the major is not the smallest major on campus, only about 22 students are registered so it is not popular enough to fully develop it.

However, Shires, as well as the administration are working hard to do all they can within this small major. "We have worked hard at SCW to bring teachers for

Elective courses for all tracks in Media too and have been fortunate to draw on teachers who often work in midtown companies: from Magazine Journalism to Digital Media to Screenwriting to TV Writing to Business Writing to Broadcast Journalism. As well, SCW draws on approved elective courses from, for instance, the Art Department, Sy Syms, and FIT, all to broaden student opportunities."

One of the biggest grievances the students have with the major, though, is the small number of classes offered each semester and the lack of variety. "I just wish there were more classes offered in advertising besides for the two mandatory ones," said a super senior in the advertising track who wished to remain anonymous.

Other students are concerned with the fact that the major is under the umbrella of the English department. "I think the fact that we don't have a straight department for it is really sad," said Chaviva Freedman a senior in the Journalism track. "I think that there's such a small journalism department, advertising department, and PR department and we don't have professors we can go to to discuss options for careers or even just try to find an internship. We're all just kind of stuck in limbo."

Many students, however, are happy with the major. "So far I'm really enjoying my major classes and am looking forward to more of them," said Shira Gottlieb, a junior who just started the Media Studies major. Leah Lipsey, senior, said "I like that the major is creative."

Despite its small size, the Media Studies major does not go without support. Professor Shires expressed that Dr. Karen Bacon the Dean of Stern College and The Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences has been at her side for the last ten years looking to push and improve the major. Bacon was also instrumental in bringing the Media Studies minor to the Wilf campus this year.

Although this introduction of the Media Studies minor at Yeshiva College has been seen as positive, some students believe that it is not enough. "I think the Media Studies major would be important for YC because of how broad it is," said Ari Kaye a junior in Yeshiva College minoring in media studies. "By having a major in Media Studies, one acquires a strong background in not just social sciences and communication, but in art, English, psychology, and more. Also it's just really cool."

Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, an adjunct professor in the Journalism track who graduated from Stern in the Media Studies major and who is now a professional journalist at The Forward, said that she is working with Stern and the English Department to improve the Media Studies major. "We're working on creating more media events, that I think that will be a big part of it because it not only brings other voices and experts in the industry to the students here but also allows students beyond the major, or undeclared majors to come and consider this as a profession."

Both Bacon and Shires are constantly looking for ways to grow, improve and innovate, making sure that the Media Studies major is never forgotten.

Email from Linda Shires:

The English Major at Stern (in all tracks) has lost students slightly in the past few years, as have English Majors at most universities, due to STEM. However, I suspect that the losses are least in Media. Media students now usually make up about half of the English majors.

Because students declare or change or decide to major or minor at different times, figures are always somewhat fluid, but, as of the start of Fall term, we had 44 total English Majors (some with tracks undeclared); 2 double majors; and 15 English Minors. A few years ago, the figure might have been more like 54 total.

Of the declared students by August 2017: Advertising had 8, Journalism had 7, and PR had 6. There have been years, under the same teachers, when the figures were different. So PR three years ago, for instance, had 14. There is no particular pattern as it depends upon student interests, opportunities, and how the fields themselves are quickly changing.

We have worked hard at SCW to bring teachers for Elective courses for all tracks in Media too and have been fortunate to draw on teachers who often work in midtown companies: from Magazine Journalism to Digital Media to Screenwriting to TV Writing to Business Writing to Broadcast Journalism. As well, SCW draws on approved elective courses from, for instance, the Art Department, Sy Syms, and FIT, all to broaden student opportunities.

Thoughts on New Film The Breadwinner

By Elana Luban

The Breadwinner, an animated film produced by Angelina Jolie and currently showing in theaters, takes place in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and centers around a young girl who takes control of her situation through her talent for storytelling. Yes, an almost Disney-esque film about radical Islam.

Based on Deborah Ellis's best-selling novel of the same title, *The Breadwinner's* plot was garnered from Ellis's interviews with Afghan women in refugee camps in Pakistan, whom she spent months interviewing.

Here's why you should call up those of your friends who consider themselves at least somewhat woke, drop everything, and go see it.

If you read any online summaries of the film, it might give the impression of being yet another girl-dresses-as-boy Mulan/Yentl story. It's not. Unlike those two tales, this one takes place in the more modern late 90's. On top of that, the circumstances in which Parvana, the eleven-year-old protagonist, finds herself are not unique to her in her part of the world and aren't the result of an unusually tragic sequence of events (Mulan's and Yentl's circumstances are unusual in their respective societies).

Instead, the circumstances in which Parvana finds herself are common; her father was arrested for no specific reason, and since women cannot go outside unattended by a man, Parvana's family no longer has any means of supporting itself. This is what leads up to her decision to chop off her hair and dress as a boy, in order to both find work and buy food without constant harassment and the danger of being beaten or arrested.

Aside from working multiple strenuous jobs to feed her family, Parvana has another mission: to rescue her father from prison, or if that fails, at least to see him.

Day after trying day, Parvana uses her skill of telling vibrant stories to give strength and hope to her family and the friend with whom she works (another girl dressing as a boy for more opportunity, who used to go to school with Parvana years ago, but becomes a closer friend to her as the film progresses). Okay, an incredibly intelligent female protagonist using an extraordinary, pseudo-magical talent to distract herself from the difficulties of life and empower herself? Yeah, a little bit unoriginal, I'll admit. But when you see the story she spins, it makes up for the slightly cliché, Disney-style plot device.

When the imaginary world of Parvana's tale first appeared on the screen, depicted with beautifully colorful, cutout-style animation, I was pretty surprised. Not only was this world a stark, unexpected contrast to Parvana's impoverished, drab surroundings in a half-desert, but the tale she invents begins with an end-of-harvest celebration in a small village, one in which men and women eat, dance, and rejoice together. The disparity between this united and joyful community, and Parvana's world, where women are shamed constantly and beaten for leaving their homes unattended by men, is jarring.

In the tale-within-a-tale, the seeds the villagers have stored for the next harvest are stolen by the minions of the evil "Elephant King," and one brave young boy decides to set out on a journey to battle the king and retrieve the seeds (various obstacles along the way are clearly symbolic of real issues in Parvana's life). One of the most touching moments in the film is the exchange that occurs between the young hero and his fellow villagers: they laugh at him and ask him why he believes he can accomplish this, and he simply replies that he believes this because he needs to.

These simple words rang in my head long after the colorful imaginary world faded into Parvana's non-imaginary surroundings and even after the film ended. Parvana, obviously represented by the hero brave enough to save his village from starvation, did what she did, not because of some carefully calculated decisions, but simply because she needed to. She saw no other choice: her family needed food, so she took responsibility and became the breadwinner. She yearned to see her father, so she did everything in her power to see him. No over-thinking, no pompous acts of courage -- just the need to stand up.

You don't have to identify as a feminist to appreciate the heartbreaking beauty of *The Breadwinner*, but Ellis's book series is considered a classic feminist work. Ellis says

herself, "as a feminist and anti-war activist, I wanted to do something to be of use to the women in Afghanistan." It will come as no surprise if the same will soon be said of the film adaptation. Feminism has always spoken to me for a combination of reasons; my parents both immigrated from Russia where the society was and still is quite patriarchal, and certain stories from their past (my mother once told me that in a moment of anger, her father had reminded her that as the daughter of the family, she was, unlike her brother, "just a piece of property") continue to shape my views. In addition, I believe American society still has a lot of growing to do (for example, rape culture/shaming of women is still perpetuated in hit songs, etc.) in this regard. I recognize that it's wrong to compare different kinds of obstacles, and that comparing America in 2017 to war-stricken late-90s Afghanistan is comparing apples and oranges, but, watching this film, I felt that I was seeing female empowerment in its purest, rawest, most primitive form. The courage and self-empowerment of Parvana is born of the simplest of reasons: need. She fills a man's role, she saves her family through her daily perseverance, and conquers countless obstacles all in spite of the Taliban's attempt to strip women of their basic rights. It's easy to lose track of what we're fighting for and what the world

would look like today if no one had ever fought, but this movie is a good reminder.

About ten minutes into the film, upon noticing a modern-looking truck in the background of one of the scenes, the friend I was with turned around to me and asked, "wait a minute, all of this takes place *today*?" That was an unremitting thought of mine throughout the film. It only added to my unease that Parvana calls her parents "mama-joon" and "baba-joon" throughout the film, similar to how one of my closest Stern College friends, who is Iranian-American, refers to her parents, reminding me that the past isn't so far in the past, and the troubles of Middle East are not as far away as we'd like to imagine. My friend's family escaped from Iran to America only sixteen years ago (she was three at the time), when the circumstances there seemed to be moving closer and closer to the circumstances depicted in *The Breadwinner*.

I'm a visual learner, so you could lecture me for hours about current wars in the Middle East, but those wars will still feel far less real to me than if I'm shown just a few depictions. I'm sure some of you can relate. This film might not have taught me anything new, but it made me see female empowerment -- human empowerment, really -- in an entirely new light. The "feminism" of Parvana is feminism at its most revolutionary, most pioneering, starkest, in an environment that needs it most. It is being human when those in positions of power simply... aren't. Don't watch *The Breadwinner* if you're expecting a Disney movie; go for it if you're looking for a sobering but beautiful film experience.



Diaspora: A Fantastic Play Besieged By Questionable Content

By Matthew Silkin

I hate Masada.

I love the view at the top of Masada. I love *davening* (praying) at sunrise, watching the first rays of light peek out from the mountains across the Dead Sea as I say the *Shemoneh Esrei*. I love the archaeology of the fortress, the stories behind the various buildings, and the overall aesthetic that Herod was going for when he originally built the place in 31 CE. But I hate the slog down (or up) the Snake Path. I hate the unbearable heat in the late spring -- because apparently nobody does the hike at a more sensible time of the year. I can't even stand the rickety cable car; it just feels a bit too precarious, even more so that the lack of guardrails on the path on the side of a mountain. I can pull up Google, search for "Pictures of Masada," and probably get the same amount of aesthetic enjoyment of the archaeology and the sunrise from the comfort of New York rather than the effort and heat of the Dead Sea sun. And yet, I visited Masada one more time, for about 90 minutes, in a theater in Greenwich Village, in the hopes that this trip to the fortress would be some nice, clean, effort-free entertainment.

Oh, boy.

Diaspora, a new play written by Nathaniel Sam Shapiro and directed by Saheem Ali, tells two separate but intertwined stories - it follows a Birthright group on their tour of Masada in the present day, as well as the struggles of the Jewish fighters in Masada in 73 CE, during their last days before committing mass suicide rather than falling to the Romans. Shapiro makes the interesting artistic decision to have the scenes weave between the present day and 73 CE, rather than have specific breaks in between the timelines, made easier by the minimal -- to the point of lacking -- set design. This is also benefitted by having the actors portray multiple characters in both the present and the past, making the audience connect the story of the Birthright students to the story of the Jewish rebellion. From a purely objective standpoint, it works. I can stand back from afar and appreciate Shapiro's vision and writing that went into what is ultimately a strong script with a lot of introspection. The weaving between time was, however, quite disorienting the first time it happened. Though I got used to the structure of the play, that feeling of disorientation from the jumps between time never fully went away.

Speaking of two different timelines, the scenes in ancient Masada were done much better than the ones in modern day Birthright. The dialogue was much less vulgar (more on that later) and contained nuanced discussion of

Jewish identity, religious observance, and the place of the individual in the larger society, that were somewhat more muddled during the scenes set in the present day. I believe it was in these scenes that the actors who didn't have much to do in the present day really got to shine, especially Joe

"I WOULD PROBABLY SAY THAT DIASPORA IS ... A 9.5/10. SUBJECTIVELY, HOWEVER, I CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE ADVOCATE... TO GO SEE THIS PLAY WITHOUT PERSONALLY KNOWING MY READERS' PREFERENCE FOR THE SUBJECT MATTER."

Tapper, who plays the Masada leader Eleazar. Though Tapper doesn't get a whole lot to do during the present as Israeli soldier Lior -- he does get an impassioned speech where he berates another character for supporting Palestine while not showing that same support for Native Americans, but that's about it -- it's the Masada scenes where he gets to show his leadership and attempt to control the people of Masada where he really gets to shine.

The acting in the play was great across the board. As I mentioned earlier, the actors play multiple characters -- mostly between the two timelines presented in the play -- and they inject each character with their own personalities and emotions, sometimes switching between them on a dime between scenes. The highlights of the show were Serena Berman, who portrays the reserved Hannah in the present day and the spiritually conflicted Chawwah in the past, and Ava Eisenson, who portrays Israeli soldier Or and Masada's women leader -- and fierce traditionalist -- Achinoam.

The characters themselves, while well written and acted, were vulgar to the point of distraction, more so in the Birthright group than in the Masada rebellion. Talk of drinking, getting high, and past sexual encounters -- in more detail than I believe necessary -- are rampant throughout the play, which made me personally uncomfortable. I feel the need to mention that I have never gone on Birthright, so I have no way of knowing if this is representative of what a Birthright trip would actually be like, but suffice it

to say that I would not have enjoyed those aspects of the trip. I did however, enjoy the political debates that erupted between the characters on the nature of Israel as a Jewish state, the treatment of the Palestinians, and the meaning of being a Jew outside of Israel. Yes, they were only surface level arguments, and I would have been surprised if the play delved deeper into topics that would require more nuance than possible to fit into a 90 minute production that also has to cram in discussions about past hookups between characters.

Did I mention that this play was vulgar? I think I did. Well, here it is again, because good Lord above this play is vulgar, to the point that I feel the need to write an entire paragraph reinforcing this point. It starts with a fourth-wall-breaking monologue from Birthright participant Olivia, played by Connie Castanzo, about what she really thinks about the *mikvah* process -- with no holds barred on what exactly goes on in a *mikvah*, mind you -- and only builds from there, culminating in a scene onstage between two characters that I struggle to describe in a YU publication. There are people who are comfortable with this, and they were among the audience that saw the play with me. To a certain point, I am among those people -- I can tolerate the occasional subtle dirty reference or two -- but *Diaspora* blew past that certain point within around the third minute of the play.

Objectively, this play is good. Great, even. From an empirical, technical aspect, this play was beyond flawless. The actors were all on point, with both their lines and their emotions, the lack of scenery fit the overall theme and presentation of the play. If I actually rated things in my reviews for *The Commentator* instead of word vomiting for several paragraphs and expecting the average reader to glean my thoughts from that, I would probably say that *Diaspora* is a 9, maybe even a 9.5/10. Subjectively, however, I cannot in good conscience advocate, neither in a publication such as *The Commentator* nor in an institution such as YU, to go see this play without personally knowing my readers' preference for the subject matter. If I thought it was too crude for my taste -- and I consider myself on the more lenient side of YU when it comes to entertainment -- then I don't think I can recommend it to other people in this community.

All the individual parts, from the acting to the lighting, are great. They're a beautiful sunrise davening from the top of a fortress. But the content, and therefore the overall sum, are just too much of a midday summer hike up to get to those nice individual parts. And sometimes, it's just not worth the effort. You can find pictures of Masada online.



FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: The Commentator has decided to reprint an article written by a Yeshiva College Student Council President over 50 years ago. The author, Rabbi Dr. David Berger, remains a part of Yeshiva University to this day, having served as Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies since 2008.

From the Archives (May 28, 1964; Volume 28 Issue 7) — In Review

By (Dr.) David Berger

Dean Berger's article is being reprinted with his permission and, at his request, the following prefatory note:

The author notes with chagrin that he wrote "effected" for "affected," "implicated" for "implied" and used the exceedingly awkward phrase "deliver their abilities." This essay, he says, does not deserve an A. Nonetheless, the egregious misspelling does not reach the level of what he wrote as a Freshman in a history exam for a course taught by Prof. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg: "Monophysitism is the belief that Jesus' two natures were really won."

What is the purpose of the Yeshiva College Student Council?

The simplest and most direct answer to this question is: to serve as the voice of the student body of Yeshiva College. Our voice, however, must not cry out in the wilderness. It must be directed toward those areas which are most important to us and which can be effected by our actions. These areas are basically four: the relationship between students, administration and faculty; intra-student affairs; matters affecting the University as a whole and problems facing the Jewish community.

In the first area—our relationship with the faculty and administration—we must combine maturity and responsibility with firmness and conviction. Our demeanor should command a respect which will increase the likelihood of a favorable reaction. The student view



Ex-President David Berger

should and must be heard on all matters of educational significance, for the primary goal of the college must be directed toward its students. Furthermore, it is we who are affected most by decisions about our education, and we should have something to say about our own future. This should be self-evident, but it is sufficiently important to warrant frequent repetition.

Curriculum

Student Council this year has dealt with a number of basic points in this area. The first is curriculum. The curriculum report which appears in this issue should be read with seriousness and care by all members of the University. It has been prepared, revised and rewritten by students with a strong sense of responsibility and a deep affection for Yeshiva.

Guidance is another matter of primary importance. It is our hope that the discussion on this vital, much neglected need will prove to have been effectual.

A third issue in this area which is of the first magnitude is that of free expression on the part of the students in our publications. A number of events took place this year which

tend to indicate that a defense of this right is in order.

This defense can validly be made on ethical, practical and educational ground. Any group of mature individuals—and college students are mature enough—should have the right to express themselves without hindrance, provided, of course, that they do not often perform acts of the grossest irresponsibility. Practically speaking, any group in the college benefits from criticism; free expression is thus of great benefit to the University. Finally, from an educational point of view, only such freedom will truly enable students to deliver their abilities to the fullest. Yeshiva's tradition in this respect is admirable. It should continue.

Among other problem that Student Council has dealt with in the area of student-faculty relations are the revision of the academic calendar of 1964-65, vending machines, the art fee, the student lounge, the rooms on the fifth floor, etc.

One more word on this topic—about Dean Bacon. The Dean holds a very trying position. The day in which Student Council stops having disagreements with him is the day it will have ceased functioning effectively. Some areas of dissatisfaction are implicated in the curriculum evaluation report. But in many issues, he has been very cooperative and interested. It goes without saying that much of what we may have accomplished this year is due in large measure to his support.

The second area—that of intra-student affairs—has, of course, been dealt with a great deal. A required bi-annual audit of Student Council funds has been instituted. An attempt was made to encourage club activities by allocating \$1000 for distribution at the discretion of the Clubs Committee. The Student Council Constitution was thoroughly amended for the second time since 1955. A student directory was prepared for the first time since 1960-1961. Co-op, thanks to its most efficient managers, had a successful year. Another important action was the encouragement and developing of the concept of Student Union.

The third area—and it is a most significant one—is that of University affairs as a whole. This is most emphatically a matter of concern for the undergraduates of our college. There are a number of problems and trends in the University which could ultimately pose a danger to the unique nature of Yeshiva. It is very important that the expansion of the University not be undertaken at the expense of the undergraduate divisions, for it is the latter that give Yeshiva its reason for existence.

Erev Pesach Classes

Certain practices, e.g. classes until 3 P.M. erev Pesach, that went on at Einstein College of Medicine this year were not in accordance with the religious principles of our University. To reiterate, we must be our brother's keeper in the sense of being vitally concerned with any matter that can affect the image and nature of Yeshiva. One more point in this vein. I cannot overemphasize the fact that our continuing as a Yeshiva depends upon the safeguarding of the requirements to take a large number of hours of Jewish Studies per week in all the morning divisions.

Finally, we must recognize our responsibility to the Jewish community as a whole. We hope, for example, to send a petition on Russian Jewry to the student councils of 1500 American universities with the hope that their student body representative will sign in their name and return the petitions to us. In other areas, the Student Union worked on the anti-missionary campaign and donated \$1000 to the YU Drive.

I cannot end this article without extending my deepest thanks to a large number of individuals who made the work of Student Council possible this year. First, to those people in charge of committees: Mike Chernik (Clubs), Alan Cohen (Elections), Daniel Kapustin and Shep Melzer (Curriculum), Harold Wasserman (Athletics), David Eisenberg (Student Directory), Bernard Susser and Sam Ottensosser (Student Court).

Maurice Reifman and Jack Levenbrowner deserve our sincere appreciation for transforming Co-op into a

profitable and successful operation.

Toby Feinerman's work as corresponding secretary made the job of this year's Student Council much easier and more efficient.

Personal Thanks

I should like to express my personal thanks to Paul Schneid who was extremely helpful in filling my petition last year. Presentation of the petition was an enterprise which I found a rather distasteful task, and Mr. Schneid made a very difficult week more pleasant.

Finally, there are three people for whom anything I say would be pitifully inadequate. Suffice it to say that without them, I would have been lost. They are Stanley Raskas, Jeffrey Tillman, and Mitchell Wolf.

In closing, I would especially like to thank the student body of Yeshiva for giving me the opportunity to experience a most eventful and rewarding year.



My Mind, For Me

By Irwin Leventer

I want my mind for me, for me, I fester for such liberty, I fight for it so thirstily, Ephemeral control.

On all things real we disagree, I search for truth, he wants but glee, He booms with volume of the sea: Dig deep into your hole.

I can't give in nor take a knee, Post seven falls, the righteous, he, Arises, up, sets himself free, A liberated whole.

Courtesy of The Yeshiva University Poetry Club

Navigating the Floors of the Wilf Library

By Ben Atwood

Warning: this article bases its descriptions of the fifth floor of the Wilf library on its BC (Before [re]Construction) days. Be advised.

During a student's tenure at YU, life will be molded through a fine academic education and an impactful spiritual experience. But tiring effort will prove necessary. He will pore over textbooks, tap endlessly at his keyboard for final First Year Writing essays, and gulp down sushi-salad lunches swiftly so as to not arrive tardily to class. But if you are a Yeshiva University student, no location will be as useful to you as Wilf campus's premiere Gottesman-Pollack Library. Or Pollack-Gottesman Library. Or perhaps it strictly carries the Gottesman name? No one truly knows.

YU's library is prime location for animated study groups, focused tutoring sessions, Netflix-binging, or solitary learning. It is where you will find many of your fellow students taking care of their young-adult duties throughout the semester. You will greet its pen-marked desks, embrace its deafening air-conditioning, and marry its one-height-does-not-fit-all swivel chairs.

Studying in the library leads to a tough choice: on which floor to unpack your books. The library has five floors, with a few subfloors in between, and each harbors its own distinct characteristics that will aid in your choice of study location. To master the library, you must develop expertise in knowledge of what floor optimizes each type of work. Thus, we will climb the steep terrain of the library floor-by-floor, analyzing each according to its unique flavor. I recommend bringing sturdy hiking boots.

A relaxed atmosphere pervades the second floor. There are tables interspersed between rows of computers meant for small study groups or similar joint activities. On this floor, people copy missed notes, debate politics, and plan NCSY shabbatonim while sharing a late-afternoon snack. If you see an index-card sized note that reads "No Food Zone," feel free to use it as a napkin. The library provides many useful resources.

The back of the floor acts similar to a lounge, with neon green, orange, yellow chairs on which to stretch or take a power nap. Natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows illuminates the area to release your endorphins and provide religious inspiration. YU is a yeshiva, after all. The sprawling windows overlook the historic Morgenstern dormitory for upperclassmen and, more importantly, the Stern shuttle bus stop. Feel free to creepily peer out the window in the evenings to see which Beren campus students have decided to spend time in on Amsterdam Avenue. I have been told that if you make eye-contact with one, winking will secure a first date.

The last major use for the second floor is printing. In YU,

the Office of Student Life wishes to make every moment of your college experience as enjoyable as possible, so they have created a game where you must hopelessly search for the three functioning computers to find one from which to print. But do not be fooled: some turn on but are not connected to the network. Many students will dare to accept the challenge, yet few will succeed.

The second floor's lack of silence makes it non-conducive to individual study. Considering its label as floor two, we next ascend to 2A. Lining the edges of 2A are personal work stations theoretically perfect for your focused studying. I write "theoretically," because the unfortunate reality is that it seems the carefree air from the floor beneath somewhat infects this floor as well, and some deem it an adequate spot for passionate phone conversations or casual study-dates. Perhaps save 2A for quick assignments requiring minimal attention.

The stairs take us to floor three, the home of several study rooms that appear to be sound-proof but, if you inquire of anyone in the neighboring area attempting to focus on his textbook, are not. If you join any of YU's plethora of committees or clubs, you may find yourself meeting in one of these whiteboard adorned rooms to discuss pertinent issues or plan ski trips that probably will never occur. BYOM: Bring Your Own Markers.

Next, we meet floor 3A, which appears similar to 2A in structure and draws fewer distractions. I would

**"IF YOU SEE AN INDEX-CARD
SIZED NOTE THAT READS "NO
FOOD ZONE," FEEL FREE TO USE
IT AS A NAPKIN. THE LIBRARY
PROVIDES MANY USEFUL
RESOURCES!"**

recommend it for decently focused work, or, if you can ignore the noise, the slightly more intensive catching up on House of Cards (too soon?).

Our library ascent climaxes at the fourth floor. Before you frantically search the crevices of 3A like a headless chicken or clueless freshman for a main staircase to floor four, beware that no such stairs exist. You must take the auxiliary staircase in one of the corners of the floor or ride the elevator up. You may ask yourself whether logic for such a structural flaw exists, but you should recognize that while Jews frequently find success in many areas, architecture seems to not be one of them.

"Fourth floor quiet study zone." My mouth salivates upon visualizing the freestanding torso-height sign that greets arrivals to floor four. On this floor, I am home at last. Silence becomes law and nonsense is persecuted. Some describe it as a getaway, that untouched brush between the tall trees far into our backyard we would enter as children and imagine our most exotic adventures. Students sit down at an individual study table and become enraptured by the focused flow of productive achievement. On the fourth floor, stillness allows for synapses in our brain to connect in the complex ways that once discovered the light bulb and conjured the theory of relativity. Walden Pond truly lies in Washington Heights.

The rows of white, outlet-laden desks seemingly sprawl until the world's end. On the fourth floor, economics majors read through entire textbooks until one in the morning, biology students' fingers become an unrecognizable blur as they rush to type up their lab reports. During finals season, the area becomes an energized beehive of overly caffeinated college students, and you must arrive at the break of dawn if you wish to secure a seat. For all focused tasks, hone in on the fourth floor, grasp it with a tight fist, and refuse to relinquish its limitless offerings.

Not recently renovated like the other floors, the fifth floor breathes the moldy scent of decaying wood that will infiltrate your senses as soon as you enter. Different from the fourth floor, the fifth floor's serious atmosphere is limited to Rabbi Simon sitting at the first desk with approximately thirty books opened in front of him. At the back tables, Bnei Akiva aficionados organize "educational" ice-skating trips and practice "Zionist" flash mobs. In other areas, Jewish studies students debate the latest Mosaic articles and critique academic texts. These former Hesder-yeshivaniks dub this "night seder." Casual chatter is supported on the fifth floor, though, if luck escapes you, you may find yourself the object of the librarian's once-a-month catharsis of pent-up shushing. Be sure to recognize that if she evicts you from the floor, you merely represent the floor's collective sins. Your potential reaches no limits on the fifth floor: you can even become a Christ figure.

Staircases on the fifth floor lead to the library's peak, 5A. There, personal study desks, similar to that of floor four but different in that they are built of the same old wood that reeks throughout the fifth floor, create a productive study area. However, air conditioning rarely ascends 5A's high altitudes, so I would not recommend working there unless you desire to sweat off a few pounds.

When you begin Yeshiva University, you must capitalize on the many resources at your fingertips to pave a smooth path to success. Allow YU's library to aid you on your quest and provide you with the perfect floor to accomplish your many ambitions. Be sure to choose wisely.

Oh, and the library carries books, as well.

LETTER TO EDITOR, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

among them was that in the face of speakers they disagree with, leftist students on campus "cry," "complain," "name call," and "try to silence" the speakers, rather than "contributing to the conversation" or "opening their ears and minds to a difference of opinion." He then implied that leftists at YU have hosted only one event, claimed that it was a radical event about inciting revolution, and made an attempt to tie the event by the YU College Democrats to antifa and domestic terrorism.

We believe that these gross misrepresentations of our club require rectification and that our proceedings merit clarification.

The first accusation is quite puzzling. Since the event with Dennis Prager was announced more than three weeks ago, there has been absolutely no effort to halt the event by anyone within our ranks. To the contrary, many of us plan to attend the event, and some have even publically encouraged attendance. As a club, we have done precisely what the author suggested we do, and what has always been our modus operandi: we have invited speakers to campus to contribute to the conversation.

The YU College Democrats have—contrary to the author's claim—hosted two events so far this semester.

The first featured a screening of *I Am Not Your Negro*, an Oscar-nominated documentary about racism in America and the lives of civil rights leaders. Conservative students, like all YU students, certainly had the chance to attend this event.

The second event was the one alluded to in the article. However, the author—who did not attend the event—severely mischaracterized it. The event featured two YU professors, one of Art History and one of English, both of whom surely meet the author's criterion of "scholar" at least as much as a radio host. One discussed how art has been utilized for activism in the past, with an emphasis on its form and usage of reappropriation, while the other discussed the meaning of "civil disobedience" and its proper place. At no point during the event was violent protest endorsed, and at no point was antifa even mentioned.

The image on the flyer for the event—which the author somehow misinterpreted as a "call for violence"—was a piece by renowned anonymous street artist Banksy, depicting a protester wielding a bouquet of flowers.

We have one further event scheduled for this semester, which will take place on Tuesday, December 5th, the very day after the Dennis Prager event. This event will feature a senior attorney at The Innocence Project, who will be discussing the organization's work using DNA evidence to

exonerate innocent people wrongfully convicted of crimes they didn't commit—many of whom have already served decades in prison, and some of whom were sentenced to death—as well as how the justice system can be reformed to prevent such injustice from occurring in the first place.

These are the types of events the YU College Democrats run on campus, while YAF invites polemicists, advertises them with provocation, and boasts leaders and speakers who engage in sweeping generalizations and straw-manning of the other side. We too are "confident that reasonable people will be able to see the difference and judge who is contributing to the expansion of debate and conversation in this educational institution."

As always, the YU College Democrats remain—contrary to the author's insinuations—committed to free speech, free thought, the free exchange of ideas, common decency, rationality, open-mindedness, and expanding horizons. Given the author's stated commitment to similar values, we look forward to seeing him on December 5th.

The YU College Democrats

Why School Sucks: How the Commercialization of Higher Education Spoiled the Fun and Robbed Me of My Curiosity

By Aryeh Schonbrun

As I begin yet another year of university studies, and commit myself to yet another barrage of challenging courses, tests, and study regimens, I have begun to bear the brunt of the difficult and unforgiving school-year, the irresponsible notice of my peers and lecturers, and the dull tedium of long days, tiresome nights, and interminable worries that typically characterize a normal educational experience. Though I experienced similar circumstances in high school, I was younger then. The juvenile willingness to pull all-nighters has given way to a mature sense of sleep-entitlement, and, if I could roll with the punches as a child, I now intend to stand up for what I see as an injustice.

What has bothered me for years, and has made my life and studies difficult in turn, I can only describe as a deeper appreciation for the ideals of education and study. I did not happen upon these realizations by chance, nor have I been blessed mightily by having seen the light. In fact, what I have discovered about our corrupt educational system I gained from first-hand experiences and personal frustration over a failing system.

Sociologically, and thus psychologically, the current system of *corrected* meritocracy, of emphasis on a strict puritanical work-ethic and a misgiving for the virtues of leisure and down-time, has struck a blow on the weakest and strongest alike. The weak suffer, overwhelmed by the immensity of an extraordinarily complex universe, and the strong suffer from extremely inflated expectations, desire to perform, and feelings of inequity and solitude. The sociological impact of such an inhumane approach to higher education causes real-world consequences, influencing our society at large, while transforming young adults' lives into a living hell. *The New York Times*, in an extensive piece written for its Magazine section (10/11), "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?", recently documented the rising tide of anxiety disorders overtaking young students throughout the country. Through individual stories, it bears to tell that a large percentage of the anxiety generated in the lives of those who suffer takes root in the generalized performance anxiety promoted by our rigid school systems and encouraged by our myopic fascination with higher education. I do not possess pleasant memories of my encounter with the college acceptance process, nor do I reminisce fondly of the days I spent studying for any of the countless standardized tests that I "needed" to take in order to improve my odds. Add that to the insult of being discriminated against (yes, Jewish quotas *still* exist), and the feelings of helplessness we all experienced waiting for the acceptance emails to arrive. Most American teenagers continue to suffer through the anxieties of adolescence, compounded by the unholy obsession that we have for university. They suffer through the indignity of being selected, whether accepted or rejected, which begs the question: Why?

Why do we expose ourselves, our youth, to the painful experiences of selection and rejection? What brings us to, by default, tell our children that their merit and value will be determined by a bunch of "scholarly" bureaucrats who administrate this selection process, or by exams in general. Don't be fooled by the dreams of "universal" education either, as many studies have shown (recently *The Atlantic* published a piece titled "The Myth of American Universities as Inequality-Fighters," 8/17) that top universities perpetuate inequality, allowing for members of the elite to network in-house, thereby limiting the potential business/employment opportunities of those who find themselves outside the ranks of a relatively few elitist schools. This process and the educational system in general have come to define the rising elites of the post-Capitalist market and political structure. We push our kids to such extremes, thinking, usually merely fancifully, that their extra effort and pain will find due recompense in time through wider opportunities and more successful careers, years down the line. But, we must ask, is it worth it? Whose interests does this system serve?

On the face of it, it seems wholly logical to wish to see one's offspring succeed in the fields of higher education. In fact, over the past few decades, college attendance

has soared, now encompassing more than *half* of all the population (though fully half of them fail to complete a degree) of the proper age-groups. Now, more than ever in the history of modern civilization, the average Joe approaches the subject of higher education with an enthusiasm akin to that of the farmers who settled the vast plains of North America. The untapped treasures of countless minds of innovative entrepreneurs, scientists, and visionaries alike have converged on colleges in the U.S.

"THE UNIVERSITY DEGREE HAS GRADUATED FROM AN HONORARY SYMBOL OF ONE'S ERUDITION TO ONE'S SOLE MEANS OF SECURING A DECENT LIVELIHOOD. FROM THE HEIGHTS OF IDEALISM, EDUCATION HAS FALLEN VICTIM TO THE ILLS OF CONSUMERISM."

and worldwide, and promise to hasten our development as a species and enrich our cultural spirit with sophistication and creativity. However, they do not swarm the quads of our colleges out of a desire to contribute to the beauty of human civilization, they do not engage in tedious, arduous study *just* in order to satisfy their innate desire to further the betterment of humanity, for themselves, their families, and their brothers. One who encounters any such idealism in today's world should scoff at the thin veneer of exaggerated truth, or pity those unfortunate to actually believe in such lofty pursuits. For most of us, education's overriding engine, and our reasoning for engaging in such dutiful and strenuous endeavors, must rely on our most primal instinct, that of mere self-preservation.

As we know, and as we have been told countless times, one cannot easily find a proper job without a university degree. Previously honorable vocations have become outdated, ousted by technology's steady, sometimes faltering, progress. Some professions still in demand (think secretaries, teachers) now demand extra, usually superficial qualifications (see NYTimes 2/19/13 "It Takes a B.A. to Find a Job as a File Clerk"), and higher grossing professions have either become ultra-selective (e.g. MD programs), or heavily saturated (e.g. Law School). Once-honorable jobs have been replaced by menial, limited-skills service opportunities, superfluous administrative positions, and increasing rates of poverty and household debt. When the jobs give out, when employers cannot offer employees meaningful positions, men lose interest in their livelihoods, fall into perpetual underemployment or unemployment, and lay silenced (sometimes drugged), unable to demand more for themselves. The university degree has become a convenient pretext, an arbitrary scalpel that the men with money use to carve away the excess masses of humanity deemed too unintelligent or uneducated to merit in the riches of a globalized, developed economy. As we now see, the university degree has graduated from an honorary symbol of one's erudition to one's sole means of securing a decent livelihood. From the heights of idealism, education has fallen victim to the ills of consumerism.

Which explains why more Americans now invest in university. They do not want to take a chance with their futures. They are told that if they work hard, if they persevere and are granted the golden tickets to adulthood, they will succeed. That the investment will pay for itself in double, double, triple pay. However, the loan-sharks know that too. And so do the university administrators. Tuition has skyrocketed, public funding slashed, and student-debt ballooned in just the past decade! Student debt cannot be bankrupted. You will be strapped like a serf to his master, to the ever-growing burden (as the interest

compounds) of an unbreakable bond to the capitalist infrastructure. Those who can pay off the debt early manage to partially free themselves. Those who wait, who struggle to make payments over longer periods of time, quite literally *slave* their lives away paying interest on a loan that promised more than it usually pays out. Social mobility has *not* risen in the past thirty years in the U.S., and for all the promise of university education, it appears that the average worker would have more successfully managed without an education and without the burden of the debt.

Karl Marx, the father of modern communist thought, describes such a relationship as the source of the ills of modern society. Having replaced the traditional feudal class-structure of nobility and serfdom, capitalism advanced the interests of those with capital, i.e. wealth, who then control political, cultural, and economic spheres. True Capitalism, as Marx writes, need not utterly devastate the lives of the working and middle-class. A booming economy is good for everyone (still better for the rich, but what the heck). However, as Adam Smith concedes, when the economy begins to stall, as it has since the mid-1970's (i.e. the beginnings of a *zero growth/steady-state economy*), "the competition for employment [between labourers] would necessarily be so great as to reduce the wages of labour to what was barely sufficient to keep up the number of labourers [i.e. bare subsistence]" (*Wealth of Nations I*). In short, the workers get hit the worst. Continued technological development brings along with it technological unemployment (when tech replaces jobs), increased competition for jobs outpaces the availability of work thereby lowering wages, and inequality becomes concretized in successive loops. Capital begets capital and the rich get richer. Jobs become scarcer and harder to qualify for. The unhealthy dynamic between employee and employer stands out more and more.

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Marx writes of the psychological trauma experienced by the worker on account of his inability to take possession of his handiwork. Likening the product of his labour to the manifestation of his soul in this world, the capitalist appropriates (i.e. steals) the value of the worker's production, severing ("alienating") him Horcrux-style from his own existence. The worker's existence eerily reminds us of the ghosts of the past, of the victims of humanity.

So too, when you work hard at school, know that your gain is not yours alone. A collection agency, university administrator, or future employer will surely smile at the thought of you wracking your brains for the right answer on a final. They will be assured of their immediate profits (e.g. tuition, books, rent) and of your future viability as a trained worker—and expect to exploit you handsomely. Any rationalization in terms of "respect" for culture pales in comparison to these massive commercial interests (a major focus on STEM just goes to show you). They have stripped education of its romantic qualities, and have soured the experience for all of us. Natural curiosity has lost out to commercial interests, raw creativity to the domination of finance. I mourn the loss of idealism and bemoan our complacency.

I now understand why we must go to school. I wish it was not so.

Sparking Conversation, Not Contempt: Dennis Prager at YU

By Molly Meisels

Partisan divides in American politics grow larger by the day. The polarization separating conservatives from liberals, Republicans from Democrats, and Americans from Americans has stunted political progress in this country. The days of frequent bipartisan conversation are long behind us, and the civility between those with

“THE STATEMENTS MADE BY PERSONALITIES LIKE DENNIS PRAGER AND BEN SHAPIRO ARE MEANT TO SPARK DIVERGENCE. THEY TAKE AMERICA’S ALREADY PREVALENT POLARIZATION AND WEDGE IT FURTHER APART.”

contradictory positions has eroded to mere nothingness. The growing tribalism of conservatism and liberalism is leading America down a dangerous path. We can no longer disagree on policy preference, because we choose to disavow our opponents’ credibility and reliability.

In a time when an imaginary wall divides us, we need cross-party dialogue more than ever. We need to begin understanding each other to promote changes nationwide, and this is especially true on college campuses. There is an increasingly threatening ‘us vs. them’ mentality that both

Shapiro event.

So, who is Dennis Prager?

Dennis Prager is an American conservative talk show host, columnist, and public speaker. He is what college students call a provocateur, a man who targets the left via flame-throwing and belligerent rhetoric. Individuals like Dennis Prager are a growing breed in the United States. They see leftism and liberalism as American ills threatening to tear apart our cherished value system. They choose to combat these perceived ills by bashing everything about the left without thoroughly initiating conversation. The statements made by personalities like Dennis Prager and Ben Shapiro are meant to spark divergence. They take America’s already prevalent polarization and wedge it further apart.

A theme throughout the articles I’ve read by Prager is the calling out of leftist “lies.” He disavows everything said by those on the left of the political spectrum as a myriad of lies – from female oppression to racial repression to climate change. Instead of responding to these leftist ideas with statistics and facts, he calls them lies right off the bat, shutting down the conversation before it even begins. Because if you renounce something, you don’t have to take the time to combat it. This leads Prager fans to mistrust and abhor the media and academia, as well as their liberal peers, causing many college students, some of whom are on the YU campuses, to completely ignore the opinions of their liberal friends. If everything the left says is a lie, then a conversation is pointless. Therefore, anything that begins as a harmless political debate will end in shouting matches, because both sides refuse to acknowledge the

a. On breastfeeding in public: “[T]he sole purpose of women’s breasts is not for nursing babies. It is also to attract and arouse men.”

b. On women as sex objects: “It is completely normal for heterosexual men to see women they are sexually attracted to as sex objects... Lucky is a couple if the man can sexually objectify his partner.”

c. On when a woman isn’t in the mood: Even when a woman isn’t in the mood for relations, she should have sex with her husband. He says that while men don’t always want to go to work, they are obligated to do so. So too, women need to fulfill marital obligations if they want a happy and successful marriage. He claims that wives can’t expect men not to cheat on them if they say no to sex too often.

d. On female depression rates: He believes that females are depressed at higher rates than men because of feminism. He says that, “Feminism raised a woman’s expectations beyond what life can deliver to the vast majority of them.” He states that women delaying their marriage for their self-fulfilling careers depresses them, because careers don’t fulfill women as much as relationships do. Prager believes that depression rates in women arise from their abandonment of marriage and family values.

Prager’s opinions on women and feminism are misconceived, uninformed, and distasteful. Not only does Prager regard women as sex objects who can derive happiness only from the home, but he also unfairly regards men as animalistic creatures unable to control themselves from adultery and inappropriate sexual behaviors. This can render men unaccountable for the actions they commit. Additionally, by using fictitious biological “facts,” Prager states that feminism is the reason behind female depression rates. However, the real reason that females experience depression at higher rates than males is due to hormonal changes during pregnancy, post-partum depression, depression stemming from puberty, and PMS. It is interesting to note, that according to many psychologists, the stresses caused by sexism add to the female depression rates, opposing Prager’s initial assumption that feminism is the cause.

In addition to his aggressive feminist attacks, Prager denies climate change and global warming vehemently, believes that assimilation into American society and abandoning diverse cultures is the only way to decrease crime rates, and, via dog whistle tactics, makes it seem that if we practice ethnic/racial separatism we’d have peace.

I believe it is a student right to bring people like Dennis Prager to the YU campus. I believe that everyone at this school deserves a chance to voice their opinions. However, the Prager event will only tear the conservative and liberal factions of our campus further apart. It will further fuel the flames of ‘us vs them.’ This has already been evident by the Prager event advertising on the Facebook group *YU Marketplace*. The student advertising the event posted, “SNOWFLAKES BEWARE: White Male coming to campus!” The post sparked a frenzy in the comments, leading to threads of individuals quarrelling, only indicative of what is to come.

How can we spark real conversation if all we have is unnecessary hate and provocative individuals like Dennis Prager and Ben Shapiro speaking to our student body?

If conservative students on campus truly want to talk about policy and social issues, we need to have civil and open discussion. The last thing this college needs is a flame-thrower who’ll bash everyone who disagrees with him by writing off their reliability and sensibility. Instead of interacting in manners of insults and degradation, how about we sit down and talk? We all need to set aside our differences to spark positive change in YU and around the country.

My plea to all of those attending the event is to keep an open mind. Listen to what Prager has to say. Hear his words, but don’t internalize them. Don’t laugh when he offends an entire minority population or calls all leftists lunatics. Know that what we need right now – more than anything – is unity, and Dennis Prager will not give us that. When you leave the event, instead of concocting ways of bringing down the leftist machine, think of ways to bring both sides of the political spectrum together, because divided we fall, together we prosper.



liberals and conservatives tend to harbor. This mentality leads to cruel judgments, mistreatment, and abusive rhetoric towards those who disagree with you. Colleges need bipartisan, courteous conversation about issues of substance; we need to join forces to combat the ills that have been plaguing society; we need to spark conversations about economic growth, healthcare, gun control, and minority oppression – and these conversations do not come in the shape of Dennis Prager.

YU’s YAF (Young America’s Foundation) chapter is co-hosting a Dennis Prager speaking event with the YU College Republicans on December 4th. These are the same individuals who organized last year’s controversial Ben

legitimacy of the other.

Besides for calling out the “leftist media,” Prager seems to have an infatuation with attacking feminism. While I have attempted to shy away from my Democratic and liberal connections in this article, I cannot shy away from my feminist ones. As the co-president of the YU Feminists Club, I am thoroughly concerned and dismayed by Prager’s opinions of women and female equality. Prager has said that women who identify as feminists today are “dummies” and complete fools. He bashes feminist theory and thought throughout his articles and his videos, while refusing to have open conversation on the matter. His opinions of women are as follows:

Prager, Shapiro, and Bringing Real Debate to Campus

By Elliot Fuchs

When I first got to this campus I quickly noticed that the political conversation was lackluster. It disappointed me that, in politically important and hostile times like these, people were not talking about the things that matter in the world. This was especially problematic for a campus like ours that holds itself to high intellectual standards.

“THESE ARE CONSERVATIVES WITH AN OPINION. THEY ARE SOMETHING THAT YOU DON’T OFTEN FIND IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING. AND THAT IS WHY YAF IS SO COMMITTED TO BRINGING THEM.”

As a result, last year, I partnered with the College Republicans to arrange for Ben Shapiro – a Harvard-educated attorney – to join us on campus. I don’t think anyone would deny that the speech sparked a conversation. Articles specifically referencing the event and its content were published in *The Commentator*, *The Forward*, *The Daily Wire*, and other prestigious publications.

But, I must say, I was a bit disappointed with the *kind* of conversation it sparked. Instead of an exchange of ideas, I was reminded of the sort of sentiment reminiscent of politics today, filled with loud rhetoric and little substance. What lacked was the intellectually driven commentary I had hoped for.

Almost one year later, the Young America’s Foundation (YAF) has invited Dennis Prager – a Columbia-educated author and scholar – to speak. Some of the reaction has been largely the same.

Since his lecture was announced, Dennis Prager has been compared to Linda Sarsour, David Duke, Roy Moore, and Anne Coulter, by both YU students and alumni.

Here is a quick breakdown of who those people are, for those who are unaware: Sarsour has ties to Hamas, Coulter is an alleged anti-Semite, Moore has been accused of pedophilia, and Duke is a known white supremacist and neo-Nazi.

Let me be clear. If you are comparing a Jewish political commentator who spends his time making videos about the Ten Commandments to a radical Islamist or a neo-Nazi, then it is not Conservatives who are the problem. The speakers and lectures are not the problem. *You* are the problem.

Furthermore, those who are confused would benefit from a history lesson. Namely, that white supremacists typically don’t enlist Jews as their allies.

There is a serious problem in this country if people are comparing academic scholars to people with diametrically



opposed views from those scholars. What’s worse, it seems that this type of reactionary response is aimed specifically at YAF speakers because they are conservative.

If you are a Leftist who disagrees with the speakers YAF has brought to campus, there are two ways you can react. You can do what you have done thus far. Cry, complain, and go after the students who have spent hours making incredibly difficult events like this happen. Alternatively, you can invite a liberal speaker to campus as a progressive counterweight. You can contribute to the conversation instead of trying to silence it. Then we can benefit from a free-market of ideas. But, alas, the Left never was a big fan of the *free* market.

Instead, the only Leftist events conservative students have the chance to attend are ones about “starting a revolution” through “civil disobedience” that are advertised with a picture of a masked man resembling ANTIFA, which seems more like a call for violence than for competing political ideas.

Dennis Prager is reasonable. Ben Shapiro is reasonable. If you are looking for organizations worthy of outrage, ANTIFA – classified as a domestic terrorist organization – is not reasonable. This is the contrast between left-wing students and the YAF chapter on this campus. I am confident that reasonable people will be able to see the difference and judge who is contributing to the expansion of debate and conversation in this educational institution.

That is why I decided to bring a YAF chapter to this campus. Because YAF is committed to making the general

populace aware of the Left’s blind ignorance fueled by political ideology instead of common decency and rationality – lecture by lecture, event by event, movement by movement.

Shapiro and Prager have authored many books on conservative thought. One has the second-largest podcast in the country, while the other is a nationally-syndicated talk show host. These are not white supremacists, these are not terrorists, these are not provocateurs.

These are conservatives.

These are conservatives with an opinion. They are something that you don’t often find in an academic setting. And that is why YAF is so committed to bringing them. The boilerplate left-wing tactic to always refer to these speakers as “divisive” is a cop-out. The credentials of the two individuals YAF has arranged to bring to campus are second-to-none. But it is common for the modern Left to point fingers and name call instead of opening their ears and minds to a difference of opinion.

I can’t even say that I agree with *everything* Shapiro or Prager says. I don’t think any free thinker agrees with everything any one person says. But it is specifically the topics where I and someone like Dennis Prager disagree that I will be focusing on the most when he speaks, because that is the way to best learn something new and expand my political horizons. I wish the Leftists would join me.

I am confident that as long as liberty prevails, speakers with a broad range of viewpoints will come to campus.

But for now, I’ll see you on December 4th.



On Inclusion and its Future

By Kee Frishman

Much of the typical morning at YU remains the same. Groggy-eyed students still flood Amsterdam Avenue trying to make it in time for their 9AM class. Many wield a fresh cup of coffee as they finish their breakfast from Nagel. And a few, reminded of the past night's stress, decide to catch up with friends

There is one thing that's different this year. Today, a

"INCLUSION ISN'T ABOUT OFFERING A HAND TO AN UNDER-PRIVILEGED POPULATION. IT'S AN OUTLOOK THAT FOCUSES ON THE STRENGTHS AND ABILITIES—NOT WEAKNESSES—OF A PERSON; A PHILOSOPHY THAT BELIEVES THAT THIS WORLD IS A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN WHEN PEOPLE INTERACT WITH AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER, REGARDLESS OF ANY PHYSICAL OR COGNITIVE LIMITATION."

few of those drinking coffee have Down syndrome; one of the students eating a bagel arrives in wheelchair, and a couple of those still lingering on 185th street have autism.

An accomplishment that wouldn't have been dreamt of just 30 years ago, people with intellectual disabilities are now students at Yeshiva University. If there were ever a reason to wear that emblem-emblazoned YU sweatshirt with a little more pride, this would be it. And though this institution and Makor (a program of Women's League Community Residences, a social services organization supporting people with disabilities) deserve much praise, the underlying message of disability inclusion is perhaps more significant.

It goes without saying that the Makor curriculum will have a tremendous impact on the special needs community. Higher education—and many post-high school pursuits in general—have simply not existed for a large number of those with disabilities, limiting their opportunities for future success. Now, however, equipped with the proper knowledge, instruction, and vocational training, graduates from Makor can realistically earn employment and become more productive in a mainstream setting.

Even greater is the sense of confidence that this program will instill in its students. For a group of people that are reminded time and again of all of the things that they "can't do," acceptance into a university is an achievement like none other. Just like their brothers and sisters before them, a young adult with special needs is finally able to study Torah alongside Rabbeim in the Beit Midrash, complain about which restaurants are not included on the Caf card, and proudly—and yes, maybe even sometimes mockingly—proclaim "Nowhere but here."

But inclusion isn't about offering a hand to an under-

privileged population. It's an outlook that focuses on the strengths and abilities—not weaknesses—of a person; a philosophy that believes that this world is a better place to live in when people interact with and learn from one another, regardless of any physical or cognitive limitation.

The values of inclusion are actually quite similar to a major goal of any university: to provide a space for diversity of thought, expression, and background. By engaging with people who see life from a totally different

perspective, a student will become more knowledgeable and sympathetic. Unfortunately, because this sort of "diversity" has historically neglected an entire population, a person's scope of understanding has been rather limited.

Many of YU's new Makor students have overcome significant challenges, shrugged off stereotypes and "limitations," and proven themselves capable of all sorts of accomplishments. And sure, not all of them have had such experiences. Some are extra witty and creative, while others can rattle off any number facts and statistics. Yet, all of them have something to teach and contribute. YU is a stronger institution because a young adult with Down syndrome majoring in "Office and Business Studies" can have discussions in the library with students studying Accounting or Management. It's a more compassionate, more thoughtful, and more introspective university because both an able-bodied young adult and his wheelchair-bound peer can share their life-experiences in the cafeteria.

Ultimately, though, pros and cons and explanations as to why those with special needs are entitled to a seat in the college classroom shouldn't really be necessary. Too often it seems that the "included" party must always bear the burden of proof as to why they belong. The rationale is simple: Because of their status as people, as Jews, and as knowledge-seeking young adults, they deserve a place in this university.

What is also clear from the YU/Makor partnership is that inclusion doesn't require an institution or person to make extreme changes in order to welcome those with special needs. It just takes the right mindset and a little bit of creativity.

A heartwarming example of such an attitude can be

seen in Netflix's *Atypical*. Because of the loud noises, Sam, an 18-year-old with autism, never attended his school dance. But, at the insistence of his family and friends, the administration decides that Sam should also be able to participate. The solution is a "silent" themed ball in which everyone still dances to the same song but with the music played on headphones—allowing both Sam and his friends to enjoy the event. Inclusion doesn't imply that someone else "gets less" or others need to be inconvenienced; it only requires the awareness that a dance, a university, or anything else would be better off if it were accessible to all.

More and more institutions are recognizing the value and importance of inclusion. Summer camps wanting to offer the most enriching, growth-oriented atmospheres are opening their doors to people with disabilities. Shuls, realizing that *Tefillah* is far more powerful and inspiring when all of its members can participate, are constructing ramps to allow for access to the *bimah* and adapting *Siddurim* for those with visual impairments. And Yeshiva University, in a remarkably inspiring step in disability inclusion, is declaring that higher-education ought to be one more place in which people with special needs belong.

The enrollment of individuals with disabilities into a college system puts the dream of a fully inclusive world a little bit more within reach. Many of the so called "differences" between those with and without disabilities are purely structural. If a child in a mainstream preschool never met a boy with Down syndrome, or if a typically-functioning 7th grader never spoke to a person with Cerebral palsy, it's no surprise that such a person will look foreign and that conversation would be difficult. It's barriers and labels—not inherent flaws—that prevent meaningful relationships.

But today, students stand before a great and promising future in which such obstacles—like non-inclusive campuses and summer programs—do not exist. Today's students will graduate university and build families with the knowledge and understanding that people with and without disabilities can not only achieve many of the same things but create a better community when they're together. Naturally, future children of all abilities will interact on the playground, in the bunkhouse, at sleep overs and birthday parties, in synagogues, and colleges. In due time, the lines dividing different types of people will fade away.

The "World of Tomorrow" is far more than just a place where people with special needs share a campus and eat at the same bagel shops before class. It's a world in which kids grow up befriending their neighbors in wheelchairs. A world where a "disability" matters a whole lot less, and asking oneself whether this person make me laugh, smile, and feel supported matters a whole lot more. With some activism, determination, and creativity, a bright future lies ahead.





Never. Stop. Commentating.

Got something to say?
Email Alexander.strauss@mail.yu.edu

The Road to Heaven or Hell?

A Brief Critique of President Trump's Infrastructure Plan

By Ilan Hirschfield

On the evening of Tuesday, August 15, 2017, President Donald Trump held a remarkably heated press conference outside Trump Tower in Manhattan in which he discussed the bloody clashes between white nationalists and counter-protesters that precipitated the previous weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia. Since watching a video of the conference, I have worried whether those who watched the conference remember that President Trump not only explored race relations on that night but also explored fixing the United States infrastructural system. While race relations hold strong relevance to American society, U.S. infrastructure does as well.

Given that Matthew Haller recently in this paper explored the other side of the coin through writing about American white nationalists' occasionally intertwining racializing and anti-Semitic roots, I wanted to discuss President Trump's infrastructure plan for the United States. While the strategy to fix the country's ailing infrastructural system is reasonable enough, I disagree with part of it due to Mr. Trump's lack of vision in anticipating said portion's potential pitfalls and obstacles.

Now, you might ask yourself—what exactly constitutes infrastructure? According a statement published by a 1987 United States National Research Council panel, “public works infrastructure” refers to “both specific functional modes – highways, streets, roads, and bridges;



mass transit; airports and airways; water supply and water resources; wastewater management; solid-waste treatment and disposal; electric power generation and transmission; telecommunications; and hazardous waste management – and the combined system these modal elements comprise.” Put succinctly, public infrastructure means the basic physical and organizational structures necessary to operate a society. Governments at the federal, state, and local levels have the charge of maintaining and developing an efficient and effective public infrastructure.

Unfortunately for its citizens, the United States finds itself running an ineffective public infrastructure. According to a study conducted last year by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association reported by USA Today, 58,495 out of 609,539 bridges in the US—almost ten percent—were considered structurally deficient and desperately in need of repairs. Inspecting the overall system sours the prospects even further. According to the “Infrastructure Report Card” released earlier this year by the American Society of Civil Engineers, a leading professional civil engineering society, the US's public infrastructure received a hardly flattering grade of a D+.

Between 2015 and the present moment, Trump has made one fact (among many) very clear: the U.S. has a broken infrastructural system, and he wants to be the president to fix that system. He mentioned public infrastructure numerous times along the campaign trail, during the presidential debates, and since the election he

has delivered three substantial speeches on the topic.

Trump put this desire on full display during a speech he gave at the Department of Transportation this past June. He highlighted the fact that environmental impact reviews can take upwards of five years, sometimes twenty years, to complete, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars. While this response represents only one prong of Trump's infrastructure plan, it holds significantly more credibility than “I have a plan. A very good plan. My plan is so good.”

Two months after giving this speech, Trump signed an executive order (EO 13807) directing federal agencies to coordinate those reviews, aiming to complete them within two years. The heart of Mr. Trump's plan gives the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), an office within the White House, the authority to develop tools and scoring criteria to review and evaluate federal agencies' speed and efficiency in processing project approvals. One of those tools, the “One Federal Decision,” mandates a “lead Federal agency” guiding each project through the review and authorization processes and ensuring that every single agency records each decision made connected to the project in one Record of Decision (ROD).

While Mr. Trump correctly deserves credit for crafting an ambitious plan containing concrete steps, the plan contains considerable potential procedural and environmental obstacles and problems.

For starters, Trump's proposed “lead Federal agency” tool could lead to more, not less, administrative

there, though.

Granting the CEQ the authority to review agencies based on their performance in processing project approvals represents too large a surge in discretionary power. Effectively, the office can now freely critique agencies for dragging their feet on processing approvals. Even if those agencies have truly worked in a timely manner and can provide documentation supporting that claim, the CEQ will have still done its damage. Such potentially blistering critique of our government's vital arteries threatens its public image, compounding on Mr. Trump's already heated accusations levelled throughout his campaign, even at his own inauguration, that the federal government has effectively twiddled its thumbs for decades and brought about no effective changes.

However, since 1970, the U.S. government has brought about significant change in its environmental policy. On January 1st of that same year, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), outlining the nation's environmental policies and goals, establishing provisions for federal agencies to enforce those policies and goals, and establishing the CEQ. Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), NEPA's main drafter who led the bill through the Senate in 1969, wrote with an explicit purpose in mind of ensuring the equal weighting of environmental factors in federal agencies' decision-making processes in the relevant policy areas. During his speech delivered in June of this year, Mr. Trump discussed how ensuring this equity supposedly went awry in writing the environmental report for a proposed eighteen-mile-long road in Maryland. The president briefly showed the audience the report, split between three immense binders. He leafed through its pages, mentioning in passing that no one would actually read the entire report. Trump also claimed that these dense reports could be replaced by “just a few simple pages” relaying the exact same information and that these reports “make you do unnecessary things.”

While Mr. Trump has a valid point in drawing attention to colossal environmental reports for infrastructure projects, ameliorating this splitting headache does not necessarily mean distilling reports down to, say, five pages or less. I have significant doubts that any Congressperson, Democrat or even Republican, would believe they have expressed fidelity to safeguarding the environment by enforcing such a page limit. Mr. Trump's modifying his vision of how much he could speed up the infrastructure process without compromising on environmental considerations would likely lead to more legislators willing to get onboard with his plan, such as Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) (who took Scott Pruitt, nominee for administrator of the EPA, to task during his confirmation hearing regarding the strength to which human activity affects climate change) and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) (who expressed significant concern about the environmental knowledge of Kathleen Hartnett White, during her confirmation hearing as chair of the CEQ, after she claimed skepticism of evidence linking carbon emissions to global warming). Such softer changes could include limits on time spent writing these reports and number of pages taken up for them.

Despite the fact that I just outlined the perceived flaws in part of Trump's infrastructure plan, I do not point out those flaws in order to deride him. I point them out with the express intent of allowing quicker, yet still responsible, building of new infrastructure to occur, benefitting the entire nation in the process. As Ashley Halsey III reported for the Washington Post at the end of September of this year, health-care changes and tax reform experienced significant delays in development during the first nine months of this year. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the Democrats hoped to earn a desirable legislative win for both Congress and the White House in the form of a \$500 billion tax dollar investment in infrastructure over the coming five years.

While Trump's infrastructure plan represents only one policy in a myriad of choices, examining the obstacles can prompt Congress to meaningfully critique the plan in order to improve it, not necessarily to scrap it, and to partner with the President in crafting sound and thoughtful legislation. May our government help build America great again, one brick, pipe, and railway track at a time.

backlogging. Given that the CEQ will appoint a lead agency for a project, how much time will it have to make that decision? Must it exercise sufficient accountability, if any at all, through explaining its choice to the President or to Congress? Put differently, asking these questions uncovers a potential vicious cycle of announcing nominations and defending them, leading back to the drawing board should the President or Congress perceive the CEQ's choice inappropriate given policy considerations.

In a similarly redundant and recursive manner, it remains unclear what advantage the ROD brings to the approval process beyond organizing every individual decision made about the project in one centralized area. The agencies involved with a project can simply communicate between themselves on decisions when information or questions relevant to two or more agencies arise.

While granting a thoughtful project approval requires such communication, it must take place in a context that treats each member as an equal working towards a common goal. While the reality of collaborative work dictates that some agencies will take a more involved role than others, appointing a de-facto “leader” Therefore, using a “lead agency” concept for projects undermines “underling” departments' credibilities, posing a checks-and-balance-esque threat to their power as they stand independent from the lead agency.

The potential degradation of agencies does not stop

A Separation of Work and Man

By Samuel Gelman (Houston, Texas)

On October 5th, 2017, Harvey Weinstein was accused of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment by dozens of women. What followed has been an unprecedented avalanche of accusations and allegations against many powerful figures in the political and entertainment spheres with no end in sight. Brett Ratner, Roy Moore, Andrew Kreisberg, Senator Al Franken, and Ryan Seacrest are just some of the men that have been accused, and, by the time this is published, many more will most likely have joined them.

The entire ordeal has been tragic on multiple accounts. Of course, the most devastating aspect of this tragedy is the stories that these women are sharing regarding all of the trauma that they are and have been going through. Sexual assault and sexual harassment should never be tolerated, and it is encouraging and refreshing to see that many of the parties involved are not letting these men continue with their lives as if nothing has happened. Brett Ratner and Andrew Kreisberg have been suspended by Warner Bros., the Republican National Committee has withdrawn financing for Moore's campaign, and Senator Al Franken has called for an ethic investigation into his own conduct. While this will never undo the damage done or excuse the men for what they did, the hope is that these measures will prevent these men from using their power to take advantage of women, and help create a culture where this type of behavior is no longer tolerated.

At the same time, and of much, much less importance, there is another aspect to this tragedy. Say what you want about these men; you cannot ignore their achievements and accomplishments. Ryan Seacrest is one of the most successful television hosts ever, having hosted all 15 seasons of *American Idol* and helping launch the careers of Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, Jennifer Hudson, and Jordin Sparks. Andrew Kreisberg is one of the most successful television producers of the decade, with his credits including *Arrow*, *The Flash*, and *Supergirl*. Al Franken is (or was) one of the most powerful and well-respected senators, with many notable accomplishments including health care reform, improving the care of United States veterans, and helping confirm Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court. These are (or were) great men who accomplished great things, and, while it does not excuse their behavior, it is sad to see them fall like this.

With all that these men have accomplished, we, the public, are put in an odd position. On the one hand, we find the acts done by these men despicable and want nothing to do with them. On the other hand, it is hard to just cut out these men from our lives. Their achievements are at a national level, and thus hard to avoid. This dichotomy leaves us with the question of what to do with the works and achievements of these men. Do we boycott and blacklist them, or do we allow ourselves to enjoy what they have provided for us so far? Can the work be separated from the man, or is the creator intrinsically connected to his creation?

This is a timeless debate that has taken various forms throughout the years, and has especially rocked the entertainment industry with two main sides battling it out. Unionists claim that the man cannot be separated from his work, no matter the act that he is being accused/convicted of. The creation is corrupted just by being associated with the accused, and, therefore, it must be banned and blacklisted by all. Separatists, on the other hand, claim that the work can be separated from the man as a man's actions do not define everything he has worked on.

While the unionist argument is noble, it fails to resonate on multiple accounts. For unionists, one of the major reasons why they call for boycott or blacklisting is because they don't want the sexual predator to profit off the work that he created. However, they fail to recognize that there is always more than one individual involved in any movie or TV show. Take *House of Cards* and its lead actor, Kevin Spacey, who is yet another Hollywood celebrity who has been accused of multiple counts of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Spacey has done terrible things and it is reassuring that Netflix has removed him from all future plans involving the show. However, he is not the only actor involved in the show. Robin Wright, Kate Mara, Corey Stoll, and Mahershala Ali all are or were starring on the show at some point. To boycott *House of Cards* would

strip them of the royalties that come in any time the show is streamed or purchased. Why should they be punished for what their colleague did?

Even if unionists want to say that actors make plenty of money and that one doesn't have to be concerned with their financial well-being, that still leaves the hundreds of directors, producers, writers, camera men and women, production designers, caterers, costume designers, set designers, drivers, and lighting technicians that work for *House of Cards* with nothing, not to mention the Netflix employees that could be affected by this loss of revenue for the streaming service. Surely they should not be punished just because Kevin Spacey committed these terrible acts.

“[LOUIS C.K.’S] WORK CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM HIS ACTIONS BECAUSE HIS ACTIONS HAVE TAINTED THE VALUES HE PREACHED.”

Furthermore, just because someone involved in the work has committed terrible acts does not make the project inherently bad. When it comes to movies and televisions, every project has major themes, morals, and lessons that it wants to teach. If those themes and morals are unrelated to the acts of the accused, then there really should be no problem watching those movies or shows. The lesson remains untouched and pure.

Once again *House of Cards* serves as a good example of this. The political drama is good TV that has been nominated for Outstanding Drama Series at the Emmy awards multiple times. The show provides its audience with lessons about politics and power that are important to the political discussion today. These lessons are unrelated to Spacey's actions and thus can still stand regardless of what he did. Allowing Spacey's acts to ruin that for the public just makes a bad situation worse, with no one gaining anything. The values the show teaches are still pure, untouched by the corruption.

But what if the values of the work have been corrupted? What if what the man did does contradict what the show stands for? This is the question separatists are now asking themselves in regard to Louis C.K., a comedian/actor who has directed, written, produced, and starred in many successful projects over the last decade.

C.K. has been accused of sexual misconduct with at least five women, including exposing himself and masturbating in front of them. What makes his case different from the rest of the accused is that his works deal with the exact things he is being accused of.

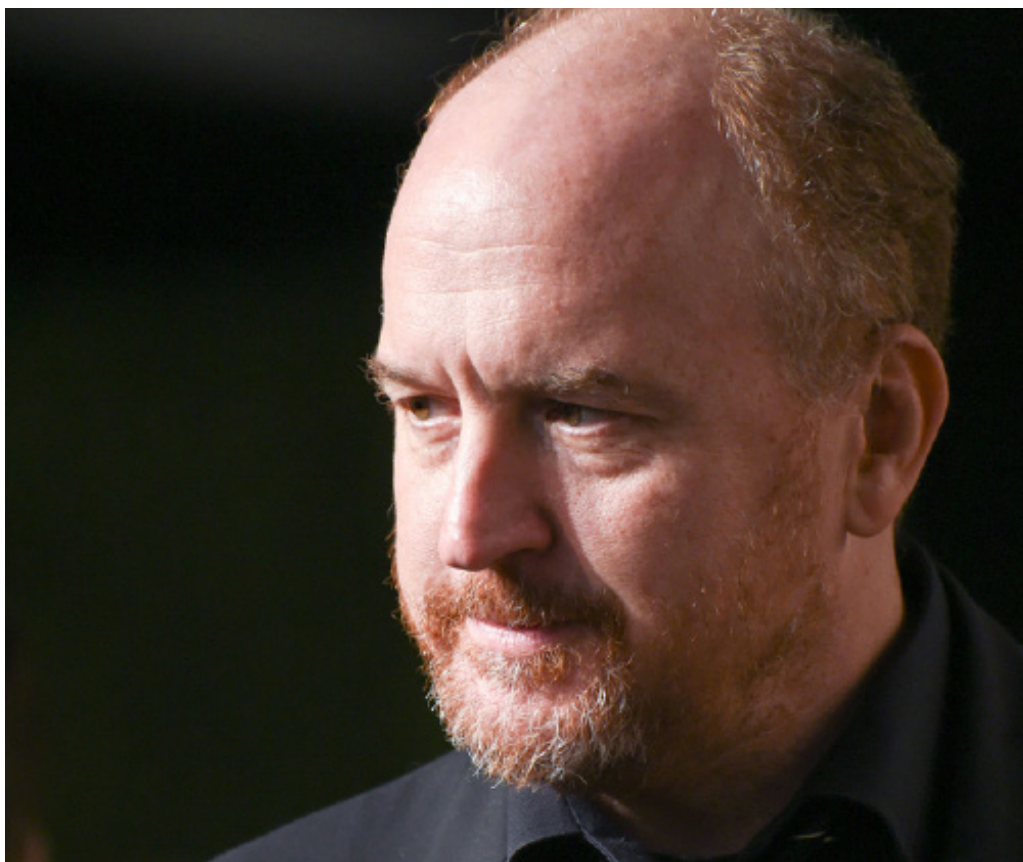
Louis C.K. is best known for his brutally honest humor about sex and masturbation. His stand-up routines are full of jokes about his own personal sexual encounters, while *Louie*, a show loosely based on C.K.'s life in which he directs, writes, produces, and stars, focuses a lot on explicit and odd sexual scenarios. C.K. used these projects to criticize the male sexual ego and the ways in which men seek sexual pleasure. It was frank, honest, and gross, and audiences loved it.

However, accusations against C.K. and his own

confession have put all of his works into new light. The humor has gone from frank and honest to feeling more of a way for C.K. to defend his now-revealed actions, as if he has been preparing for this moment his entire career. In one of his stand-up routines, C.K. talks about how he is sick of all the perverted sexual thoughts that go through his mind all day everyday. “It makes me into an idiot,” he says. “I’m jacking off to morons...It’s just a dumb part of life that I’m sick of.” He then continues, saying that while women also “get to have these [sexual] thoughts, I have to have them. You’re [women] a tourist in sexual pervasion. I’m a prisoner there.”

Then there is the infamous scene in *Louie*, in which C.K.'s character goes on TV to debate masturbation against a young, innocent-looking, female, Christian activist. Louis is introduced as an “aficionado in masturbation... who even brags about it,” to which he responds with a matter-of-fact nod and a slight grin. As the debate begins, Louie makes the argument for masturbation, stating that “it’s easy, it’s fun, and nobody gets hurt.” However, as the activist continues to defend her position and makes Louie question his happiness, he bursts into a rant, saying that “You don’t know me and you don’t know God. God probably hates people like you...I masturbate and I’m proud of it, and God’s happy. And later I’m going to masturbate and I’m going to think about you.”

These incidents are typical of his routines, which is why it is so hard to watch his work now and why the unionists are right when it comes to C.K. His work cannot be separated from his actions because his actions have tainted the values he preached. His frank critique has morphed into a defiant act against those that would question his behavior. His claims that he is a “sexual prisoner” and that “God probably hates people” that attack those who



masturbate, are now seen as excuse for his behavior. He is not responsible for his actions, but some other force, be it his subconscious, God, or those that try to point out his flaws. All this time, while he has critiqued his audience and made them reflect on their actions, it seems he has never reflected upon himself. He has become a hypocrite who does not follow the values that he himself preached, making his work hypocritical, corrupt, and valueless.

At one point in the debate, the activist says the following to Louie: “I know you are a comedian, so this is probably so funny for you.” Louie responds with a simple “yeah, it’s pretty funny.” The activist then looks at Louie not with anger but with pity. “That’s so sad,” she says, “that you don’t know the darkness that you live in.” One can only hope that after all these allegations and accusations, Louis C.K. and the others like him do a some introspection and examine the darkness they live in, as well as all the darkness they have brought to their victims and their families.

Are you a College Student Looking to Invest in Stocks, Bonds, or Bitcoin?

By Daniel Elias

Most typical college students spend their time studying, participating in clubs, and hanging out with friends. Yet, there is always a group of students out there eager to make some money. For those interested in a deeper understanding of the market and figuring out which stocks or currencies to invest in, or to avoid, this article may be beneficial to you.

If you invested money in the U.S stock market this past year, you probably earned a nice return on that investment, despite fears of a post-election slump. Since January, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has reached five 1000-point benchmarks, the most in a single year since the creation of the index. The S&P 500 recently surpassed 2600, also a new milestone. You might think that you've been so successful this year, that you're ready to start your own hedge fund. But, if you ask anyone from a Wall Street analyst to someone with minimal knowledge of the U.S stock market, most will agree that stock prices are extremely high today, and perhaps overpriced, which is concerning for any investor. So, before you invest your entire life savings in the market, it is important to understand that equities have climbed to new highs and investing in equities is starting to become very risky. So, should one stay away from stocks right now, and look for alternatives?

Two notable metrics used to analyze the current valuation of the stock market are the cyclically adjusted P/E ratio and the trailing P/E ratio. Robert Shiller, a winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Economics and professor at Yale University is known for his development of the Cyclically Adjusted P/E Ratio (CAPE) in 1990. The CAPE ratio calculates the price of the S&P 500 divided by its average earnings over a period of 10 years, adjusted for inflation, and is used to value the market and predict potential returns. In simpler terms, the ratio is the current price of a stock, divided by its average earnings over the last ten years. If a ratio is relatively high compared to similar companies, it means that the stock price may be overvalued. On the other hand, if the ratio is relatively low, it may signal that the stock is undervalued. When attempting to value the entire market, one may look at the prices and earnings of all the stocks in the S&P 500, to try and get a general sense of the economic situation. It is important to note that the CAPE ratio has averaged 16.8 since the creation of the S&P 500, and only on Black Tuesday in 1929 and at the peak of the dot-com bubble in 2000 has the multiple climbed above 30. Both situations resulted in a major market downturn. The CAPE ratio currently sits at 31.6, which hints that the market is due for another correction. However, some argue that the ratio

is not a good metric at the present time because it factors in the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008, which skews the CAPE ratio. Perhaps the classic P/E ratio may offer a better picture of the current economic situation.

The Classic P/E Ratio, also known as the Trailing P/E Ratio, differs from the CAPE ratio by using one year's

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earnings rather than a full decade's worth. It currently sits at a multiple of 25, almost 10 points above its historical average. Right now, people are willing to invest \$25 in the stock market in order to earn \$1 per year. Perhaps, people should turn to risk-free bonds. To one's surprise, bonds may be a factor in the inflated stock prices. Right now, the Treasury yield sits at historic lows and offers almost half the return of stocks. It seems as if investors don't have a great place to turn. I must include that many argue that the classic P/E ratio is not a great indicator of the market, either, since one year may not be enough to understand the conditions of a company. Although the P/E sits at 25, it is still far from the peak of 123.73 (housing bubble) and 43 (dot-com bubble). Nevertheless, P/E ratios never seem to stay so far above average for such extended periods of time.

In order for the market to return to its average, one of two things must happen: either the price of stocks must come way down, or earnings must enjoy continuous increases. When looking at historically high P/E multiples, the first scenario seems much more likely than the second.

With stocks at record highs and bond yields and interest rates at record lows, investors have few good options. This brings up the possibility of investing in Bitcoin.

Bitcoin, a digital currency not regulated by the government and also untraceable, seems like a great alternative to stocks and bonds. Most people are intrigued by Bitcoin but are reluctant to invest in it. Perhaps, it's because Bitcoin is highly speculative and the price has

been exceptionally volatile.

Robert Shiller, in his bestselling book, *Irrational Exuberance* published in 2000, famously predicted the dot-com bubble. Shiller is also renowned for predicting the housing bubble a few years later in 2003. It is, therefore, worthwhile to pay attention to his thoughts on when the next bubble may occur. When asked about the best current example of irrational exuberance or speculative bubbles in an interview, Shiller quickly explained that it was Bitcoin. He believes the reason Bitcoin is up more than 1000% this year is mainly that of the speculation, mystery, and interest surrounding it. If you purchased 100 bitcoins for \$10 in 2010, you would be a millionaire today. Shiller explains that Satoshi Nakamoto, a supposed genius, invented the cryptocurrency called Bitcoin. Once people saw that Bitcoin's investors were profiting from this phenomenon, they became intrigued by the cryptocurrency. Satoshi Nakamoto, as it turns out, is a totally fictitious creation and the true identity of the inventor remains unknown. This only adds to the mystery and intrigue of Bitcoin. It is clear that Bitcoin follows the perfect pattern of a bubble. It can even be compared to the tulip mania that swept through the Netherlands in the 17th century when people decided that tulips were worth the same price as their houses, only to realize one day that tulips were just pretty flowers.

Similarly, because of the mystique of Bitcoin, speculators have caused prices to skyrocket. Is a single Bitcoin worth \$100,000, \$10,000 or \$0? According to Robert Shiller, it's fundamentally worth nothing. That being said, is Bitcoin a good investment today?

Although the economy is robust, it seems there is no clear-cut option for where best to invest your money. Shiller's CAPE ratio and the classic P/E ratio show glaring warning signs that the stock market may be significantly overvalued. Bond yields sit at record lows and don't offer much incentive for long-term investment. Lastly, Bitcoin is the most speculative investment since the dot-com bubble, and we all know how that ended. So, where does that leave us college students with a drive to make money but no real investing experience?

Although I am no expert, I would advise that people do their due diligence before making any investments. Check out companies whose products or services are in demand and have the potential for future growth. Do your research and pick companies that are financially stable and have a high intrinsic value.

The advantage of investing when you're young, means you have time to ride out the storms. You can't time the market, so proceed with caution, and bear in mind that historically the stock market has been the best source of return on investment.



Naked Economics and the Free Market

By Daniel Ferber

This past week I finished reading *Naked Economics* by Charles Wheelan and immediately made a mental note to recommend it to anyone who has an interest in economics, human nature, business, or psychology. If your understanding of economics can be boiled down to a rudimentary understanding of the laws of supply and demand, yet you have a desire to expand your understanding on the subject, this is the book for you. In *Naked Economics*, Wheelan breaks down some of the most daunting concepts of economics and conveys them in a simple, yet engaging manner.

Once economics is stripped of the intellectual jargon that it's generally associated with, what remains is a simple definition which operates under a single assumption. Simply stated, economics is the study of maximizing efficiency and getting the most out of any given situation. It operates under the assumption that people generally act in a manner in which they feel their utility, or benefit, will be maximized. Before delving into the content of this book, this definition and assumption are vital to have a firm grasp on how economics impacts every aspect of life.

Wheelan illustrates the practical relevance of economics, within the context of his definition, with an amusing, yet compelling statistical anecdote. Since 1905, the average number of children born dropped approximately 45 percent. This drop in childbirth was caused by the progressive and steep ascent regarding the costs involved in raising children. These mothers weighed all the benefits and detriments of having more children and concluded that their utility would ultimately be maximized with fewer children. It is important to clarify that economics, specifically the concept of utility maximization, doesn't necessarily motivate selfishness, but rather it enables wiser decision-making. This is evident in the fact that these benefits were not solely manifested in fewer expenses and more opportunity in the workplace, but were also found in evading a less privileged life for their children. This precisely explains the trend of the drop in fertility; women felt that, with all factors taken into account, their utility was most effectively maximized when having fewer children.

While this anecdote represents economics in relation

to everyday decision-making, Wheelan stresses that economics and its relation to the market is of equal importance. In understanding how the two directly align an understanding of a free market is vital. A free market is a system in which the prices of goods and services fluctuate based on what consumers desire, thus being governed by the rules of supply and demand. He postulates that because the free market caters to what people feel will maximize their utility; the market tends to be self-correcting. This can be simply explained as follows: A free market is one that, regardless of the

"SIMPLY STATED, ECONOMICS IS THE STUDY OF MAXIMIZING EFFICIENCY AND GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ANY GIVEN SITUATION."

situation, finds channels to provide goods that are desired by the consumer. When an event occurs which affects the exchange between the market and consumer, the market will naturally adjust to assure that the buyer's utility is satisfied. This phenomenon can only occur once the buyer and seller are left alone from government regulation, primarily in the form of determined fixed prices for goods and services. Wheelan conceptualizes this notion through a fascinating, yet realistic, chain of events. If an incident occurs causing the price of oil production to rise, a series of procedures will subsequently transpire. First people will drive less, then they will buy more fuel-efficient cars, next companies will introduce fuel-alternative solutions, and eventually as the demand for oil mitigates the price of oil follows suit. Wheelan describes this instance of market self-correction and supply and demand as an ideal model of market economics.

Wheelan introduced his book stating that with a comprehensive understanding of economics, people can live their lives with an enhanced efficiency regarding everyday decisions making. This is because it provides

a tool in which one can approach an array of questions such as the desirability of an investment opportunity, the decision of whether or not to attend college or graduate



school, the benefits and costs of alternative careers, or the likely impacts of geopolitical events. This book will open doors to the world of economics and will provide an understanding of the factors behind decision-making and its effects on a day-to-day basis on a micro and macro-scale.

Career Center Corner: Delaying the Job Offer

By Dr. Diane Safer

I just got offered a job but I have other interviews lined up in the next few weeks with other companies I also want to consider. What should I do?

Congratulations! Getting a job offer is great news!

First, reflect on your existing offer by considering all aspects of the offer. Ask yourself some important questions – in this position, will you be doing what you want to do? Is this a company in which you can see yourself growing and developing? Are there opportunities for professional development? Does the company culture fit you well? Finally, do you feel the compensation is fair? Consider not just the salary but the whole package – do you have excellent benefits? Are you offered an acceptable number of vacation days? Are you able to take off for all the Jewish holidays? Does the company provide 401K (retirement) matching?

To answer these questions, do research about this opportunity. Use websites, such as Glassdoor.com, for salary information. Reach out to YU alums, found via LinkedIn, about company culture. Speak with the company's human resources department to discuss benefits. If you are considering negotiating for something more, such as an increase in salary or any additional benefits, make sure your requests are absolutely reasonable and within expected considerations for this position and its level.

Once you have determined that this job is definitely

a position that works well for you, your needs and your interests, consider saying yes now. However, if you really would like to weigh potential other options and wait to see if you receive more offers, you need to do it carefully and professionally.

Here are some ways to respond:

Show gratitude. Gracefully thank the company that offered you the position and show the appropriate appreciation for this opportunity.

Request time to consider the offer. Ask the company if you could possibly have another couple of weeks in order to make an informed decision. Be sure to provide a specific and reasonable deadline date (and stick to it).

Be honest. Be sincere and be honest about your reasons for needing additional time to consider the offer. You really can say you are meeting with other companies. However, you must be careful and make sure you don't make the company feel like it is the back-up choice. Rather, make sure you explain that you are seriously considering this decision and have many factors to consider.

Practice your response. Rehearse your response so that you can be courteous and confident in communicating your message while still expressing enthusiasm and interest.

Whatever you do, **consider the consequences.** There is a risk in asking for extra time to make a decision, especially if the amount of time is significant. The company likely has other candidates it is considering. It may not agree to give much, or even any, additional time so as to

not end up losing the other candidates who the company may consider recruiting. Also, the company may retract the offer if it believes you consider the job is second best; it will not want to hire someone only to lose that person in a few weeks or months.

When you begin meeting with other companies once you have an offer in hand, you can consider leveraging the offer. Carefully consider if it would be to your advantage when you meet with other companies to let them know you have received an offer but that you really prefer to work for them (if you do). You can use it to make yourself look like you are a desirable candidate. However, do not use it as ultimatum. Companies that may have considered you for the position may have a different opinion of your candidacy if you strike too hard a tone.

Finally, do keep in mind that once you accept a job offer, you are committed - professionally and ethically. Reneging on an accepted job offer is unacceptable and unprofessional, and may come back to affect you later in your career. The business world is always smaller than you can imagine and everyone is connected.

Good luck with your efforts and you are welcome to come to the Career Center to meet with a career counselor to further discuss your options.

Bouncing Back from Bankruptcy: Today's Retail Reality

By Sarah Torgueman

Trips to traditional stores are becoming history as retail store crowds slim, doors close, and chains go bankrupt. BCBG Max Azria, Toys R Us, True Religion Apparel, Payless Shoe Source, and Radio Shack, among other retail giants, have suffered this year with a combined closing of more than 6,700 U.S. stores since January 1st, 2017. This has resulted in a record number of store closings greater than any other year, according to CNN Money. Among the biggest traditional retail names, these retailers have each filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy this year. Despite significantly slow in-store sales over the past few years, big retail bankruptcies have come as a shock and may have just begun.

This year's Black Friday, notably the busiest shopping day of the year, marked a shift in consumer purchases, as traditional brick and mortar retail continues to decline. According to CNN Money, while American shoppers spent a record of \$5 billion in 24 hours this year, compared to Black Friday 2016, online shopping marked a 16.9% increase in dollars spent online. Black Friday in-store visits have declined by 4% since last year, according to in-store video analyses conducted by RetailNext Inc., while online purchases have simultaneously increased by 18% since last year, according to software company Adobe Systems Inc.

Changing consumer habits have given way to the booming online retail industry, forcing traditional retail to shift how they sell their inventory. BCBG Max Azria Group Inc. has struggled to remain afloat during this transition, ultimately filing for bankruptcy in March, in what was the third attempt to save the company, according to Bloomberg. Founded in 1989, the fashion brand's cocktail dresses and handbags have been popular among red-carpet celebrities. Last August, Azria, the founder of the business, surrendered his equity stake and left the company. "Like many other apparel and retail companies, BCBG has fallen victim in recent years to adverse macro trends, including a general shift away from brick and mortar to online retail channels, a shift in consumer demographics away from branded apparel," former Chief Restructuring Officer of BCBG Holly Felder Etlin said. BCBG has filed for bankruptcy due to its overwhelming debt load, with which the company owed about \$459 million to lenders. According to Biz Journals, the company's acting interim chief executive optimistically noted that the chapter 11 filing would further aid "overall strategy while we explore opportunities to recapitalize the company and profitably expand."

There's no question that the explosion of online toy shopping forced Toys R Us into bankruptcy this past September. According to CBS News, the company's heavy debt load from a \$6.6 billion leveraged buyout by private equity firms Bain Capital and KKR & Co. in 2005 led to its bankruptcy. The purpose of the deal was to

improve the in-store shopping experience. Nonetheless, it ultimately limited Toys R Us from investing in e-commerce and competing in the online retail industry sector. Furthermore, according to Bloomberg, children toy preferences have shifted to the online marketplace of ample digital gadgets and toys that Toys R Us has failed to keep up with. Lego, the toy building-block maker, has witnessed its first sales decline in 13 years, mainly credited to the shift of preferences to online apps, games, and gadgets. Finally, with speculation that Toys R Us would go bankrupt, according to CBS News, almost 40% of international and domestic Toys R Us suppliers grew nervous, lost confidence in Toys R Us, and demanded cash up front. Like BCBG, Toys R Us has hoped that the bankruptcy will enable restructuring so that Toys R Us can pursue long-term growth. It aims to capitalize on bankruptcy relief with plans to close less profitable

"THE SHIFT TO ONLINE PURCHASING, SLIMMING IN-STORE CUSTOMER CROWDS, HAS HARBORED INCENTIVES FOR TRADITIONAL RETAILERS TO REINVENT IN-STORE SHOPPING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES."

stores, invest in remaining locations, and keep up with competition. On another note, last week the U.S. trustee in the Toys R Us bankruptcy case filed an objection to Toys R Us' attempt to pay company bonuses to its executives to encourage them to remain with the company. According to the Wall Street Journal, the bonuses included a \$2.8 million payment to CEO Dave Brandon. It seems that Toys R Us has a long way to go to return to its original status as a successful toy retailer.

The ever-expanding online retailer, Amazon, as well as other e-commerce players, have cornered the retail market and have dominated the industry, catering to the greater convenience of buying online. According to Forbes, Wal-Mart has entered the e-commerce playing field, which has accounted for only around 3% of its total revenue so far. Along with many other traditional brick and mortar companies, Wal-Mart has invested tremendously in e-commerce growth. Forbes expects Wal-Mart to neutralize its brick and mortar retail locations and projects the company's total U.S. e-commerce sales to reach \$523 billion by 2020 from \$395 billion in 2016. Wal-Mart and Amazon have slashed product prices as they can afford to do so, while companies like Toys R Us have struggled to compete or match prices primarily with debt

being such a tremendous burden. Interestingly, Amazon has made it difficult for competitor retailers to match its prices to prioritize customers by blocking price-tracking technology, as the Wall Street Journal points out.

The shift to online purchasing, slimming in-store customer crowds, has harbored incentives for traditional retailers to reinvent in-store shopping customer experiences. Macy's has organized fashion shows and its well-known flower show to attract customers to its physical stores. Armani has invested in designing its stores like hotel lobbies to position itself with the attributes of comfort and architecturally modern. Other companies have upgraded stores via technology. Marks & Spencer has added touch screens, digital devices, and video walls to showcase the latest clothing trends and home goods to consumers who shop at their brick and mortar locations. Nike stores now include fitness lounges and small-scale basketball courts, soccer fields, and running tracks with built-in digital sensors, where customers can try out these new features and gain real-time feedback on their "training" time. Nike also periodically brings athletic stars to its retail locations to attract consumers. Best Buy and Wal-Mart exercised similar tactics this Black Friday. According to the Wall Street Journal, while Best Buy Co. withheld some deals from its website and only offered exclusive products and special sales in stores, Wal-Mart also advertised its deals and discounted products differently for its stores than its online site.

As big-box traditional retailers deal with financial troubles, others have found strategies to compete and succeed. By entering the world of e-commerce or creatively attracting consumers to their stores, it seems that retailers have been finding new ways to keep up with competition and thrive. In a Darwinian series of events, it seems that retailers are dealing with a "survival of the fittest" transition. Those with recognizable brands and unique store experiences will continue to attract customers, while those that fail to keep up will be forgotten. The dominance of Amazon, however, is making retail life even harder. The possibility remains that traditional retailers may invest in expanding to e-commerce and may utilize brick and mortar locations and warehouse space as distribution centers to imitate Amazon's success as it is doing with the present Whole Foods acquisition. The decline of traditional retail and the simultaneous domination of online retail justifies the conclusion that the consumer preference shift will eliminate many retailers and advance others who wish to compete and thrive in the future. According to CNN Money, this holiday season is crucial for overall retail and for the economy because around 30-40 percent of annual retail sales occur between Black Friday and Christmas. Only time will tell if traditional retailers set themselves up to bounce back from heavy debt loads and declining sales, and share in the retail success of one of the largest consumer-focused societies in history.



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