

# THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

VOL. LXXXVI

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2020

ISSUE NO. 2

## GPATS: 20 years of Advanced Torah Learning Marked with Monumental Enrollment Increase

By TEMMI LATTIN

This semester, Fall 2020, will mark Yeshiva University's Graduate Program of Advanced Talmudic Studies' (GPATS) 21st year since its inauguration in 2000. Currently the only Orthodox program in North America for serious, high-level Torah learning for women that confers a Master's degree upon graduation, this year's GPATS incoming class size of 23 students is the first substantial enrollment increase since inception, up from only 11 students last year (see chart).

A major part of GPATS' current program includes pedagogic and pastoral training. While many graduates pursue Jewish education, students have also had the opportunity to participate in a wide range of Jewish leadership internships, including hospital chaplains and clergy positions in shuls like Lincoln Square Synagogue. Additionally, recent graduates pursue many varied careers after GPATS. Many students study in GPATS for one or two years before going on to graduate schools for medicine, law, history, psychology and many more.

As described by Director Nechama Price, "Being in GPATS is a life-changing experience, where you learn a tremendous amount of Torah, enhance textual and conceptual skills in Torah learning, and are exposed to leading Torah scholars. Students benefit from a faculty with deep expertise in Talmud, *Halacha* (Jewish Law), and *Tanach* (Bible) and who embody the attributes of humility, kindness, and commitment."

President Berman commented on the current enrollment increase with the incoming 2020 class, stating that "supporting and increasing opportunities for women's learning on all levels is a key priority for YU."

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GPATS Class of 2019 made a *siyum* to mark their learning in the two-year Gemara and Halakha program and their awarding of a master's degree.

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

## YU Announces New LGBTQ Inclusivity Policies, Denies LGBTQ Club Formation

By SRULI FRUCHTER

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on September 3.*

Yeshiva University released an [official statement](#) on LGBTQ inclusivity and several new university policies on the matter, emailed by Vice Provost of Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel to undergraduate students on Thursday, Sept. 3. The statement also revealed that YU will not approve an LGBTQ club, a decision [passed to administrators in February](#).

Among the newly announced policies, the university plans to update its "diversity, inclusion and sensitivity training" to focus on "diverse student groups, including sexual orientation and gender identity." Administrators will receive initial training in the coming semester, and one for faculty, staff and students will be developed. The Counseling Center will also ensure that its staff includes a clinician with "specific LGBTQ+ experience." Additionally, a "warm line" will be created in the coming semester for YU students to discuss or report concerns about "non-inclusive" harassment or bullying.

"This is a highly charged, highly emotional subject," President Berman said in a

statement sent to The Commentator. "We are the bearers of a 3000 year old Torah tradition. Our LGBTQ+ students are our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, family and friends. At the heart of our Jewish values is love - love for God and love for each of His children."

The committee's statement was undersigned by Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Yaakov Neuberger, Azrieli School of Education Dean Dr. Rona Novick, Director of the Counseling Center Dr. Yael Muskat and Azrieli Psychology and Jewish Education Chair Dr. David Pelcovitz, all of whom were assembled by former Senior Vice President Josh Joseph last year to [form a committee](#), at the request of President Ari Berman, to "address matters of inclusion on our undergraduate college campuses, including LGBTQ+."

The committee explained that, while the Torah is "accepting each individual with love and affirming its timeless prescriptions," the requested LGBTQ club "under the auspices of YU will cloud [the Torah's] nuanced message."

"While the YU Pride Alliance is pleased to see the committee release a statement addressing matters present in our mission statement, albeit nearly a year after the

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## Student Newspapers' History Digitized by YU Libraries

By ZACHARY GREENBERG

For the first time in their histories, most issues of The Commentator and the YU Observer — Yeshiva University's two undergraduate student newspapers — have been digitized and uploaded [online](#). This project was undertaken by Librarian of Electronic Reserves Stephanie Gross, and includes articles dating as far back as 1936, leading up to 2000.

The project is part of the Yeshiva Academic Institutional Repository (YAIR) program, which collects research and scholarship works from YU faculty, staff and students. Currently, all the Commentator issues from 1936-2000 and Observer issues from 1975-2000 have been uploaded. Observer issues from 1958-1975 will be uploaded in the coming weeks. Thereafter, Gross plans to upload the modern issues from 2000-present. She hopes future editors of the newspapers will continuously send her their works to enable an ever-lasting archive of the publications. PDFs of Commentator issues from 2015 to the present are available on The Commentator [website](#).

Many other universities across the country have similarly digitized their student newspaper [archives](#), including the

[Columbia Spectator](#), [Harvard Crimson](#) and [Yale Daily News](#). YAIR's project increases accessibility of Yeshiva University's history through the prism of student publications.

"The Commentator and Observer are repositories of YU history," Gross commented. "There are people who say 'why have newspapers since they are not really scholarly?' I think the benefit of having newspapers is that it's a cultural documentation of YU. It helps students get a sense of a breath of the institution."

During her time with the YU Libraries, Gross has uploaded hundreds of PDFs of student publications such as [Geshet](#), [Nahalat](#), [Kol Hamevaser](#), [Chronos](#), [Derech HaTeva](#), and beginning this past February, [The Commentator](#) and [the Observer](#). Gross was able to convert photographs a student took of the archives in the late '90s into PDF files in a text-searchable format before uploading them to YAIR.

The Commentator's origins date back to 1936, a time when many Jews were fleeing Europe to escape Nazi Germany. Thereafter, The Commentator covered articles including the horrifying times of the Holocaust, post-Holocaust survivors coming to America, the Israeli War of Independence, McCarthyism, the Korean Wars, and beyond. Gross noted,

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## Tuition Hikes Amid a Pandemic are Unacceptable. Nix Them Now.

By THE COMMENTATOR  
EDITORIAL BOARD

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on August 7.*

As our nation and the world at-large continue to grapple with what is the [worst economic crisis](#) since the Great Depression, Yeshiva University's planned tuition hike for the upcoming academic year is nothing short of unconscionable. The planned, annual four-figure increase in tuition at a time when many families are struggling to put food on the table is out-of-touch and ought to be nixed.

As The Commentator [previously reported](#), tuition and fees at YU have increased by nearly \$6,000 over the past four years. For this upcoming year, tuition and fees are slated to increase by more than \$1,500 — up to a whopping \$46,475. That's an increase of nearly 15% since the 2016-2017 academic year.

Meanwhile, many students have learned over recent weeks that most — if not all — of their courses for the fall semester will be given wholly online, while services and campus life will undoubtedly be diminished in comparison to previous years. It is absurd to demand students and their parents pay more for far less — especially during these trying and tumultuous times.

Indeed, most courses have been moved

entirely online for the fall, and notwithstanding the university's rhetoric of a "robust" fall semester, for the time being, there is little that separates YU from an inexpensive online college with the addition of recorded *shiurim*.

We understand that YU is hurting financially, as are a countless number of its students and alumni, as well as companies across the globe. COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on all of us, and notwithstanding projected federal aid, the university's fiscal condition is nothing to brag about.

However, rather than continuing to spend and ask for more from strug-

*It is absurd to demand students and their parents pay more for far less — especially during these trying and tumultuous times.*

gling students and their families, the university must take a hard look at its finances, make difficult decisions and slash unnecessary spending. Providing scholarships and launching fundraising campaigns are stopgaps, but they do not get anywhere near the root of the issue: a bloated bureaucracy that grows year

after year with reckless spending and [fiscal irresponsibility](#).

A business-as-usual approach that continues to ask for thousands more in tuition each year may have worked in the past, but it is simply untenable under present circumstances, especially with much of the university's attractive features — from campus life to in-person *chavrusa* study — being sidelined due to the pandemic. The student activities fees, which pales in comparison to the overall cost of tuition, is also bewildering given the current predicament.

This does not mean the end of YU — far from it. Rather, the university must adapt to the changing times and the reality of higher education during and after the pandemic. Asking for more while doing less simply will not work. Cutting costs and trimming excess bureaucratic fat will.

There is ample wasteful spending to trim, and doing so merely requires the university commit to putting its students above politics. Hefty administrator salaries, as evidenced in the university's [recent public tax filing](#), are a good place to start. While we commend President Berman and other members of the administration for taking voluntary salary reductions, far more must be done to put YU's house back in order. Beyond that, limiting runaway spending on lobbying Albany, Washington and City Hall, ceasing the hiring of expensive consultants,

*Continued on Page 4*

## Student-Administrative Dialogue Ain't Such a Bad Thing

By YOSEF LEMEL

In my last editorial, I focused on a major problem affecting the students of Yeshiva University, namely, the miscommunication that students commonly face. The main solution outlined in that editorial was The Commentator; through accurate and thorough stories published in these pages, the Yeshiva community would be informed about the issues they face.

Indeed, it was The Commentator along with student government — in a coordinated effort — that notified students about the prospective changes to Yeshiva's drop date policies; prior to our reporting on the issue, students were not notified about these changes. In response, over 500 students expressed their displeasure in a [petition](#) to the administration and the policy was subsequently reversed.

While the university administration must be commended for this policy reversal, long-term changes must be instituted to facilitate student-administrative communication and increase transparency. One model for future dialogue was exemplified in the multiple university-wide [webinars](#), which allowed administrators to speak to students on a more direct and personal level regarding initiatives for the

coming semester.

When he first assumed the Yeshiva presidency, Rabbi Berman [told](#) The Commentator that he would not hold town hall meetings, a [regular tradition](#) during President Joel's tenure. For the sake of transparency and accountability, I hope the recent webinar series represents a change in this attitude and a reinstitution of the town hall format. Students want answers to legitimate questions and a more intimate relationship with the university's top administrator.

*Students need an established and authoritative vehicle to spur change and work towards the common good... at present, there is no fixed policy-making body within Yeshiva that includes their voices.*

However, in addition to this, students need an established and authoritative

vehicle to spur change and work towards the common good. The Commentator can provide students with information and a forum for their concerns, but at present, there is no fixed policy-making body within Yeshiva that includes their voices.

Imagine a tripartite body composed of students, faculty and administrators that created policies encompassing all areas of academic life. Imagine if students and faculty had a say in the construction of the academic calendar, cheating and grading policies, and even protocols regarding the COVID-19 response — issues that directly affect them.

To the average reader, this all might sound like some utopian dream, a quixotic attempt to synthesize the various voices of the university into a unified and harmonious body, the mere fancies of a cynical editor calling for drastic changes to the student-faculty-administrative relationship.

This could not be further from the truth. For nearly 40 years — from 1969 to the mid-2000s — the [Yeshiva College Senate](#) functioned as the body outlined above. I believe that now, of all times — after multiple [instances](#) of [miscommunication](#) and [disconnect](#) — would it be appropriate for the university administration to coordinate with students

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## THE COMMENTATOR

2020-2021

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*The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.*

*For 86 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 Umadda, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.*

Visit us online at  
[www.yucommentator.org](http://www.yucommentator.org).



**1 Commentator Issue no. 86.2**

Starting the semester with a second issue of The Commentator without even stepping foot on campus. That's gotta be a new record.



**2 Meeting the Commie Fam**

It's been an absolute pleasure to personally meet every single one of you ... on Facebook.



**3 The Deans of YU**

They're *The Dean Dream Team* and they're fighting for your return to campus this fall. #robust #“It's not easy being dean”



**4 Mordechai “Mark” Weiss is running for VP of YU**

Not sure how this is going to pan out, but you definitely have our attention. (I also really liked your questionable YouTube vlogs)



**5 Sukkot and Simchas Torah Break**

Finally some proof that there **is** diversity at YU!



**6 Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches**

Sometimes a sandwich is just a sandwich, OR IS IT??? #metaphors



**7 Virtual Library Sessions**

You may have taken us out of the Gottesman Library, but you can never take the Gottesman Library out of us. #5thFloorVibes

**7UP** by Zahava Fertig  
**NMODZ**

**Fall 2020 Semester Begins**

**1**



It started with approximately 11 seconds of excitement before the sudden realization hit us all that this semester will be (mostly) on Zoom too.

**What are your fall dorming plans**

**2**



The only question that invokes more stress than "what are you doing after college?"

**Asynchronous classes where attendance counts**

**3**



I'm not sure that word means what you think it means .

**Covid Code of Conduct Video**

**4**



No words, but at least the elevators seem to be working.

**Obsolete Student ID Cards**

**5**



As the green SPRING 2020 sticker slowly fades away, Yeshiva University students yearn for a new, fresh sticker to be haphazardly placed upon the ever-growing sticker pile located on the bottom right of their ID card. Oh, how we miss the little things.

**Notification Emails from Canvas**

**6**



Yes, I know my class was recorded and no, I do not want to watch the rerun.

**New Caf Rules**

**7**



No longer can you wander the caf in circles, opening and closing fridge doors, sniffing the soup, testing out the crispness of the lettuce or checking the expiration dates on the yogurts. #RIPCafPizza

# Overwhelming Majority of Undergraduate Classes Online for the Entire Fall Semester

By SHLOMIT EBBIN

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on August 23.*

The overwhelming majority of undergraduate classes will continue online when students return to campus after Sukkot break on Oct. 19, according to the MyYU student portal.

All classes will be conducted online and campuses will be closed to undergraduate students until Oct. 19. Following Sukkot break, undergraduate classes will have various instruction formats. By undergraduate college, the breakdown of courses marked online for the entire semester is 71% at Stern College for Women (SCW), 85.5% at Yeshiva College (YC) and 100% at Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB). Approximately 28% of SCW courses and 14.5% of YC courses are classified as blended, with less than 1% of face-to-face classes at SCW and none at YC. According to the Registrar, "blended classes" contain "a blend of both face to face and online instruction, whereby online instruction replaces or supplements face to face meeting time. The online portion of the course may be synchronous or asynchronous."

While on-campus housing applications were due by July 24, students were not notified about their class' statuses until a few weeks later. Dean of SSSB Noam Wasserman sent out an email on Aug. 6 stating that for "all Sy Syms courses on both campuses, the core mode of teaching will consist of online instruction that mixes asynchronous teaching and live-online teaching." SCW and YC students also received an email on Aug. 6 from various undergraduate deans, informing them that the "students' Self-Service" on MyYU will indicate their classes' mode

of instruction.

Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) will continue after the break with 67.75% of its classes and *shiurim* in person and only 32.25% online. Within UTS, 63% of the Mazer Yeshiva Program's *shiurim* are online and 37% are face-to-face, 40% of the Stone Beit Midrash Program's *shiurim* are online and 60% are face-to-face, and Isaac Breuer College and James Striar School each have

*"As a pre-med student, I am especially worried I won't get the proper lab experience while working remotely*

Shoshanah Marcus (SCW '22)

28.6% of their classes online and 71.4% face-to-face. The parallel Jewish studies classes on the Beren Campus are included in SCW and are all marked as online or blended, including those that normally contain a *beit midrash* component.

On the Wilf and Beren campuses, between YC, SCW and SSSB, there are nearly 350 and 400 classes on each campus, respectively, with about 300 on each taking place online for the entire semester. The only class marked as face-to-face instruction for after the holidays is the "Money and Banking" Economics class on the Beren Campus, according to MyYU. The Beren Campus will hold 103 blended classes, and the Wilf Campus will offer 37.

"In deciding whether classes should be online, face-to-face, or blended, we took into account a number of factors," stated Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman on the community call on Aug. 1. "We asked ourselves what's the best approach for each academic discipline. We came up with a plan to have fully online, blended, and fully face to face instruction."

Additionally, YU faculty members were given technological training over the summer break to prepare for online learning.

Some students voiced their excitement about the possibility of returning to the classroom. "I was just really excited to have an in person class," shared Lily Polinetsky (SCW '22), a student enrolled in Multivariable Calculus, a blended class that will have a face-to-face option after the holidays. "It's

the screen with the students who are remote working on the kit, and another faculty member in the lab hands on with the students in the lab," said Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Science Karen Bacon. "If we do it well, it really is a model for things we might do in the future. I think science, which is one of the strengths of YU, will continue to be a dynamic experience this fall, and I think we're going to learn from it some things that will actually help us in the future when we're all back on campus again."

Some students are still concerned with having online labs this semester. "I think the university is doing their best and is using many great and advanced resources in order to best simulate the virtual lab experience," shared Shoshanah Marcus (SCW '22). "However, I don't believe that an online lab can truly capture the hands-on experiments that are conducted in person. As a pre-med student, I am especially worried I won't get the proper lab experience while working remotely."

Faced with another semester of online learning, some professors are working to make their students feel comfortable and succeed academically. "We also recognize that this is an incredibly stressful time for both students and faculty. Our classes will necessarily reflect that, with the knowledge that many students are not in ideal learning environments, and that we are all contending with the psychological demands of a global pandemic," YC English Department Head Rachel Mesch told The Commentator. "We hope that our classes can create space for students to be reflective, while supplying them with the tools for doing so."

really great to know that I'm going in and I'll be able to sit, even if it's far apart, and be able to talk about class, have that interaction, and make new friends."

"It's unfortunate that we have to be online this semester, but I'm thankful that the administration and professors have been working through the summer to try to create innovative ways of making this semester productive," said Wilf Student Life Committee Co-Chair Jonah Loskove (SSSB '22), a student who will continue classes online after Sukkot.

Both YC and SCW science professors have adjusted their lab courses to accommodate all students, whether they return to campus or continue with remote learning. Wilf Chemistry Department Co-Chair Rajalakshmi Viswanathan told The Commentator that her department is preparing to "offer laboratory courses in both modalities." Other lab professors in the biology and engineering departments are planning on having online lab simulations and home-lab kits.

"We'll have one faculty member manning

## TUITION HIKES

*continued from Page 2*

abandoning expensive advertising practices, stopping the procurement of food and wines for administrators, and taking preventative steps to keep facilities safe and in compliance with code to prevent liability and massive fines are prudent measures as well.

If YU wishes to secure its future financial success, it must cater to the needs of its current students — the donors of tomorrow. The wellbeing of the students should be the prime consideration of the university. Providing students with a quality education in both secular studies and *limudei kodesh*, while ensuring students can secure good jobs and acceptance to graduate school after their time on campus, must be the university's

top priorities — nothing else. This attitude is imperative for the long-term success of any academic institution.

*Rather than continuing to spend and ask for more from struggling students and their families, the university must take a hard look at its finances, make difficult decisions and slash unnecessary spending.*

It is clear that the spend-and-raise-tuition days are over, and more fiscally responsible practices must supersede the reckless

spending habits of the past. The university's future depends on it.

As students, we care deeply about the

continued vitality and health of the flagship university of Modern Orthodoxy in America. Over the past century, YU has provided an

invaluable service to American Jewry. We want nothing more than to see its continued success for years to come. But that requires making the requisite, albeit tough, decisions to ensure YU returns to sound fiscal footing for years and decades to come.

*Editor's Note: For an article to be designated under the byline of "The Commentator Editorial Board," a minimum of 75% of editorial board members, including the editor-in-chief, are required to give their assent.*

## DIALOGUE

*Continued from Page 2*

and faculty in reestablishing the Senate to represent all undergraduate divisions of Yeshiva. Such a step would be viewed as a symbol of goodwill and would chart a more democratic and enlightened step forward for this institution.

Indeed, this Senate should not have supreme power; tyranny of the majority is a rational fear that accompanies the establishment of any democratic institution. Of

course, in any plan drawn up, Rabbi Berman should retain veto power over any resolutions passed. Yet, even if veto power is exercised, a transparent statement of power would be made; students and faculty would know the position of the administration after their voices were given due consideration.

I call on student leaders and members of the faculty to sit down with the administration to construct a plan for the formation of

a University Senate. While the exact specifics — including the appointment of senators — could be ironed out, it is clear that the present system is broken. Students are left out of important administrative decisions that directly affect them and some are under the impression that their needs are not fully taken into account.

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, the second president of Yeshiva, expressed that he

accepted the Senate because he trusted Yeshiva students. "I think the Senate is a blessing to the institution," he said. In a similar vein, I hope that the administration, faculty and students, in this spirit of trust, will be able to discuss constructive methods to grant voices to the underrepresented portions of our institution.

## DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Continued from *Front Page*

"The newspapers show an amazing cultural documentary of how the young Modern Orthodox Jewish men felt about these historical events."

"The digital publicization of The Commentator archives is a wonderful development, spreading a wealth of information relating to Yeshiva's history. The library staff must be commended for their efforts," Yosef Lemel (YC '21), editor-in-chief of The Commentator, remarked. "Previously, students had to go to obtain special permission to receive access to the PDFs; now the archives can simply be accessed on the web. My hope is that there will be an effort to digitize the archives from 2000-2015, 15 years of important Yeshiva history that largely remain offline."

In 1958, four years after Stern College for Women opened, the YU *Observer* was founded to give the women of YU a newspaper forum. The *Observer* especially covered cultural and internal political events that Stern originally faced. In addition to the mainstream articles of both newspapers, the

"The YU *Observer* has come a long way since it first began," Fruma Landa (SCW '21), editor-in-chief of the *Observer* explained. "I believe that it was the passion of the founders and the dedication of the previous editors in chief that enabled this paper to be what it is today — a newspaper representing the

the legacy of the YU *Observer* and work on a newspaper created by strong-willed, motivated individuals."

"One main point that continually jumps out at me (and pleases me to no end) is the need to defend their First Amendment Rights," Gross said. "The controversies, hired deans, fired deans, resigned deans, censorship, Torah vs. Mada. I've been so impressed by a few of the editors that I've even looked them up to see where they are now."

*"The newspapers show an amazing cultural documentary of how the Young Modern Orthodox Jewish Men felt about these historical events."*

— Librarian Stephanie Gross

Purim editions of both newspapers have also been uploaded to the repository.

Beren and Wilf campuses with six strong article categories. I feel privileged to further



# The Observer

## Stern College Undergraduate Newspaper

Vol. II

NEW YORK, N. Y. MAY 29, 1959

No. 6

Early issues of *The Commentator* and YU *Observer*, now available on YAIR's online archive.

YOSEF LEMEL

## INCLUSIVITY POLICY

Continued from *Front Page*

committee was formed, we remain disappointed that YU continues to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity," YU Pride Alliance Vice President Chana Weiss (SCW '21) said on behalf of the club's 2020-21 board. "We have delineated that the ultimate course of action to achieve our shared goals will be the establishment of an official club for the YU LGBTQ+ community and we are deeply saddened that the YU administration is unable to recognize that."

Weiss added, "The administration has failed to be transparent about which halachic 'nuances' are at odds with the club and, on the contrary, we stand firm in our belief that *pikuach nefesh* necessitates the creation of our club." She also noted that a club application for the YU Pride Alliance was resubmitted for the upcoming semester.

According to two members of student government, the application was submitted

19 minutes before Nissel's email was sent to undergraduate students, the same day the unofficial club was informed by the administration of their denial.

"Yeshiva University is wholly committed to and guided by Halacha and Torah values," the committee's letter began. It went on to explain that a team of administrators, psychologists and rabbis spent four months meeting with inclusion experts and YU students, alumni and *roshei yeshiva*, among others, to deal with this issue before the coronavirus pandemic. These new initiatives are a part of a "larger, ongoing, campus-wide effort" to support marginalized students, but it will first focus on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The campus conversation about forming an official LGBTQ club became pronounced in September 2019 when over 100 LGBTQ YU students, alumni and allies [marched for](#)

[equality](#). The year prior, then-student leaders [reportedly met](#) with President Berman and various administrators to discuss LGBTQ inclusion on campus, and a [committee](#) led by Joseph was later formed to focus on the issue.

Since the September march, the unofficial YU Pride Alliance [met](#) with student leaders and [formally submitted](#) a club application — under the new name "the YU Alliance" — to receive official YU club status. In Feb. of that spring semester, the student council presidents on both campuses abstained from voting on the club's approval, passing the decision to the administration.

Weeks later, after the YU Pride Alliance alleged that the student council presidents discriminated against the group when they abstained from voting, the Beren Constitutional Council [declined to hear the case](#) because of the pending report to

the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) on the matter. Citing their ongoing investigation of the matter, a NYCCHR spokesperson declined to comment on YU's announcement.

Berman expressed, "I thank the committee for their detailed work in bringing the full plethora of our values to bear in formulating their initiatives, and I share in their optimism that their ongoing efforts will further enhance our beloved Yeshiva's undergraduate culture of belonging."

*Editor's Note: This article was updated to reflect the time and circumstances of the Pride Alliance's new application for official YU club status.*

## Update: Administration Issues Apology to Art Students, Construction to Continue

By **SRULI FRUCHTER**  
AND **YOSEF LEMEL**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 20.*

*This article is an update to a piece published by The Commentator on July 12 which can be found [here](#).*

Art students at Stern College for Women (SCW) received an apology on July 17 from the Yeshiva University administration for mishandling students' artwork during renovations to repurpose space from the Art Department to the Katz School of Science and Health's new cybersecurity master's program. The statement was signed by Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon and Provost Selma Botman.

Citing the "confusion" from the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent "protracted absence from campus," Bacon and Botman admitted that, "in hindsight ... everything needed to be packed and stored for the possibility of a protracted absence

from campus." The statement continued, "This miscalculation has impacted our graduating seniors in particular, and it is certainly not the way we hoped to celebrate the culmination of their achievements. We are truly sorry this happened." Construction on the art floor will continue as planned.

Artwork we've spent our years at Stern creating had wires and equipment stacked between them, thereby bending and damaging them." Goldstein previously related her experience in a Commentator opinions article.

Rocky Pincus (SCW '20), a recent graduate, related that her artwork was still

apology was "misplaced." "They put a lot of the blame on the COVID situation," she said. "How someone takes [the artwork] out shouldn't be affected by that and they didn't take responsibility for how it was handled or the fact that stuff was still left inside."

Current students enrolled in the Stern art program were also disappointed with the situation. "I was really disheartened to find out that they had started renovations without letting anyone know," said Baila Landa (SCW '23). "Like many students, I have a lot of supplies and projects still in the classrooms, and I don't want anything to happen to them. It kind of seems like they are taking all our hard work and showing it off when it's convenient for them, and then not giving us the space or resources we need when it's inconvenient."

Referring to the apology letter, Landa added, "It seems Dean Bacon and Provost Botman really do care about us art students, and I am hopeful that they will work with Prof. Tullius to set things right and make up for everything that has happened."

*Citing the "confusion" from the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent "protracted absence from campus," Bacon and Botman admitted that, "in hindsight... everything needed to be packed and stored for the possibility of a protracted absence from campus."*

On July 13, before the apology was issued, Basya Goldstein (SCW '21) and another art student visited the eighth floor of 215 Lexington Ave., where the art floor is located. "What we saw was totally shocking," said Goldstein. "The students' artwork from those rooms were dumped and strewn around, treated like garbage.

hung up, even while the floor was officially under construction. "That was just shocking," she expressed. "The one thing the school could have done to make things not as bad was to handle the artwork properly and just be respectful of everyone's stuff, and they didn't do either of those things."

Pincus believed the administration's



The state of the art floor during renovations

BASYA GOLDSTEIN

## University Reverses Early Drop Date Policy Following Student Backlash

By **YOSEF LEMEL**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on August 13.*

The Fall 2020 course drop date without a "W" has been moved from Sept. 22 to Nov. 17, announced Chief Enrollment Management Officer Chad Austein on an Aug. 12 Yeshiva University community conference call. The calendar change came on the heels of [student backlash](#) to the Sept. 22 date.

Under the new policy, from Nov. 17 until Dec. 7, students will be able to withdraw from classes and receive a "W" notation on their academic transcripts. After Dec. 7, students will be required to complete their respective classes and receive a letter

grade. Austein assured that the spring semester will be adjusted to reflect a similar timeline to the fall's drop dates. Regarding any future policy changes he said, "In the spring we will revisit the policy and we'll make any changes going forward for the next academic year." According to Austein, an updated calendar will be published shortly.

previous fall semester's drop without a "W" date on Dec. 2. No official university communication was sent to students regarding the original policy change prior to The Commentator's [publication](#) on the matter.

After student council presidents were originally notified by The Commentator of the then-prospective drop date changes, they jointly sent a letter of complaint to

asking to meet. The presidents did not receive a response until a week later, after they followed up. In his response, Austein stated that the university was re-evaluating its policy; no meeting was offered to the presidents in his email.

Following this email exchange, Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) created a [petition](#) calling for YU to "return the calendar's course-dropping deadlines to be consistent with prior years." The petition received over 500 signatures.

After reaching out to the Office of Student Life (OSL) with their concerns, student council presidents secured a meeting with Austein; four presidents met with Austein, University Registrar Jennifer

*"Some time ago we reviewed our withdrawal from course policy and realized it was not consistent with best practices and needed to be reevaluated."*

Dean Karen Bacon

The Sept. 22 date was four weeks into the semester and over 10 weeks before the

Austein and the academic deans on June 16, requesting a change to the policy and

*Continued on Page 8*

# YU Administrators Share Insights Into Fall 2020 Campus Life Via Community Webinar

By ELISHEVA KOHN

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 23.*

*The information provided in this article is supplementary to the official YU Fall 2020 Plan, available [here](#), and the official YU FAQ, available [here](#).*

University administrators, along with Dr. Robert van Amerongen, YU's newly-appointed medical director, held two webinars via Zoom on July 21 and 22 to provide students and the broader YU community with updates on the upcoming fall semester.

Both webinars -- scheduled at different times to accommodate students in various time zones -- were hosted by President Ari Berman, outgoing Senior Vice President Josh Joseph, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman, five undergraduate university deans, Chief Enrollment Management Officer Chad Austein, Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum, Director of YU International Students and Scholars (OISS) Jennifer Golden and Dr. Van Amerongen.

## Health and Safety

According to Dr. Van Amerongen, the university is aiming to have all students, faculty members and staff tested for COVID-19 prior to returning to campus. Students on campus will be required to fill out a daily health survey which will be available on a mobile app. All campus buildings will be equipped with hand sanitizer and students will have their temperature measured regularly. Addressing the concern of long lines consisting of students "waiting endlessly just to get their temperature checks," Dr. Van Amerongen assured students that staff are being trained efficient-

ly to conduct these checks "seamlessly and rapidly."

Masks will be required in all buildings, except when eating or in private spaces, such as dormitory rooms. Students from coronavirus "hot spots" may be required to quarantine upon arrival on campus. University officials are currently identifying locations on campus that can serve as quarantine spaces.

## Housing and Campus Life

As of July 22, dormitory sign-ups are at 60% capacity, according to Dean of Stu-

in advance.

According to Nissel, students will be able to form "micro communities" with whom they can share campus Shabbat meals with. Guests will not be allowed on campus, including on Shabbat.

## Academics

Given the "remarkably low percentage" of students who opted for the recently modified and more flexible P/N policy -- 70% of the student body did not opt for the new P/N option -- the policy will be ineffective for the fall, according to Dr. Noam

and staff, and *batei midrash* will be open on both campuses. Associate Dean of Torah Studies at Stern College for Women Shoshana Schechter and Dean for Men's Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky assured students that Torah opportunities will be offered in-person, as well as online. "Right now I'm speaking with each *rebbe* and talking with them in terms of their preferences, in terms of their *talmidim's* preferences and matching those up," Kalinsky said. Various *shivurim* and *chaburot*, led by Torah educators from both campuses, have been operating virtually over the summer.

According to President Ari Berman, enrollment for this upcoming semester is "robust."

## International Students

Given the reversal of the recent policy by the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) regarding international students enrolling in online classes, international students taking a full schedule online will be able to maintain their F1 status, said Golden. Nevertheless, Golden said, international students may face other obstacles, such as travel restrictions, and are therefore encouraged to consult authorities in their home countries, as well as the OISS [COVID-19 web page](#). According to Botman, faculty members will accommodate students whose class schedules are affected by time difference.

## Refunds

In the event that all dormitories will have to be vacated for health reasons, the university will offer a refund policy that is "expected" from YU students and the broader community, and will "act accordingly," said Austein.

According to a university spokesman, additional webinars are scheduled to take place in the near future.

*Students on campus will be required to fill out a daily health survey which will be available on a mobile app. All campus buildings will be equipped with hand sanitizer and students will have their temperature measured regularly.*

dents Dr. Chaim Nissel; students who apply prior to the July 24 deadline are likely to be accepted. University officials are working to provide transportation to campus for students residing in nearby communities. Students not residing on campus in the fall will "hopefully" be able to apply for housing in the spring, said Nissel.

Both campus cafeterias -- operating at reduced capacity -- will offer take-home meals on days when classes are in session. Glass partitions will be placed between cashiers and students, and foods that are openly exposed to students, such as salad and pizza, will be eliminated to maximize safety. Whether meals will be offered on Friday mornings and Sundays is yet "to be determined," said Nissel.

According to Randy Apfelbaum, campus elevators have been fixed while students were away, and some are completely new. All campus elevators will operate at reduced capacity. Since all bathrooms in the Wilf dormitories are shared, male students will have to sign up for shower slots

Wasserman, dean of Sy Syms School of Business. Furthermore, in light of student outrage over the Fall 2020 date to drop a class without a "W" -- which was set for nearly three months earlier than in prior years -- the university is "currently re-evaluating" the date and has "not made a final decision," said Austein.

All classes will be available online and students will have the opportunity to learn in a more versatile manner; according to Wasserman, the university is planning on offering asynchronous options, online assessments, videos and discussion forums in order to maximize flexibility while maintaining a high "academic standard." Smaller classes may be offered in-person, and students will be notified of the online/in-person options for their classes by the end of July, according to Dr. Botman. All labs and art studios will be open as well, said Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Karen Bacon.

Regular *minyanim* on the Wilf Campus will be limited to students, faculty



A screenshot of the virtual community webinar

## Nissel Named Vice Provost, Marketing and Enrollment Depts. Merged as Part of Administrative Restructuring

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on August 9.*

Among various administrative changes, Dean of Students Dr. Chaim Nissel will be promoted to vice provost of student affairs and the Marketing and Communications Department will be merged with the enrollment team, President Ari Berman announced in an Aug. 7 email to university faculty. This restructuring comes in light of Senior Vice President (VP) Josh Joseph's upcoming departure from YU in September to begin as executive VP and chief operating officer (EVP/COO) at the Orthodox Union.

Nissel will now work in the Provost's Office under Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman. According to Berman's email, Nissel will be responsible for the areas of "student success, including student life, residential

life, counseling and health, athletics, academic advising, support services and career services."

First arriving at YU in 1998, Nissel served as director of Housing and Psychological Services. In 2001, he was appointed associate dean of students and was promoted to

Doron Stern, former VP of communications, will lead the newly-merged Marketing and Enrollment Department as vice president. "This shift places the entire marketing, communications, recruitment, and admissions process under one roof to better ensure accountability and results," Berman

Austein.

Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel Andrew Lauer will now oversee YU's high schools, Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy (MTA) and Central, under Heads of School Rabbi Josh Kahn and Bracha Rutner, respectively.

The email also confirmed that YU is searching for a new EVP/COO to replace Joseph. In the interim, the heads of facilities, human resources, information technology and special projects will report to the President's office.

These changes were not announced to students as of press time.

"While the world will never be the same," Berman wrote, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic that has the university beginning the academic year online, "knowing that we have the right people in the boat, all rowing in the same direction, gives us great confidence that we will reach new levels of success in the future."

*"I am excited to work with Provost Botman and our academic colleagues, along with students and the student affairs team, to further enrich the student experience and foster student successes."*

Newly-appointed Vice Provost Chaim Nissel

university dean of students in 2012.

"I am excited to work with Provost Botman and our academic colleagues, along with students and the student affairs team, to further enrich the student experience and foster student success," Nissel told The Commentator.

explained in his email. Additionally, all enrollment services for both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as international student activities and student finance, have been grouped under this department. Stern will be working closely with Chief Enrollment Management Officer Chad



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Former Senior VP Josh Joseph (left), newly-appointed Vice Provost of Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel (middle) and newly-appointed VP of Marketing and Enrollment Doron Stern (right).

### DROP DATE POLICY Continued from Page 6

Spiegel and members of OSL. According to Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22), one of the meeting attendees, Austein and Spiegel explained the reasoning for the moving of the drop date to the presidents.

"Our academic policies are based on what is considered best practice in higher education while taking into account local conditions," explained Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Dr. Karen Bacon in a statement to The Commentator. "Some time ago we reviewed our withdrawal from course policy and realized it was not consistent with best practices

and needed to be reevaluated."

On similar lines, Dean of Sy Syms School of Business Dr. Noam Wasserman previously told The Commentator, "When I got to YU I was surprised to find that the deadline was much later than anywhere else I had been. There are many ways in which a late deadline disadvantages students in the long term."

After concerns were voiced by students and faculty members, university administrators — including Austein, Spiegel, Provost Selma Botman and the academic deans — discussed the matter internally. "We came to the realization that this policy

change was not appropriate at this time due to COVID, due to the atypical semester we are all about to embark in," expressed Austein on the Aug. 12 call. Bacon stated that "local conditions, which have disrupted the normal flow of work, made it clear that this is not the time to make a change." The drop date was subsequently changed to Nov. 17 to "mimic" last year's policy.

"I am extremely happy and satisfied with the decision," said Poppers. "This represents not only a short-term victory for the students of Yeshiva University, but a tremendous step towards building and cultivating a strong student leader relation-

ship with the administration which I hope will result in additional positive change going forward."

Following Austein's announcement, Greenberg updated his online petition to declare "Victory!" "I'm happy that the drop date was moved to a more reasonable time for students," expressed Greenberg, "but more importantly, I am thrilled with the open dialogue that we had with Chad and his team. I look forward to speaking out on behalf of the student body again in the future."



## President Berman and Senior Administrators Salaries, YU Finances Released

By YITZCHAK CARROLL AND SRULI FRUCHTER

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on August 6.*

The salaries and compensations of President Ari Berman and various senior executives, along with details of the university's finances, were disclosed in Yeshiva University's [Form 990](#) tax records for the 2018 fiscal year. The Commentator received the public filing on July 31.

Most non-profit organizations are required by federal law to reveal financial information — including the salaries of senior executive officials — in a public filing due on May 15. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline for submission of Form



Former President Richard Joel (left), President Ari Berman (middle) and VP for Legal Affairs and General Counsel Andrew Lauer (right) were among the senior executives listed in Form 990.

*According to tax records, former President Richard Joel, who currently teaches on a part-time basis in the Sy Syms School of Business, received \$665,889 in aggregate compensation in 2018, including a base salary of more than \$500,000, and the use of his university-owned residence.*

990 was delayed until July 15.

The tax record revealed that Berman made nearly \$750,000 in aggregate compensation in 2018. Berman's salary consisted of a \$592,834 base with over \$150,000 in other compensation, totaling \$747,392. This aggregated sum was \$160,000 higher than his \$582,000 total compensation for the first ten months of his presidency in 2017. As The Commentator previously reported, Berman is also provided with a parsonage

house in Teaneck, New Jersey, which YU purchased for \$1.8 million upfront more than three years ago.

Former President Richard Joel, who currently teaches on a part-time basis in the Sy Syms School of Business, received \$665,889 in aggregate compensation in 2018, including a base salary of more than \$500,000, the tax record revealed. This was in addition to the use of his university-owned residence. During the final years of Joel's tenure, he was among the highest-paid university presidents in America.

In response to The Commentator's inquiries on Joel's pay and other related matters, a YU spokesperson said, "Other than what is required by law to be disclosed in the Form 990, the university does not disclose confidential salary or benefit information of individual employees."

Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel Andrew Lauer's total compensation was over \$700,000 — about \$50,000 less than his pay reported in YU's 2017 filing — ranking him the highest-paid senior staff member after Berman. Jacob Harman, vice president of business affairs, trailed behind Lauer with approximately \$655,000 in total pay, making him the

third-highest paid employee of the university listed on the filing.

Outgoing Senior Vice President Josh Joseph, who will begin as chief operating officer and executive vice president at the Orthodox Union in September, was paid a base salary of more than \$340,000, with over \$150,000 in additional compensation. Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman's sum total was over \$360,000.

Compared to the 2017 Form 990, former Vice President of Institutional Advancement Alyssa Herman's 2018 total compensation more than doubled from about \$195,000 to over \$400,000.

As The Commentator previously reported, for the 2020 payroll year, President Berman is taking a voluntary 20% cut through December, while other senior staff members are voluntarily taking a pay cut between 5 and 10 percent.

The 2018 Form 990 also included key financial information about the YU's expenditures and fiscal positions. According to the document, the university spent roughly \$2.5 million in advertising in 2018 — around \$1 million more than it spent in 2017. Additionally, more than \$3 million was

spent on travel costs in 2018, and roughly \$5 million was spent on outside consulting costs, including fundraising consultants, third-party legal and lobbying firms as well as outside accounting services. The university spent over \$3.75 million on food in 2018, and office expenses exceeded \$6 million.

According to the filing, in 2018, over \$95 million in grants and assistance went to student financial aid, scholarships and fellowships, including "emergency assistance student grants." This marked a more than \$7 million increase from such assistance disbursed by the university in 2017.

The university spent more than \$9.16 million on security services in 2018, the overwhelming majority of which went to a \$9 million contract with Securitas, which YU contracts with to provide security personnel for its campuses.

## YU Begins Construction to Repurpose Art Department Space for Katz School Amidst Student Protest

By SRULI FRUCHTER

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 12.*

Yeshiva University Facilities Services officially began renovations to repurpose space on the eighth floor of 215 Lexington Ave. — historically used by the Stern College for Women (SCW) Art Department — for the Katz School of Science and Health's new cybersecurity master's program, The Commentator learned.

The last known plan, according to SCW Art Department Chair Prof. Traci Tullius, devoted nearly a third of the art floor — including the multimedia classroom, the video lab and Tullius' office — to the cybersecurity program for a conference room, computer lab, lounge and pantry. Despite undergraduate student protests and a petition of over 1,000 signatures that opposed the removal of Art Department space, the renovations are moving forward and should be "ready for students in the fall," according to Provost

and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman.

According to the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB), there are no issued work permits for the eighth floor of 215 Lexington Ave as of Sunday, July 12.

*"I've consistently and strongly voiced my opposition to this plan since it was originally proposed, but Covid makes the compression of the art studios absolutely unacceptable."*

SCW Art Department Chair, Prof. Traci Tullius

However, if the work is classified as "regular maintenance," it would not require a DOB work permit, according to a COB spokesman. As of publication, YU Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum did not respond to The Commentator's inquiries regarding the nature of the active construction.

While President Ari Berman previously declared a freeze on all capital projects in

light of the coronavirus pandemic, since the art floor construction was "specifically funded by donors, prior to the coronavirus outbreak," it is separate from YU's annual capital project budget and not subject to the capital project freeze, according to Botman.

"I've consistently and strongly voiced my opposition to this plan since it was originally proposed, but COVID makes the compression of the art studios absolutely unacceptable," Tullius said. "In my opinion, it's outrageous to tackle this in the midst of the pandemic, when the focus should be on health and safety."

On Wednesday, July 1, Tullius was first informed by Facilities Services of their plan

to begin construction "right away" over the summer and subsequently notified her art students of the update. Additionally, she said, while they were given a Facilities Services contact for students to schedule a time to collect their work or supplies from the eighth floor, no specific protocol was given to art students; no student has successfully accessed the floor over the summer, according to Tullius.

Botman told The Commentator that the construction will feature various upgrades for the Art Department. In response, Tullius asserted that the listed upgrades are misleading; she explained the "enhanced audio visual capabilities" are a projector in a classroom, the "expanded graphic design lab" would be the maintenance of the current graphic lab's space and the "new multi-disciplinary studio for media studies, photography and video" are displaced equipment housed in another classroom. Tullius added that there may be added blackout

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## YU Athletics Announces Plans for 2020-21 Season

By CHARLES SCHAECHTER

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 21.*

Director of Athletics and Recreation Joe Bednarsh announced Yeshiva University's plans for its sports teams for the upcoming 2020-21 season via email on July 9. Following direction from medical experts, coaches and the NCAA's Skyline Conference, nearly all teams have had their regular sea-

*Following direction from medical experts, coaches and the NCAA's Skyline Conference, nearly all teams have had their regular season altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

son altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both women's and men's soccer teams and the women's volleyball squad will not partake in the Skyline Conference season, but hope to have some form of "limited competition." Meanwhile, women's and men's cross country and golf teams have been given a full go-ahead and will begin their season following students' return to campus in Oct. with no known changes. The women's tennis team's season was moved to the spring and plans to compete in the league.

Although their seasons begin in the spring, the softball, baseball and men's tennis teams traditionally start practice in the fall. As such, all off-season practices have

been suspended. Men's volleyball is also a spring sport, but at the moment there are no expected changes to their program.

Bednarsh stated that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis, the main factors being if the sport involved contact or lent itself to social distancing, the necessity of

sharing equipment between players and if there is "enough time to complete conference competition after following the appropriate return to play protocols."

These changes have been deemed necessary by many student-athletes, but some are still irritated. "We all know that YU has

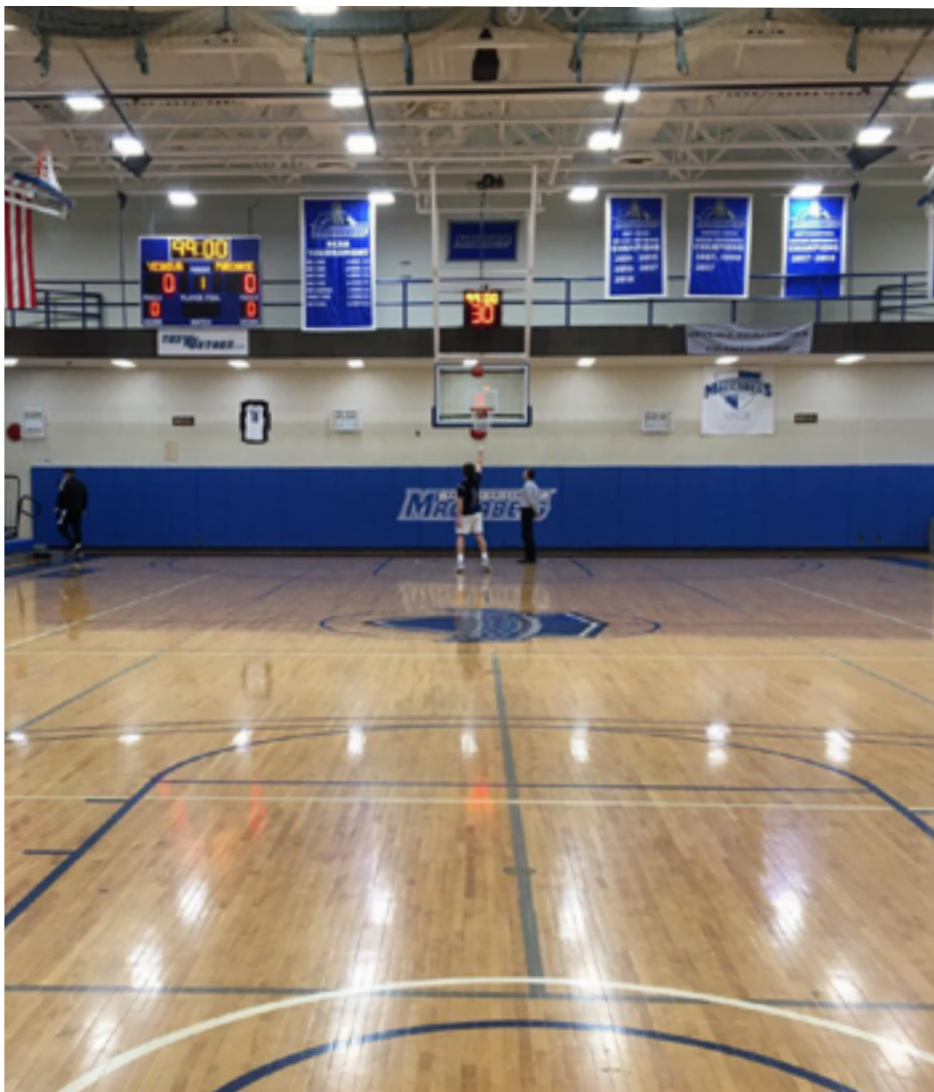
made the best decision regarding our health. However we still feel very frustrated. We want to play," shared Men's Soccer Captain Isaac Bendahan (YC '21).

Beyond the immediate future, Bednarsh shared in his email that winter sports like basketball and fencing have an "uncertain start date." This development will undoubtedly leave many fans uneasy following the men's basketball team's successful conference championship victory and unprecedented winning-streak at the NCAA D3 tournament in March. The tournament was abruptly cut short due to the coronavirus outbreak, which left the Maccabees hanging their hopes on next season.

"Honestly, I think we are living one day at a time here and waiting to see what happens. Things seem to change constantly," Head Men's Basketball Coach Elliot Steinmetz told The Commentator. "It will likely come down to NCAA and conference decisions on how many games are played and when they start. Obviously, we are excited about the team we have coming into this season and are hopeful we will get the opportunity to compete. But at the same time, life is about perspective, and we recognize the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of safety and health for our athletes, coaches and fans."

"I do feel that we could have a regular season because overall fencing is a pretty socially distant sport," shared Adina Passy (SCW '21), the captain of the women's fencing team. "It is very rare that you are closer than six feet to someone for longer than a minute. But I am very happy that we are even getting back at all and really look forward to being with my teammates again."

Bednarsh added, "we will continue to evaluate the most current information and consult with experts in the field as we strive to provide the safest quality athletic experience to our dedicated student-athletes."



The Max Stern Athletic Center court, shot before campuses closed.

AKIVA POPPERS

### ART FLOOR CONSTRUCTION

Continued from Page 9

screens, but no new equipment.

Art Department faculty members first learned about these then-potential changes to the art floor in Nov. 2019. Among various exchanges between Tullius, her colleague Prof. Mary Creede and Facilities Services members, the Art Department was able to negotiate to reclaim the graphics lab, which was supposed to be allocated for the cybersecurity program. Between this time, art students and faculty members took action to prevent any space reallocation, covering displayed, student artwork with signs saying, "No art floor? No art."

Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon previously said that "This issue [of the art floor construction] is on the back burner until we deal with the more immediate concerns." Aside from the email Tullius received on July 1, there has not been further communication with the Art Department regarding the current construction.

Some art majors feel shunned by YU's decision. "The video lab is my second home, so if they really take that away... I won't have that space anymore to edit, watch, and create films with the already scarce resources they did have to offer," said Tamar Ciment (SCW '20), a film major who often used the eighth floor. "And on top of that, there would be basically no future film majors



Students covered displayed student artwork to protest the art floor space removal.

ROCKY PINCUS

at Stern because of how discouraging the art department will appear to prospective students... I hope everyone comes to their senses and starts showing us that they care about the arts."

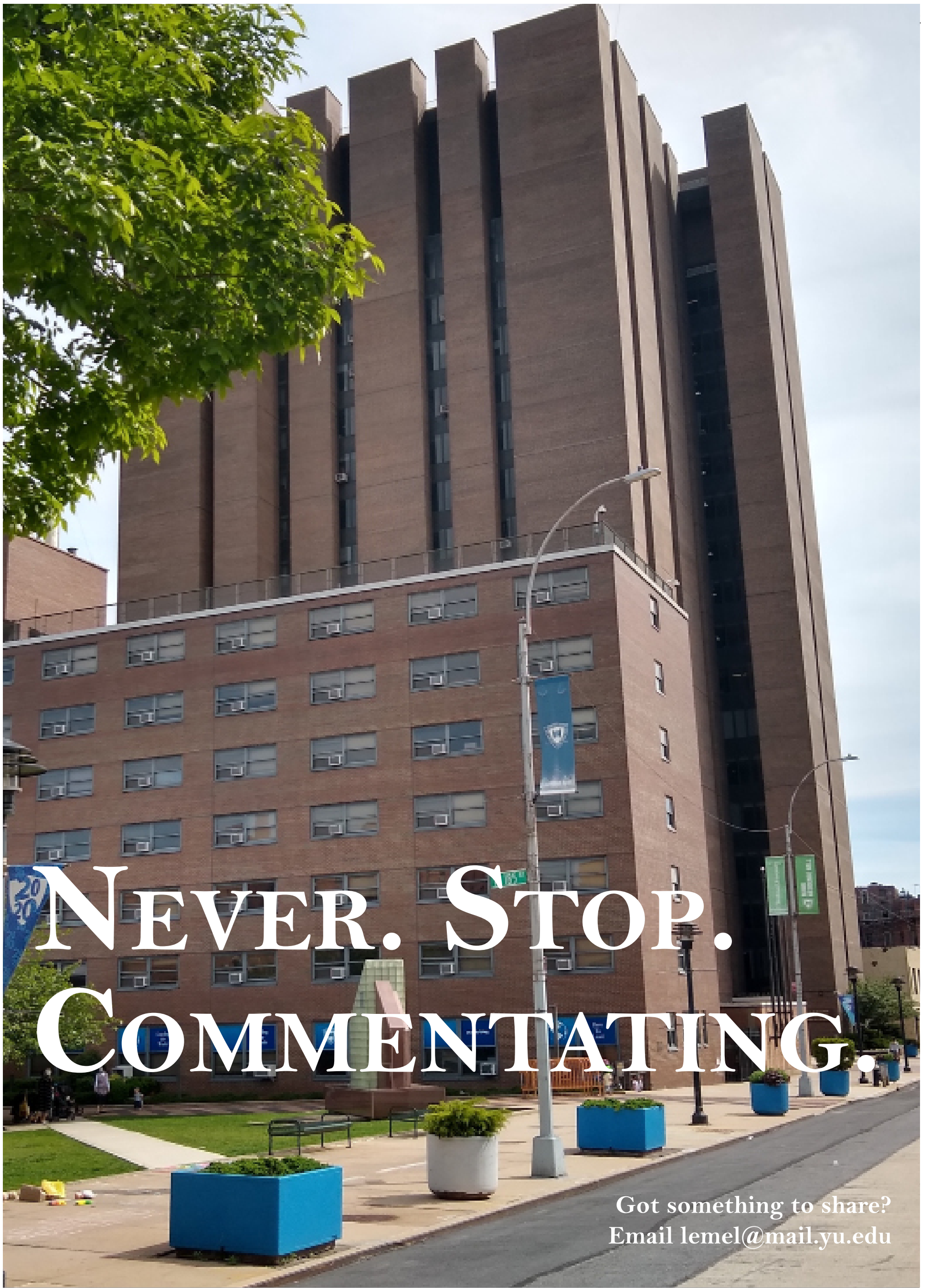
Aside from their initial disappointment

with the project's original announcement, some art students are also concerned about the whereabouts and safety of their artwork. "In previous renovations, they did work on some rooms without telling anyone, and a lot of the artwork and supplies

were damaged, thrown out, or went missing completely," said Rocky Pincus (SCW '20), a former art student who also led the student protests. "I personally have things on the art floor, and I left my things there thinking we'd come back to school at some point... I heard construction began, and I'm very nervous."

"It's also quite disappointing to me that the concerns of students, voiced strongly and eloquently through their activism this spring, is being completely ignored," Tullius told The Commentator. "They at least deserve the courtesy of a response from the administration, an explanation, or some sign that their opinion and experience matters. I worry that this lack of acknowledgment sends a very troubling message to our students."

As of publication, Katz School Dean Paul Russo did not respond to The Commentator's request for comment.



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## GPATS

Continued from Front Page

He expressed that YU is very proud of these women who “chose to spend additional years of learning Torah at GPATS” and concluded that “these students represent the future leaders and educators of our community, and we continue to look for ways to further grow the program.”

**The Early Years: 1999-2003**

Originally referred to as the “Torah She-Ba'al Peh program,” GPATS was announced in 1999 under the auspices of then-YU president Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm — who passed away in May — and funded with a \$1.6 million pledge by the Avi Chai Foundation.

The two-year program with Gemara *sed-er/shiur* in the morning and *halakha* in the afternoon, started off as a certificate program in advanced Talmudic studies. Women also had the option to simultaneously pursue a Master’s degree in Jewish education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration by enrolling in evening courses, tuition-free. Rabbi Ephraim Kanarfogel was appointed the director of this new initiative along with an advisory committee: Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik, Dr. Karen Bacon — who was the dean of Stern College for Women (SCW) at the time — and Rabbi Moshe Kahn. For the inaugural class, Rabbi Kahn was hired to teach the morning seder Gemara along with Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh teaching *halakha*; Rabbi Eitan Mayer joined the program the following year to teach the new cohort’s *halakha shiur*.

Beginning in the 2000-2001 school year, this exclusive program which provided an \$18,000 stipend (and created slight controversy, especially when compared to the Wilf campus’ much smaller stipend) had an application designed to foster competition, and only accepted 10 women a year. In the first year, they accepted 10 out of 16 applicants and had 8 women enroll, and in the second year, 10 out of over 20 applicants were accepted. With this competitive program, students were expected to have finished a minimum of two years of college-level Gemara study and have adequate skills in Aramaic and Talmudic texts.

For the first two years of the program’s existence, the *halakha* curriculum constituted *Hilkhot Shabbat* for first-year students and *Niddah* for second-year students, but starting in 2002-2003, first-year students learned *Hilkhot Kashrut*, a curriculum which continued for almost all of the following cohorts. Two “comprehensive examinations” were given in both Talmud and *halakha* each semester, and today’s program has similar *bechinot*.

At the time, it was unclear what would be the equivalent course of study for women

graduating from colleges other than SCW, but there were women from colleges such as Brandeis, Queens, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the first two years of the program. The opportunity to get a degree from Azrieli as well as the curriculum’s focus on methods to teach Judaic studies, were all part of the vision (but not requirements) to train women to be future educators in Talmud and *halakha*.

The original grant from Avi Chai was only for three years, and Rabbi Lamm was unsure if the grant would be renewed until June 2002, when the Avi Chai Foundation informed YU that they would provide a new grant for another cohort of 10 women. At that point, it was announced that some of the grant money would be used to hire a second Talmud teacher. Rabbi Mayer switched to teaching Talmud alongside Rabbi Kahn, and

GPATS participants giving *shiurim* or *chaburot* to undergraduate students. Ultimately, however, only seven fully-qualified women applied for the next cohort by the deadline, prompting the faculty to suggest making the application requirements a bit more flexible. At the time, Rabbi Kahn also pointed out that a significant number of SCW women were opposed to learning Gemara on *hashkafic* grounds, which could have been contributing to the low application rates.

**Expansion and Evolvement: 2004-2013**

Four years after its inception, two of the program’s rabbis, Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh and Rabbi Mayer, made *aliyah* and left the program, and Rabbi Binyamin Tabory joined the staff for his sabbatical year from *Yeshivat Har Etzion*. Around that time, Rabbi Daniel Wolff joined the program for

“Being in GPATS is a life-changing experience, where you learn a tremendous amount of Torah, enhance textual and conceptual skills in Torah learning, and are exposed to leading Torah scholars.”

Professor Nechama Price

Rabbi Gedalya Berger started teaching the second year *halakha shiur*, *Niddah*. Around that time, the question of the grant’s goals for the graduates’ careers came into question; perhaps it was expected for all of them to go on to be Talmud teachers, but Avi Chai insisted that they did not have such an agenda. However, women in the first cohort requested for a twice-a-week Tanakh option and were denied by the foundation, citing Bible options available to them at the Bernard Revel Graduate School.

While it seems that the program in its early years did not have problems attracting applicants, in its fourth year, 2003, Rabbi Kanarfogel reported that they were now having an easier time finding fully qualified applicants, with the required strong Gemara skills. Another change was that many women enrolled in GPATS were not completing the full two-year program, instead choosing to attend for one year only before entering a different graduate program, a departure from the original intended goal to prepare Jewish educators. Overall, the growing interest in the program was seen as a potential sign of increased acceptance from the wider Orthodox community for women’s learning and dwindling controversy. Students proposed ideas to ramp up recruiting, including getting the word out to SCW students and

a short time teaching *Halakha*, and upon his departure, the *shiurim* were combined into one *halakha* shiur. At that time there were conversations about the program conferring a master’s degree upon completion, and it was reported by The Commentator that the process had begun. The process ended up taking a lot more time, nearing completion in 2008, when they gained approval, and SCW began to grant the degree in Fall 2009. Reflecting back on that time, some alumni noted that the transition of the program to a master’s program was a practical decision because prior to that, graduates were only receiving a certificate which was not comparable to *smicha* awarded to men for similar learning, and, therefore, didn’t improve job prospects. However, they also expressed that the program was originally designed to be for full-time, yeshiva-style learning and not for a master’s degree.

In 2006, Rabbi Shmuel Hain was appointed as the Rosh Beit Midrash and taught a Gemara *shiur*. It was then that the program began being known as GPATS. A new collaboration between GPATS and Yeshiva University’s Center for the Jewish Future (CJF) began with a senior fellowship for women who finished the two-year certificate program, but it was not continued much longer after that year. The 2006 class had 11 graduates, reported to be the largest class yet, with most of the graduates also pursuing graduate degrees in education. However, at that time GPATS did have some diversity of student’s career paths. For example, an Australian student, Leonie Hardy, received an MD and practiced medicine for two years before joining the program. In 2007, GPATS’ mission statement was “to develop an elite cadre of female scholars of Talmud and Halacha who will serve as leaders and role models for the Orthodox Jewish community,” and didn’t mention anything about training teachers.

The Avi Chai Foundation stopped providing financial support for the program in 2008 and subsequently, SCW took over providing funding for the program. GPATS began granting a master’s degree in Biblical and Talmudic interpretation in 2009, with an added requirement of two fully-funded courses from YU’s Revel and/or Azrieli graduate schools. Any additional courses at these schools were also free for current GPATS students up until 2018. Rabbi Hain left the program in 2011 and was replaced

by Rabbi David Nachbar as a new maggid shiur while Rabbi Yosef Blau started increasing his presence in the Beren Beit Midrash. The Center for the Jewish Future began to have a larger role in the programming, enriching GPATS scholars “through pedagogic training, scholar-in-residence opportunities in synagogues around the country, and placement for significant positions in Jewish education.” Despite all of these changes, the program had very little growth, partially due to high acceptance requirements for applicants, and perhaps, as some speculated at the time, due to a lack of support from YU *roshei yeshiva* and members of the YU administration.

In 2013, GPATS was reportedly flourishing, with a new opportunity for SCW undergraduates to begin the master’s degree in their senior year with a joint B.A.-M.A. program, of which five women enrolled in that year. Additionally, the CJF continued to help further expand GPATS with its co-curricular pedagogical program, with Rabbi Kenneth Brander and Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter at the forefront of these changes.

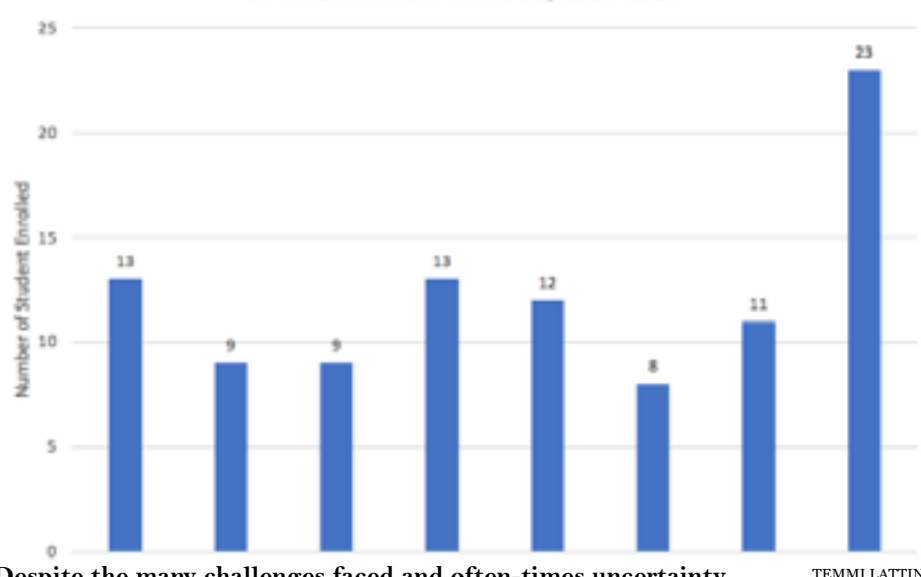
**Financial Instability, Transition and Perseverance: 2014-2019**

In 2014, however, no new students enrolled in GPATS; since the program only consisted of second-year fellows, there were worries about GPATS shutting down. In light of YU’s grave financial situation at the time, numerous master’s programs were discontinued, and many thought that GPATS would follow. Instead, GPATS was restructured — largely by Rabbi Brander — and was transferred from being part of SCW to being under the CJF, which also started covering the program’s funding. The stipend for fellows was lowered to the current sum of \$5,000, which is less than 20% of the original stipend in 2000 (taking inflation into account). In May, The Commentator reported a potential curriculum overhaul, with changes to the Gemara learning and *halakha sugyot*, such as swapping Gemara *B’iyun* for a “top twenty” *sugyot* course and replacing *Yoreh De’ah* with *Orech Chaim*, which students were very unhappy about. Ultimately, these changes were withdrawn, and GPATS maintained a full morning seder of Gemara *B’iyun* and generally followed a two-year halacha cycle of *Niddah* or *Kashrus* (though a cohort may vote and choose a topic from *Orech Chaim*).

While the curriculum swap was unrealized, GPATS transitioned from mainly training teachers to producing female community leaders, like *yoatzot halakha*, for the Jewish community. The GPATS administrators envisioned GPATS to be a pre-professional program, to prepare “students for careers outside the Beit Midrash,” as Rabbi JJ Schacter phrased it.

Following the uncertainty surrounding GPATS’ future, in Fall 2014, Professor Nechama Price, a GPATS alum of 2003 herself, was hired as the new director and the first female faculty member of the women’s graduate program. In 2016, Professor Price brought back and reenvisioned the Beit Midrash Summer Program that ran from 2006 through 2009 by establishing the highly successful Beren June Zman, led by Rabbi Nachbar, a GPATS Gemara maggid shiur. Parallel to the Wilf Campus’ June Zman program, this summer learning program was created in an effort to increase Torah learning opportunities for undergraduate students and recent graduates of SCW and other universities. As explained by Rabbi Nachbar, “June Zman is one way in which GPATS seeks to enrich the religious life of undergraduate students on campus.” For

GPATS Enrollment Numbers, 2013-2020



TEMMI LATTIN

Despite the many challenges faced and often-times uncertainty surrounding GPATS’ future, barring the 2014 “restructuring year,” GPATS enrollment numbers have remained mostly unchanged until this Fall 2020 semester’s major increase.

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## Law Review

## Qualified Immunity — A Deconstruction of the Curious Doctrine

By DANIEL MELOOL

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 22.*

On May 25, a Black man named George Floyd was accused of using a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes in a deli in Minneapolis. After police arrived on the scene, the situation took a turn for the worse as one of the officers, Derek Chauvin, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes while the other officers just stood and watched. Chauvin kept his knee pressed against Floyd's neck despite his pleas that he couldn't breathe and even after paramedics arrived. Eventually, Floyd lost consciousness and tragically lost his life. Aside from the revisited discussion about race and criminal justice reform, this horrendous incident has also reawakened a debate in legal circles regarding the legal doctrine of qualified immunity.

Qualified immunity asserts that a government official can not be prosecuted for violating a citizen's constitutional rights unless that official's actions violated a "clearly established" statutory or constitutional right. This likely could mean that Chauvin can't be prosecuted for his actions since it could be argued that, under qualified immunity, there was no previous case that decided an officer can't press his knee against a person's neck. As Patrick Jaicomo and Anya Bidwell, attorneys at the Institute for Justice, have pointed out: "When Floyd's family goes to court to hold the officers liable for their actions, a judge in Minnesota may very well dismiss their claims. Not because the officers didn't do anything wrong, but because there isn't a case from the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court specifically holding that it is unconstitutional for police to kneel on the neck of a handcuffed man for nearly nine minutes until he loses consciousness and then dies." If that is the case, then it would seem impossible to ever hold officers accountable for abusing their power like in the aforementioned incident. In a country whose pledge of allegiance concludes with the famous words "liberty and justice for all," how did our legal system devise a doctrine that allows for officers to be above the law?

The origins of qualified immunity can be traced back to 1967 when the Supreme Court introduced the doctrine in *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U.S. 547 (1967). The case involved Black clergymen in Mississippi who, in 1961, were charged with violating the Mississippi Code by attempting to use a waiting room in a bus terminal that was designated for only white people. The clergymen were then convicted in civil court, but the cases against them were dropped after one of them was granted a trial de novo in which the jury decided a verdict in his favor. Subsequently, the clergymen sued for damages in the District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 which states: "Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States... to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law." After much deliberation, the jury ruled in favor of the policemen.

Appealing the case in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, the appeals court sided with the officers, ruling: "In this cause... the doctrine of official immunity protects

the police officers from common-law false-imprisonment liability." The Supreme Court, in an opinion by Chief Justice Earl Warren, reversed the ruling of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, writing: "The common law has never granted police officers an absolute and unqualified immunity, and the officers in this case do not claim that they are entitled to one. Their claim is rather that they should not be liable if they acted in good faith and with probable cause in making an arrest under a statute that they believed to be valid. Under the prevailing view in this country a peace officer who arrests someone with probable cause is not liable for false arrest simply because the innocence of the suspect is later proved." Chief Justice Warren's opinion rejected the idea that the officers were covered by absolute immunity, but accepted that the officers were entitled to what we now know as qualified immunity.

*In a country whose pledge of allegiance concludes with the famous words "liberty and justice for all," how did our legal system devise a doctrine that allows for officers to be above the law?*

The Supreme Court would further develop the doctrine less than a decade later in *Wood v. Strickland*, 420 U.S. 308 (1975). In 1974, high school students in Arkansas who had been expelled for possession of alcoholic beverages sued their school officials in the District Court for the Western District of Arkansas under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The district court ruled in favor of the school officials on the grounds that they did not act with malicious intent toward the students. On appeal, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the district court and ordered a new trial. The Supreme Court then vacated and remanded the decision, ruling that qualified immunity extends to public school officials so long as they acted within good faith. Writing for the majority, Justice Byron White explained: "we hold that a school board member is not immune from liability for damages under § 1983 if he knew or reasonably should have known that the action he took within his sphere of official responsibility would violate the constitutional rights of the student affected, or if he took the action with the malicious intention to cause a deprivation of constitutional rights or other injury to the student."

As a result of the decisions handed down in *Pierson* and *Wood*, the standard for applying qualified immunity rested on whether a government official acted within good faith, believing that his or her conduct was lawful, and that the conduct was objectively reasonable. However, this standard would not last long as the Supreme Court would revise its application less than a decade after the decision in *Wood*.

In 1982, the Supreme Court created a new standard for qualified immunity in *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800 (1982), which coincided with *Nixon v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 731 (1982). The developments of the cases began in 1970 when Earnest Fitzgerald was fired from his position in the Department of the Air Force. Fitzgerald then accused President Richard Nixon of terminating his position in retaliation for a testimony he gave before a Congressional Subcommittee in 1968 in which he claimed that there were cost overruns and unexpected technical difficulties concerning the development of a particular airplane. The

Civil Service Commission, a government agency tasked with selecting federal employees based on merit, denied Fitzgerald's claim that his dismissal represented unlawful retaliation. Thereafter, Fitzgerald filed a suit in the District Court for the District of Columbia against presidential aides Bryce Harlow and Alexander Butterfield accusing them of conspiring against him in his wrongful dismissal. President Nixon was also named a defendant in the case. The district court ruled that the officials were not entitled to absolute immunity. Harlow, Butterfield and Nixon appealed the decision regarding absolute immunity to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals who dismissed the appeal without issuing an opinion.

The Supreme Court heard and decided both cases at the same time, reversing the decision of the district court. The Supreme Court held that Nixon, in his capacity as a

concern that the doctrine has served as a cover-up for officers that violate the law. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, wrote in a dissent in *Kisela v. Hughes* 584 U.S. (2018) that qualified immunity "tells officers that they can shoot first and think later, and it tells the public that palpably unreasonable conduct will go unpunished." Indeed, a series of recent appeals court rulings confirms Justice Sotomayor's discontents. Last year, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a district court decision, and held that an officer who shot a 10-year-old boy was covered by qualified immunity. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that an officer who shot a 15-year-old boy who was walking to school was also protected by qualified immunity. The court even acknowledged that the officer violated the boy's due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, but could not convict the officer because there was no similar case that existed previously.

The Supreme Court's right-leaning justices have criticized qualified immunity from a more legal perspective. The late Justice Antonin Scalia explained in a dissenting opinion in *Crawford-El v. Britton*, 523 U.S. 574 (1998) that he felt the doctrine was essentially made up by the Court and not grounded in common-law: "As I have observed earlier, our treatment of qualified immunity under §1983 has not purported to be faithful to the common-law immunities that existed when §1983 was enacted, and that the statute presumably intended to subsume... We find ourselves engaged, therefore, in the essentially legislative activity of crafting a sensible scheme of qualified immunities for the statute we have invented — rather than applying the common law embodied in the statute that Congress wrote." Justice Clarence Thomas, who joined the aforementioned dissent by Justice Scalia, echoed a similar sentiment in a concurring opinion in *Ziglar v. Abbasi*, 582 U.S. (2017): "I write separately, however, to note my growing concern with our qualified immunity jurisprudence... Until we shift the focus of our inquiry to whether immunity existed at common law, we will continue to substitute our own policy preferences for the mandates of Congress. In an appropriate case, we should reconsider our qualified immunity jurisprudence."

The criticism that qualified immunity was created by judicial decree is certainly not unfounded. Chief Justice Warren essentially

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Police in Lyon, France amid protesters.

## 24-Year-Old Alum Launches “Campaign” for YU’s New EVP-COO Post

By SRULI FRUCHTER

*Editor’s Note: This article was originally published online on August 18.*

Mordechai Weiss, a 2018 graduate of Yeshiva University and an incoming third-year student at the New York University School of Law, tossed his hat into the ring to become YU’s new executive vice president (EVP) and chief operating officer (COO). Weiss launched his “campaign” to gather support for his application on Monday, Aug. 17.

A third-generation YU alumnus, Weiss earned a Bachelor’s degree in accounting from the Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) and graduated as the valedictorian of YU’s James Striar School (JSS) of Jewish Studies. Weiss is currently working as a summer associate at the Los Angeles-based law firm of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP.

The 24-year-old’s vision for YU centers around five key agendas: strengthening the alumni network, improving the university’s Career Center, connecting Beren and Wilf students, creating a curriculum and services to enhance student experience, and changing the campus culture. Weiss said that he believes these steps will return YU from its 97th-place national college ranking in the U.S News and World Report back to the top 50 schools, a focal point of his mission. Weiss further outlined these keys in his “campaign” video.

“It is time for YU to make a bold decision and choose me as Vice President to bring a youthful, passionate voice into the administration,” Weiss said. “I want the students and administrators to know that I will work tirelessly to bring the University back to its preeminence as a top 50 University.”

For the past several months, the university has been searching for an EVP-COO, a newly created role due to Senior VP Josh Joseph’s departure from YU to begin as EVP/COO at the Orthodox Union on Sept. 1. The job application instructs candidates to submit a resume and cover letter in confidence.

Weiss confirmed with The Commentator that he reached out to YU students, YU alumni and various news outlets — including The Jewish Week and The New York Post — before submitting his job application.

According to its job description, the new EVP-COO will be YU’s “chief business, administrative, and operating officer,” tasked with “building a dynamic business model and operational framework” and “helping to define sustainable, efficient ways to deploy resources, deliver services and identify new sources of revenue and funding.” While the qualifications for an ideal candidate stress past managerial and leadership experience, there are no requisite years of experience explicitly cited for applying candidates. The application instructions note that “consideration of candidates will continue until the position is filled.”

“I expect individuals to object to my application due to my age,” Weiss told The

Commentator. “I would respond that my age is my biggest asset. YU needs to attract and appeal to the younger generation of students and I will do exactly that. My passion and excitement will be shared with the students because they will experience representation of their voice at the executive level.”

During his time in YU, Weiss was active in student life and played on the men’s basketball team. He also launched LIT, an app that allows users to find “the hottest venues” for nights out with friends. Over the past few months, Weiss also posted several, now-deleted videos to his YouTube channel, including ones on summer fitness, law school and creating a “spiked” hot sauce.

Weiss told The Commentator how he networked with past and current students through “many, many hours of phone calls” to “get a better picture of what everyone was struggling with, especially from the women’s campus.” As of publication, over 160 people signed Weiss’ endorsement petition for the position, which he created the day he launched his campaign.

“During the past few months, Mordechai reached out and told me his idea to run for the Vice President [position] of Yeshiva University,” said Cloe Bohbot (SCW ‘19), Weiss’ close friend and Beren’s representative for his “campaign.” “I thought it was an amazing idea. Being a Stern student that was very involved in the social life of both [Beren and Wilf] campuses, I felt I knew the needs and wants of many of the students on the girl’s campus.”

Although the EVP-COO posting does not list any salary details, Weiss added that he “will donate [his] entire first year’s salary to directly fund the five keys of my agenda that will bring YU back to the top 50.” As The Commentator previously reported, for the 2018 fiscal year, Joseph’s salary as senior VP was reported at a base of more than \$340,000 with over \$150,000 of additional compensation. Additionally, while Weiss did not disclose the costs on his “campaign,” he noted that it was completely self-funded.

Since the EVP-COO will not be taking over all of Joseph’s responsibilities of Joseph’s senior VP position, it is unclear whether the EVP-COO will lead the committee, established by Joseph, to address the concerns of LGBTQ students at YU.

Commenting on Joseph’s committee, Weiss told The Commentator, “At this time, I do not know enough about the work of Rabbi Joseph’s committee in addressing the LGBTQ+ topic on campus. But I can tell you this — with all issues at YU, there will be a continuous and open dialogue between my office and the students.”

Weiss added, “This is something I’m willing to risk everything for because I really think it’s so important.”

A YU spokesperson declined to comment on Weiss’ campaign and application for the position.



MORDECHAI WEISS

24-year-old Mordechai Weiss (SSSB ‘18) is applying to be YU’s new executive vice president and chief operating officer.

### QUALIFIED IMMUNITY Continued from Page 13

admitted as much in the Pierson decision where he wrote: “A policeman’s lot is not so unhappy that he must choose between being charged with dereliction of duty if he does not arrest when he has probable cause, and being mulcted in damages if he does.” The revision of the doctrine by Justice Powell in the Harlow decision also gives credence to the claim that the doctrine was a creation of the Supreme Court. As noted above, he criticized the old standard and subsequently declared a new one. Was the Court not acting like the legislature in

simply rewriting the standard for applying qualified immunity? It may very well be the case that officers should be entitled to some form of protection for doing their job in a reasonable manner despite the damage incurred by an innocent party, but according to originalists like Scalia and Thomas, it is not the job of the Court to legislate from the bench.

The desire to end qualified immunity is also apparent in the halls of Congress as some members have devised legislation that would eliminate the doctrine.

The legislative efforts to repeal the doctrine are also not confined to partisan politics. Currently, Representative Justin Amash of Michigan, the lone Libertarian in Congress, has introduced a bill called the “End Qualified Immunity Act,” that has received Republican and Democratic support. This makes it the first tri-partisan supported bill in history.

Considering that the Supreme Court recently decided not to hear a set of cases challenging the doctrine, it seems that any reforms will need to come in the form of

legislation. While it may seem disheartening that the Court has refused to hear these cases, it does not mean that it will not hear them at a later point in time. Nevertheless, with a Court review off the table for the foreseeable future, any reforms will need to come through an act of legislation. Regardless of where one stands politically, there is ample reason to be skeptical about the doctrine of qualified immunity.

## The Art of Reestablishing Yourself

By DEBORAH COOPERSMITH

Hi! It's Deborah again! Still abroad, albeit surrounded by a different set of four walls, with no return ticket booked. Much of this time abroad, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, has bestowed on me many opportunities to learn valuable life lessons.

In the past eight months, I have lived in two countries, three cities and five housing situations. I started off 2020 in the Brookdale dorms watching a movie with friends. I then spent a few weeks at home before moving to the Hebrew University dorms. The next stop was Givat Shmuel for the summer, and now I am back in Jerusalem as a part-time *madricha* in Midreshet Lindenbaum.

One of the surprising attributes this pandemic brought out in me is the perseverance and grit in dealing with last-minute changes and cancellations.

I am not spontaneous—I thrive on consistency and planning. A break from the norm is manageable, but not enjoyable. During the Spring 2020 semester, I was supposed to have an in-person semester abroad, return to America in June, work in Camp Moshava and then start my senior year on the Beren Campus. Literally, none of this happened. I've learned that I can plan all I want, but I must accept that there will always be certain things out of my control. While I might not understand the master plan that God has in place, I need to trust that everything will work out.

Dr. Joel B. Wolowelsky of the Yeshivah of Flatbush once expressed that chaos in itself is an order. I've come to realize that the idea of change fits within his observation, as change, whether predictable or not, is natural. Therefore, change is a requisite for life—it is bound to happen. By learning to adapt more easily, I still struggled, but I survived knowing that chaos is normal.

I also learned to build a new community for myself. It is terrifying to put down new roots in a foreign place, but the only way to begin to feel comfortable and make the new

place feel like home is by putting yourself out there to meet people. I am lucky to have met so many wonderful, diverse people on my journey. Over these past few months, I have definitely ventured outside my comfort zone and my life has become more enhanced as a result.

I've become good friends with people I

Hatfutsot, in Tel Aviv. I also became friends with David, a Muslim from San Diego, and we discuss the theological intricacies of Islam and Judaism. These wholesome conversations would never have happened had I not been willing to meet new people and hear different perspectives. The best part was that all I needed to do to make that connection

nobody. A friend from Stern connected me with Tali, a person I went to camp with years ago, but hadn't seen since. Tali was so friendly and welcoming and invited me on multiple occasions to hang out with her friends in order to meet new people. She recognized that I was a little lost and was happy to show me the way. These people, the ones who are truly kind inside and out, are the ones to look out for.

I am happy to say that I was able to embody Tali's kindness to other young women who moved into the neighborhood during my last two weeks in Givat Shmuel. I invited them to come with me to *shul* and we even shared a Shabbat meal together. I was able to warmly welcome them because I knew what it was like to be in their shoes and also what it was like to extend a coronavirus-free hand.

I've learned to appreciate the journey rather than the final result. I did not have the semester I envisioned nor the travel I expected, but I am lucky to realize that in spite of that, so much good still took place. Those moments of playing Just Dance at 1 a.m., taking a day trip to the beach or just spending hours on the porch are the times I began to look out for and focus on. I was able to spend the summer reconnecting with a childhood friend of mine, interning at an incredible museum doing substantial work on their upcoming exhibit, and learning again in the *Beit Midrash* that had the most profound impact on my adult life. There was—and still is—so much I cannot control. Why not focus on the moments that I can create, the relationships I can foster? By focusing my attention on the aspects that were in my control, and accepting that there is so much I cannot, I've been calmer and happier.

It is still not so easy being abroad, especially during times like these. Thankfully, I've learned so many important lessons that made reestablishing myself so much easier, more meaningful and more worthwhile.

*Much of this time abroad, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, has bestowed on me many opportunities to learn valuable life lessons.*

never would have met had I stayed in Stern for Spring 2020. I met Constance, a young, Irish-Catholic woman, who was full of good advice and funny stories to share. Our friendship resulted in us interning together at The Museum of the Jewish People at Beit

was smile and say a friendly word.

It is important to acknowledge the people who are willing to open the door when you're knocking on the other side and hopefully one day be that person. When I moved to Givat Shmuel, I came in knowing essentially



Deborah, a YU student, has been abroad since January and through the COVID-19 pandemic.

DEBORAH COOPERSMITH

## Why People Don't Wear Masks: The Masked Culprit and Behavioral Economics

By YAAKOV METZ

Every day, we are plagued with decisions. And, as an increasing body of [psychological research](#) shows, our ability to make good decisions deteriorates as we make more choices. In other words, our ability to decide is a depletable resource. In psychology, this concept is known as “decision fatigue” and is one of the main reasons why, when offered a simple solution to a complex problem, we often opt for the path of least resistance. In the present pandemic, we are overrun with one complex solution after another. Whether it be strict quarantine measures imposed by government officials, travel limitations effectively making the world a much smaller place than it was just nine months ago, or an elusive vaccine that is yet to exist but is expected to be discovered in record time, chances are, the fatigue has already set in by the time you reached the end of this sentence.

There is, however, one decision that Goldman Sachs claims — if adhered to correctly — would prevent a 5% or \$1 trillion GDP loss through preventing future lockdowns. That same choice could save 66,000 Americans, about the same number of people that fly through Newark International Airport every day, from dying

of the Coronavirus by December, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). Both metrics refer to the simple choice to dawn a small piece of fabric over one's mouth and nose. Participation

psychology, notes the exception to the rule of rational behavior. One of the most studied experiments in behavioral economics is known as the “Ultimatum Game,” where two players are tasked with sharing a spe-

as fairness, injustice and revenge.

By understanding this principle, behavioral economists have helped solve real-life issues such as [drunk driving](#) with the use of free nachos, saving for retirement by [reframing](#) what it means to invest, and even [urinal backsplash](#) with the use of carton flies. All the aforementioned examples were accomplished with the use of what behavioral economists like to call “nudge theory,” or positive reinforcement through subtle suggestions that influence decision-making without changing the available choices. A [2018 study](#) sought to study a remedy to childhood obesity by encouraging school cafeteria patrons to purchase healthier options. By placing the healthy food at students' eye level, there was a significant increase in the purchase of nutritious meals. This behavioral “nudge” clashes with classical economics, which would assume that students would still purchase the pizza regardless of placement, because that choice will provide the greatest personal utility.

What behavioral nudges can be implemented to encourage mask-wearing? Before this can be answered, we must first understand why people do not wear masks from a behavioral economics standpoint. Facts and data do not usually spur action; rather

*Behavioral economists have helped solve real-life issues such as drunk driving with the use of free nachos, saving for retirement by reframing what it means to invest, and even preventing urinal backsplash with the use of carton flies.*

in mask-wearing is an essential prosocial behavior, yet many people choose not to do so. Some [detest](#) encroachment of their personal liberties, whereas others simply doubt the effectiveness of mask wearing. As we reluctantly trudge into the better part of a year with the global pandemic, it is time to ask — free of criticism and with sheer curiosity — why don't people wear masks? And, is there anything that can be done to change that behavior?

One of the cornerstones of economics is the assumption of rational behavior, or that individuals consistently make choices that offer the greatest level of personal utility. However, a recently renewed field of study known as “behavioral economics,” which examines the crossroads of economics and

cific set of money. Player one is given all the money and is asked to divide the money with the other player. If player two accepts the money, it is distributed per player 1's offer (say 50/50); however, if player two rejects player one's offer, neither receive any portion of the money. According to classical economics, it is within player two's best interest to accept any offer from player one that is greater than zero. The assumption is player two will act rationally, after all, \$1 is better than nothing. However, less equal offers (say 80/20) are often rejected by player 2, and this demonstrates a direct deviation of one of the most basic rules in classical economics: presumption of rationality. Behavioral economics studies this phenomenon by considering additional factors of decision, such

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### MASKED CULPRIT

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humans tend to respond well to salience, or the quality of being noticeable. When presented with uncertainty, we often look at our surroundings, and base choices off things we can touch, see and feel. Immediate cues suggest that COVID-19 is not a horrible disease because people are not grotesquely dying in public, and total anarchy has not ensued. This roadblock to mask-wearing ties in nicely with yet another complicating factor known as the “Law of Small Numbers.” This principle asserts that humans tend to overestimate how much of our personal experience is like the experience of everyone else, generalizing the neighborhood-wide for the nationwide. **Optimism bias** leads to the belief that an individual is less likely to get sick with COVID-19 and also contributes to non-mask wearing. This fallacy, often subconscious, drives action by reinforcing the thought, “but it could never happen to me.”

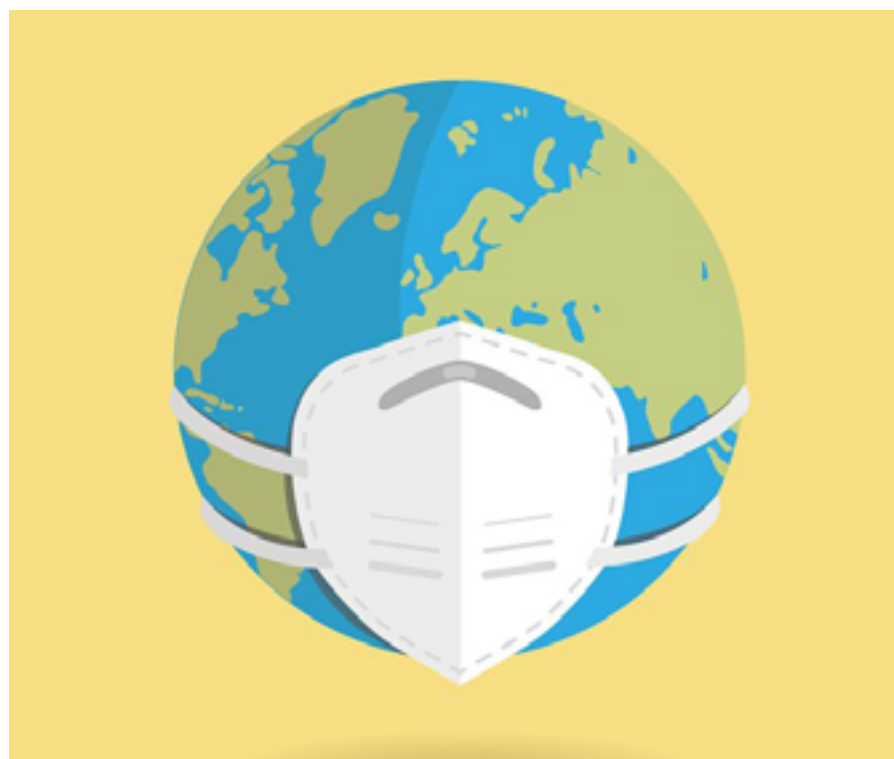
On a broader scale, given the chronological order of events, urban and densely populated areas were the first to have exposure to COVID-19 en masse, and therefore were also the first to warn everyone about the detrimental effects of not wearing a mask. These early warnings to rural areas were both given and received as a reprimand. A mass **psychological reactance** ensued where individuals felt that an outside power was threatening to limit their range of choices. People promptly responded by not wearing masks, even though they may have otherwise done so on their own accord. Imagine being told to take out the trash by a sibling, and although you were planning on doing so just a minute ago, not taking out the trash is now a position you will now uphold at all costs.

As for the implementation of behavioral nudges, a basic backbone and powerful tool

of behavioral economics are communal norms. These norms include not cutting in line, not playing heavy metal in a library and wearing clothing. Third-party punishment is the censure one receives from members of their community for not abiding by these norms. This social pressure is one of the most powerful tools for guiding pro-social behavior in a community.

Creating a social norm is a science in and of itself. The first step in doing so is to have a binary benchmark as to whether one is abiding the norm or not. For example, one is either naked while playing heavy metal in a library or not, there is no in-between and zero ambiguity. Although this may seem intuitive, this was one of the largest failures in the implementation of masks. In the beginning of the pandemic, the narrative was to **not wear masks** and instead to save them for healthcare workers. Present-day expert advice only **mandates** an old hand-me-down bandana that can be tied to one’s face. Equally unclear in public health directives was when to wear a mask, whether it be in the park, or when walking by people on the sidewalk. Not only did this confuse people as to when they should wear a mask, but it also made the social norm of wearing a mask impossible to define.

The second and equally important factor is to mitigate social reactance by carefully choosing the right messenger. Ohioans do not want to be lectured by the New York governor; they want familiarity with a person or character with whom they identify. This issue is already being addressed with PSAs coming from the **NFL**, **Pixar** and **Sesame Street**, organizations that are familiar to most Americans. More local sources like neighborhood doctors and ads appealing to



In an ill world, behavior is often the best medicine

PIXABAY

specific regional demographics add a personal connection that eventually appeals to the broader audience.

The American people need to be given clear guidelines on when to wear and when not to wear a mask. Coupled with the behavioral nudges from personalized PSAs and local outlets, behavioral norms will begin to solidify, and third-party punishment will take care of the rest. It is important to recognize that social reactance is a broad phenomenon and can be recognized in our everyday lives. You are likely reinforcing

non-mask wearing by screaming at a bear faced coffee goer when social norms have not stabilized. Although it may make you feel better about yourself, it is not going to get any more masks on more faces. The issue of mask wearing reminds us of how complicated simple solutions can become when attempting to alter the social fabric even for the betterment of society. With the help of behavioral economics we can start to effectively promote mask wearing through the science of unmasking behavior.

### GPATS

Continued from Page 12

the past five summers, the summer course typically attracted 25-30 students; this **summer’s** online platform had over 60 women participate via Zoom. Professor Price also spearheaded the “Sunday Night Learning: Empowered by GPATS” program in 2017 for female high school girls, giving them a chance to learn under GPATS students and faculty.

Following the announcement of Rabbi Brander’s **departure** in 2018, there were renewed **concerns** about GPATS’ stability due to the absence of a successor. Nevertheless, Professor Price assured that the program was financially stable and had President Berman’s full support.

Provost Selma Botman **assumed** a new senior advisor role in the GPATS faculty, and met with GPATS students who, afterwards, **voiced** tentative optimism to the YU Observer about the support from YU, pointing to vague statements and asked for a clearer vision for recruitment and advertising to ensure the program’s longevity. The 2018 year also had the smallest class size since the establishment of GPATS, with only 8 students enrolled, but 2019 saw an increase to 11 students.

In late 2019, Professor Price **announced** a new Tanach track starting Fall 2020. As Professor Price noted, she had envisioned this second track from the start of her appointment in 2014. In the early years of GPATS, women had **expressed** a desire for such a track and Rabbi Brander noted discussions in the works in his 2017 **interview**.

#### Prosperity and Growth: 2020

For Fall 2020, SCW Tanach professor Dr. Michelle Levine and Revel professor Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Berger will be running the morning Tanach seder with *chavruta*

learning and an accompanying shiur. Dr. Levine, GPATS’ first female instructor, will be teaching Parshanut (Biblical exegesis), specifically about the different commentators and their unique approaches, while Rabbi Berger will be covering literary aspects within Tanach as well as Bekiyut learning. Tanach students will then join the Talmud students in the same afternoon *halakha shiur* and will receive the same \$5,000 stipend. Instead of afternoon seder, they have the option to take classes at Revel Graduate school and count Tanach morning seder as 12 credits towards an M.A. from Revel. Aliza Pollack (GPATS ‘21), who is currently enrolled in the Tanach track, expressed that she’s been hoping for a program like this for years and is “so happy that it’s finally happening.”

For Fall 2020, there are 23 students enrolled in GPATS, a historic enrollment increase since its inception 20 years ago. Of that, 18 students are in their first year of learning, four are Shana Bet students, and one is Shana Gimmel. From the early years of the program, many women chose to stay an additional year (or more) to continue their learning as a fellow and received funding and had a role in assisting newer students in the program. Dr. Shana Strauch Schick, the first woman to **receive** a doctorate in Talmud from YU, and a student of GPATS from 2002-2007 reflected on her years in the program, sharing that “GPATS offered a unique opportunity to spend significant time in an immersive beit midrash environment.” Over the course of her five years at GPATS she was “able to engage in serious learning b’iyun in Gemara and Halakha, with a cohort of dedicated women.” Dr. Strauch Schick concluded, “GPATS is where I gained

an understanding for what it means to learn Torah, and in turn established my path as a student and as a teacher.”

In more recent years, Shana Gimmel students stopped receiving a stipend, but some women still choose to stay a third year for the sake of additional Torah learning. There are 16 full-time students taking both morning and afternoon classes and two undergraduate students taking GPATS classes. Five students are enrolled in the Tanach track and the other 18 are in the Talmud track. As is the case with all Fall 2020 Beren courses, some GPATS faculty members are planning to teach on campus, while others will hold classes online. Nevertheless, all GPATS courses will be fully accessible via Zoom. This online format provides geographic flexibility for GPATS students, who previously needed to live in New York to attend courses. Pollack, whose husband’s last-minute job complications due to COVID-19 required them both to live in Chicago instead of in New York explained that only because GPATS is going to be online will she be able to continue with the program.

Furthermore, the two Revel or Azrieli courses that were required for the GPATS degree for over 10 years will no longer be mandatory. Instead, a GPATS student may pursue a second degree from another YU graduate school with a discount. In late spring 2020, newly **appointed** SCW Associate Dean for Torah Studies Shoshana Schechter took over Provost Botman’s role as the GPATS supervisor, working closely with Professor Price to administer the program. She added that GPATS classes will offer in-person instruction early (compared to other YU programs), Sept. 8., right after Labor Day, and is glad that there will be women

learning in the Beren Beit Midrash before undergraduate students return to campus.

When asked what she attributes the growth of the program to, Professor Price identified a number of factors. First, she described that more women are recognizing “the impact” that learning Torah has on their lives. Nodding to the varied student makeup, she asserted that this impact holds up “whether these women are treating GPATS as a gap program prior to graduate school, or as a preparation for a lifetime as an educator.” She also pointed to the noticeable impact GPATS alumni left after 20 years of the program’s existence. Professor Price detailed the deliberate recruitment efforts, as was **requested** by GPATS fellows in 2018, including outreach to seminary students as well as in various SCW education classes. She finished off by expressing how thrilled she was to witness GPATS double in size and in programming, commenting that “this reflects a growing excitement amongst women for learning Torah and dedicating years to studying it.” Dean Schechter also conveyed that she is very much looking forward to GPATS’ continued growth. “Yeshiva University should be on the forefront of high level learning for women and GPATS is an integral part of that vision,” she said.



# We Asked, Y(O)U Answered: Zooming Through the Summer

By DEBORAH COOPERSMITH

*Editor's Note: The Commentator's "We Asked, Y(O)U Answered" column provides students with a forum to express their opinions and/or experiences regarding various aspects of student life.*

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Yeshiva University students saw their summer plans significantly altered. The Commentator reached out to various students via email and social media to ask them about their summer experiences. The responses of eight students are provided below.

**Zahava Fertig (SCW '21)**  
**Political Science**

"My original summer plans fell through in the middle of February. Then, when COVID-19 hit, my plans to make plans were put on hold. After seeing an email from Dean Wasserman about a potential internship program, I jumped on the opportunity and applied for YU's Consulting Force Summer Internship Program. I was paired with a grassroots Jewish non-profit called Project Proactive where I worked with two other YU students in creating, planning and facilitating a two week Virtual Leadership Development Program for 17 teens.

"Except for a few rare exceptions, most of my social life took place on my laptop, through Zoom and Whatsapp. I made sure to reach out to at least one friend per day, and I was part of a virtual Zoom library with a bunch of people who were also working/studying from home this summer. This was a great way to be productive without being alone and I had a chance to meet and get to know new people (what a novelty!). Plus, my friend Deborah, started a book club that met once a week, which was a great way to motivate me to read something new and get to talk about it with a great group of people.

"While this was definitely not the summer I expected or intended, having the flexibility to "be" in multiple places at a time enabled me to participate in a fellowship program, an internship, take a summer class and still have time to relax and spend with my family."

**Michael Stark (SSSB '22)**  
**Business Management**

"I originally did not have an internship. Over the summer, I kept sending out my resume and was eventually asked to interview for a real estate company called GRI Properties. I got the chance to learn more about real estate through my internship as well as have fun going surfing at the beach and enjoying the nice weather.

"COVID definitely halted my social life. I was not able to see many of my friends and it became a lot harder to stay in touch. As each day passed, it didn't feel like a new day started. Everything became monotonous and it was like one long day that never ended."

**Moshe Nissanoff (YC '21)**  
**Business of Medicine**

"It was definitely difficult to keep in touch with my friends, but I owe that mostly to studying for the MCAT instead of COVID-19. I still made it an effort to talk to friends both in person and over video chat!

"I had a super productive summer! I took Physics I and II with labs, Intro to Information Systems, began studying for the MCAT, and applied to medical schools, which included writing roughly 70 essays. Family is everything to me and I am grateful to have such a strong relationship with them. After being out of the house for the past three years, I am lucky to be able to spend so much time with them. My family

also hatched turkeys for fun and I started a vegetable patch!"

**Yoseph Talasazan (Katz '24)**  
**Business Management**

"Quarantine definitely ruined my expectations of summer, where I couldn't really hang out with friends or go out to my favorite places such as the beach or synagogue. However, I had time to do things I've always wanted to do such as have a scheduled workout, call up friends from across the country, and learn more Torah throughout the week.

was doable."

**Yosef Rosenfield (YC '21)**  
**Music**

"I work for the Providence Eruv Corporation. Fortunately for me, Jews still like having a kosher eruv every Shabbos, even during a pandemic. I also did some work this summer with *shemirat hamet* (guarding the deceased).

"I tried unsuccessfully to run a boys baseball camp, but only one of the factors behind why it didn't work out was due to the fear

*"While this was definitely not the summer I expected or intended, having the flexibility to "be" in multiple places at a time enabled me to participate in a fellowship program, an internship, take a summer class and still have time to relax and spend with my family."*

Zahava Fertig (SCW '21)

"If I got to be quite frank, it was not fun. Being around my family was fun but being at home all day, everyday, certainly was not. There is only so much you can do at home for a long period of time. However, being at home helped me because I was forced to brainstorm and think of ways to be productive. Without this quarantine, I may have not been able to progress and become a more scheduled and disciplined person.

"I am confident that I did have a productive summer. I feel closer to Hashem through prayer and Torah learning than ever before. I feel more disciplined when it comes to getting work done throughout my day. Although I wish I could spend my summer outside with friends and family, being inside was needed for me in order to progress and refine how I schedule my day.

"I worked part-time for a personal protective equipment company where I helped them get started on social media platforms. I also worked part time at a restaurant as a chef where I would make panini sandwiches and they were honestly really good. I did all this in order to support myself when moving to the YU dorms. It was not easy but

of getting together during the pandemic. I turned 21 over vacation, but I anyways wouldn't have celebrated with too many friends because they were away for the summer or live in a different part of the country; one close childhood friend came over to my house, and we shared a drink and hung out.

"I like being at home. I'm way more productive, and I get to see my parents every day! I hate New York with a passion (I've lived there for the last seven years). I published my fourth book! I'm also juggling five editorial positions between three different YU publications, so I wrote and edited a ton of articles for those jobs. Additionally, my songwriting has been booming the last few months, and I've been rehearsing for my four upcoming concerts at YU."

**Megan Herskowitz (SCW '21)**  
**Education**

"I worked at a day camp this summer. It was my original plan, but camp was only five weeks instead of the usual eight. COVID-19 had a big effect on my social life. I didn't get to hang out with most of my friends in person as I would have liked. I did hang out with some of my friends who don't live so close

to me online, something I probably wouldn't have done if Zoom hadn't become such a big thing this year.

"I love my family, but I spent a little too much time with them. I miss my roommates and can't wait to move into the dorms in October. I feel like I did more than others this past summer, however, I also feel like I missed out on a lot due to COVID-19."

**Shifra Lindenberg (Sy Syms '21)**  
**Marketing**

"I was planning on searching for a summer job or internship, but after Covid hit I didn't try because I was told it was near impossible to find one.

"I don't have a lot of close friends in South Jersey so I didn't really hang out with anyone in person. In five months, I only hung out in person with two friends who drove to see me. It was hard leaving all of my friends in New York because I'm a social person and it was tough not to see them. I stayed in touch with a couple of my close friends online but it wasn't the same.

"Last year I had a turbulent summer so this summer wasn't as bad. It wasn't easy not doing anything with friends, but I was still able to go to the beach with my family and walk correctly. This summer, I taught myself how to make new drinks like slushie mimosas and a chocolate chip cookie cocktail. I've also put together an apartment in New York that I will be fortunately moving into for the fall."

**Dovid Morris (YC '23)**  
**Biology**

"I did not have an internship this summer. I was actually looking for a job as a phlebotomist (in training) at a local hospital. Unfortunately, I did not receive the job because of time constraints. Ultimately, I ended up working as a cashier at the local kosher store during July.

"My social life was not actually impacted all that much this summer, as I worked as a cashier in the one Jewish grocery store in Michigan. Bodybuilding gyms were open in Michigan and I had plenty of social interactions there.

"I was learning in Yeshivas Yishrei Lev (of Telz Stone, IL) last year. I returned, about 2 weeks before Pesach, and quarantined in my room for those 2 weeks. Afterwards, I generally stayed in the house. So my summer was actually quite liberating. I do feel that my summer was productive to a certain degree. Although, if I had received the phlebotomy position, it would have been exponentially more so."

*Editor's Note: There were many responses that were not included in the column. Many students mentioned that these past few months were challenging and a bit lonesome. While some enjoyed being at home for a certain amount of time, many are ready for a change of scenery. Surprisingly, many people felt that they had a productive summer and were able to catch up on a lot of hobbies and activities they usually don't have time for. There were a number of others who did not feel productive at home. Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey!*



Many summer internships went online

ALEXANDRA KOCH

## Katztrating Stern

By **BASYA GOLDSTEIN**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 14.*

Throughout the pandemic, President Berman's messages have focused on Yeshiva University's "abiding love" for its students and concern for their welfare, health and security. The emptiness of these messages has been demonstrated by the YU administration's decision to proceed immediately with plans to take away much of Stern's art floor and devote that space instead to the Katz cybersecurity graduate program.

This seemingly arbitrary decision does not take into account that a large amount of space is vital for the Stern College Art Department to properly function. Even without COVID-19 restrictions, the space on the Art Department's floor is insufficient to hold classes. Until now the Art Department has been constrained for a lack of space; even the common area has been utilized as classroom space. Thus the reduction of space will further exacerbate this long-standing issue.

The administration has not provided any plans or explanations for how the Art Department is supposed to operate with such limited space. With only three months until the in-person fall semester begins the university has yet to provide specific information regarding the relocation of the displaced art equipment and where classes will be held once rooms previously used by Stern students have been annexed by the Katz program. This lack of communication also makes it almost impossible for the faculty to plan for the coming semester,

notwithstanding the challenges they already face from the COVID-19 crisis.

These developments are especially concerning because the rooms being confiscated include our digital technology classrooms. Without a space for tech-oriented art courses, our ability to have any standing in a highly competitive, tech-focused field will be severely crippled, and will limit the number of digital art courses offered in the coming semesters.

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*After two months of entreating the school to let us retrieve our work, a fellow student and I were finally allowed in. What we saw was totally shocking... The students' artwork from those rooms were dumped and strewn around, treated like garbage.*

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Even more disturbing are the potentially dangerous health implications of the proposed plan. By increasing traffic to the eighth floor while decreasing available space, those responsible for the Art Department renovations are almost guaranteeing that the art students will not be able to socially distance properly, therefore risking the safety President Berman purports to prioritize.

Many women at Stern see their college as a single-gender safe space imbued with Torah values — an alternative to secular coed campus life. In contrast to Stern, the Katz graduate program is both secular and coed in nature. The introduction of this program on the Beren campus would make many of us uncomfortable. Art students tend to work in the art studios alone until midnight; therefore the introduction of a secular coed

environment can at the very least cause concerns of *yichud* and have other unsettling consequences for female students.

Because of the detrimental consequences of the plan, it has been made very clear to the YU administration from the outset that the students, faculty and alumnae are vehemently opposed to it. We have stated our case and made our opposition very clear with a petition that garnered over a thousand signatures, multiple letters of protest, a formal

complaint, op-eds and demonstrations. And yet, throughout it all the administration has "responded" by ignoring the respectful pleas of the student body. Provost Selma Botman merely sent an email that served up platitudes, and the other members of the administration would not even bother to reply. They did not have the courtesy to acknowledge our concerns, or to enlighten us in their decision-making process. Students and faculty deserve a rationale for making a decision that will severely compromise a thriving department, something more than just "a decision has been made." How can President Berman say that YU prioritizes the students when the actions of the administration so clearly prove the contrary?

Yesterday I experienced the consequences of this callous attitude towards students first

hand. After two months of entreating the school to let us retrieve our work, a fellow student and I were finally allowed in. What we saw was totally shocking. They had already begun complete demolition without notifying the department heads and giving them time to safely store away the equipment and artwork. The students' artwork from those rooms were dumped and strewn around, treated like garbage. Artwork we've spent our years at Stern creating had wires and equipment stacked between them, thereby bending and damaging them. It was a total slap to the face, and really brought it home how little the students or the art department seem to matter to the YU administration.

The seizure of the art floor space is yet another example of YU administration's recurring trend of dealing with serious issues by barely acknowledging them and then failing to initiate meaningful change in response. Now the administration is ignoring the well-founded and reasoned objections of students, faculty and alumnae to a plan that will cripple a thriving art department and place Stern students' health and welfare at risk. As YU raises Stern's tuition yet again, it is a good time for Stern women to stop and reevaluate how the administration's priorities compromise their education, and whether it is worth it to pay top dollar to a university that puts the students of Stern last.



The artwork and equipment on the art floor were left in disarray.

# A Genocide in the Making: China's Uighurs Need Us

By **SRULI FRUCHTER**

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on July 20.*

I've always lambasted the bystanders of history. Whether it was the world's silence during the Holocaust or the Rwandan Genocide, I was perplexed at their indifference to injustice. Now, as a Uighur Muslim genocide is materializing in China, I'm questioning if I'm becoming a bystander myself.

Since 2017, in Xinjiang, China, the Chinese Communist Party has forcibly detained over one million Uighur Muslims in internment camps. The crimes they committed? Well, those include myriad egregious offenses, such as wearing headscarves or face veils, growing out beards, fasting during Ramadan, attending mosque services or even referencing Quran verses. In other words, Muslim identity is deemed threatening to the Han Chinese majority. Like the best of history's authoritarian leaders, Chinese President Xi Jinping is working to eliminate that threat.

Living in a police state, the 11 million Uighurs in Xinjiang have their online activity tracked, assigned government officials who report on their home life and mandated spyware on their mobile devices. Their every breath is monitored and recorded. This is the privileged life afforded to those outside the estimated 143 internment camps, as the inside accounts tell a more harrowing story. While the camps' primary objective is political indoctrination and expunging Muslim identity, countless leaked documents and first-hand testimonials revealed that detained Uighurs are often subject to psychological and physical abuse, rape, and torture. The personal accounts are horrifying, each worse than the next.

Leaked videos have shown Chinese

authorities boarding shackled and blindfolded Uighurs onto trains like dogs in a pound; we can all bear witness to China's atrocities. Our history as Jews has shown us

Policy Act of 2020, which authorizes U.S. sanctions against Chinese officials persecuting the Muslim minority, moves like this should have been initiated months, if not

and Zaidy's terrors in the Holocaust, it's that silence is injustice's best friend. As Jews, our historical persecution — whether it was Roman brutality or the Spanish Inquisition — has demonstrated the consequences of oppression left unchecked.

The Chinese government believes they are justifiably treating the cancer of their country, antagonized by flare-ups of violence in past years. An ideology of this nature should alert intolerable sirens in our hearts. China has defended these self-described "vocational training centers," insisting that Uighurs' human rights are not infringed on, while simultaneously barring foreign investigators and journalists from visiting these internment camps. This is nothing new.

Where is the international outrage? We live our lives without the slightest acknowledgment of Uighurs' reality. Their family members are kidnapped in the night, their actions are under the watchful eye of a draconian government and their freedoms are stripped away in internment camps. They're being forced to abolish their Muslim identity. China's crimes must be stopped, or we'll find the Uighurs' demise in a future textbook.

I know that I can't solve the Uighurs' plight, nor can I single-handedly prevent their developing genocide. However, I can use my voice to raise awareness, petition my representatives to demand change and utilize social media to start a conversation. These are the gifts Hashem entrusted us with, and it would be callous to discount them. Silence is perhaps the greatest injustice of all; being a bystander is not an option. We must act in whatever way we can. As Elie Weisel taught us, "What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander."

*Editor's Note: To learn more about the Uighurs' human rights crisis, see [here](#) and [here](#).*

*If I've learned anything from my Bobi and Zaidy's terrors in the Holocaust, it's that silence is injustice's best friend.*

what this leads to, and that truth is becoming more evident by the day: This is a genocide in the making.

According to some experts, recent reports about China's widely enforced sterilization and abortions of Uighur women already meet the United Nations' criteria for genocide, which includes "Imposing measures

years, ago. In Oct. 2019, over nine months ago, more than 20 countries at the United Nations condemned China's detention of Uighurs, but the consequences since have been futile or nonexistent. How grave must China's brutality become before our world leaders are forced to act? History suggests that effective action may never come, so long



A Xinjiang internment camp from 2017

WIKIPEDIA

intended to prevent births" of an ethnic or religious group. Yet, the international response has been painfully slow, if not completely absent. While President Trump recently signed the Uyghur Human Rights

as people don't demand it.

This is among the most pressing human rights issues we're facing today. We have a moral imperative to stop China's tyrannization. If I've learned anything from my Bobi

## A Solution to the F-35 Problem

By **NAFTALI SHAVELSON**

On August 13, President Donald Trump announced a historic peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Known as the Abraham Accord, it provided for fully normalized relations between the wealthy Gulf nation and the Jewish state, the third such agreement between Israel and an Arab country. Concurrently, Israel would officially suspend plans to apply sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria, formalizing what was already the likely conclusion of months of legislative and administrative gridlock.

It seemed like everybody won: the US administration snagged a major diplomatic achievement to bolster its legacy (and election prospects), Israel got a reliable Sunni peace partner in the Middle East and the UAE gained access to a technological and military powerhouse aligned in its struggle against Iran.

However, things turned out not to be quite so simple. Days after the announcement of the accord, newspapers began reporting on a secret clause allowing the UAE to purchase America's F-35 Lightning II fighter jet, the

most advanced stealth fighter in the world. This was troubling for a few reasons: firstly, Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz was seemingly left in the dark about this aspect of the deal. More importantly, though, until this agreement came to light, Israel was the only country in the Middle East to maintain a fleet of the fearsome aircraft. This was a manifestation of what has been known for years in Washington as Qualitative Military Edge (QME).

Essentially, U.S. law requires America to uphold the Israeli military's technological and tactical advantages over regional threats to allow it to deter numerically superior adversaries. By carefully tailoring Middle East arms sales and by providing a steady stream of military aid to Israel, the U.S. has tried to ensure that its most important regional ally will stay a step ahead of those who aim to harm it. Understandably, Israelis were upset by this secret deal, which seemed to undermine the core tenet of that understanding. But Emiratis were also angry that their newfound peace partners were still viewing them as potential enemies when it came to military hardware. This issue puts all three players, the U.S., Israel and the UAE, in a tough spot, and, if left unchecked, could lead to a diplomatic freeze between these

countries mere weeks after the start of their relations.

It's a problem alright, but I'd like to propose a solution.

For years, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) has been covertly developing a new stealth bomber to shore up its long-distance strike capacity. While fighters like the F-35 are cheaper and more versatile, they run into range issues and have trouble carrying the weights of some of today's larger bombs. That's where bombers come in: they can fly many times farther than fighters while carrying a payload many times larger.

America's current bomber fleet consists mostly of B-52 Stratofortresses with no stealth capacity that have been in service for the better part of a century. For missions requiring stealth, the USAF has a few B-2 Spirits, amazingly complicated aircraft with initial unit costs of an eye-watering \$2.1 Billion. These are so expensive they're almost impossible to actually use in any real capacity, costing over \$135,000 per flight hour just to get off the ground. For that reason, America has been trying to build a new bomber with stealth capacity to serve the USAF into the 2060s. Enter the B-21 Raider. Costing "only" about half a billion dollars apiece, the new long-range strike

bomber will ensure America's military edge over its enemies (no other country currently operates a true stealth bomber) without breaking the bank.

Historically, the U.S. has kept its stealth bombers out of the hands of other militaries, turning down extremely lucrative arms deals in order to ensure the exclusivity of its top product. Times, though, are changing. Russia and China are both working on their own next-generation bombers, which could enter service around the same time as the USAF's. By sharing the B-21 with a handful of very close allies such as Israel, the U.K. and South Korea, America could ensure that the Western sphere of influence remains strong and fully defended. It would also allow those allies to pursue goals aligned with America's interests while keeping the spotlight away from the U.S. and suppressing talk of U.S. military globetrotting. Specifically, by selling B-21s to Israel, America could provide its most effective response yet to Iranian saber-rattling — if Iran went too far, Israel would use its B-21s to attack Iran itself, a possibility that has been precluded in the past by the lower range of Israel's fleet of fighter jets.

*Continued on Page 20*

# Why Might it be Bad to Rush Through YU in Three Years?

By DR. NOAM WASSERMAN

*Editor's Note: This year, the Commentator will feature regular columns from university administrators tackling timeless "Why?" questions about Yeshiva University. Please submit your question suggestions to [lemel@mail.yu.edu](mailto:lemel@mail.yu.edu).*

When I came to Yeshiva University, I had to make several adjustments. Many were hugely positive, like my having to adjust to YU's amazing faculty-to-student ratio within each of its classes. I was used to teaching courses that I capped at 65 students so they wouldn't get too big. At YU, a large class is 30 students. As a result, students develop much deeper relationships with faculty, and consequently get better recommendation letters for graduate school, get individualized faculty attention when trying to figure out their career steps and even send their former professors invitations to their weddings.

At YU, you even get to [chat](#) with the deans.

For one of the adjustments, though, I have seen negative effects that match research results about how short-term decisions can harm longer-term career outcomes. That adjustment involves the intense focus that many students have on **rushing through YU in three years**.

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*It's tempting to pay one less year of tuition now and to get to the paycheck-earning stage of life one year sooner.*

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## The Underemployment Problem

It is understandable that many students (and parents) focus on finishing college in three years. We figure that with our having gone to yeshiva or seminary for a year or two, we have added reason to get through college quickly. This is particularly true given the cost of private-college tuition and the desire many Orthodox students have to start a family earlier than other college students.

What this approach misses is the **negative effects of underemployment**. Underemployment is when a college graduate takes a job that is worse than s/he could have gotten if s/he were better prepared for the job market.

Data from the Federal Reserve show that **underemployed college graduates** have lower-paying jobs and are more likely to have part-time jobs, after having a harder time finding positions. Research published recently in a top labor-economics journal shows that when underemployed college graduates try to find another job, they have callback rates 30% lower than

adequately-employed job candidates, suggesting that employers view underemployment very negatively.

The effects of underemployment last for years, both financially and regarding employment satisfaction. Launching your career in a less than optimal way can have permanent effects.

## Explore and Strengthen

What are the ways in which the rush through YU can cause underemployment? Two of the big factors are under-exploration and weaker qualifications.

**Under-exploration.** College has long played a key role in helping students find the best fit for their talents. By exploring a range of subjects before deciding on their majors, college students are able to find and build their strengths. When we shortchange that exploration process, we latch onto majors that don't fit us as well and build toward careers that won't play to our strengths. In the extreme, I have seen students who after graduation realized that they had mis-chosen their majors. They were now faced with a choice between going back to school to shift into "what I should have majored in to begin with" or continuing to pursue a suboptimal career fit. Either route has significant costs financially and personally.

**Weaker qualifications.** In today's job market, college internships are key to making you a stronger candidate for great post-graduation jobs. (That's one reason why we focused so intensely this past summer on creating new **Summer Initiatives** for YU students.) When a YU student first arrives on campus as a "sophomore" (i.e., has just three years left at the university) and s/he searches for a summer internship, s/he is competing against sophomores from other universities who have three times as much college knowledge (having completed three semesters of college compared to one semester). That leads to either not getting a summer internship or getting a worse one. The following summer, the student is competing against juniors from other colleges who not only have more college knowledge (five semesters compared to three) but also had **better internships** the prior summer. The following year, when they are competing for full-time job offers, students who rushed through college have weaker qualifications and thus have a higher chance of

being underemployed.

## Countering Underemployment

What can YU students do to avoid the long-term problems of underemployment that are caused by the short-term rush through college?

- **Take time to explore more.** Don't come into college saying, "I know I want to major in X" while not seeking possibilities that might be better than "X." I was fortunate to be pushed to explore other areas to complement my initial focus on engineering. I took the time to try out business studies, among other possibilities, and found a second pillar on which I've been able to build my career (see next bullet below). Without my business studies, I might not have gotten my first job, which required both managerial and programming knowledge. I likely would not have gotten into the MBA program I attended, and would not have been able to put in place each subsequent step that resulted in my being able to come to YU. Decades later, my exploration in college is still paying off.
- **Find more than one pillar on which to build.** Even if you know your core major, find a complementary subject that will enable you to be a stronger candidate for jobs, will open up new employment options for you, and will make it possible for you to have a more-rewarding career. It's for that reason that at Sy Syms we have been encouraging more students to "**do duals**": majoring in two areas within Syms, or majoring and minoring within Syms, or majoring in Syms and minoring within Stern or YC.
- **Build degree depth.** We have also been building better pathways between YU's undergraduate schools and its graduate schools. This makes it a lot easier for YU's undergraduate students to graduate with a YU graduate degree in the same amount of time as their non-YU peers would only be earning an undergraduate degree. This form of "dualing" makes YU students even stronger candidates on the job market because they bring deeper "undergrad+grad" knowledge of their area than students who are just coming out of undergrad. These actions increase the chances that you will have to spend more than three post-Israel years at YU. It's tempting to pay one less year of tuition now and to get to the paycheck-earning stage of life one year sooner. However, the actions above can bring significant long-term gains that outweigh the short-term tuition costs and



Dean Noam Wasserman speaking at the 2019 Syms Dinner

the costs of underemployment. They can also bring greater job satisfaction and heighten the impact you'll be able to have on the world.

By slowing down a little now, you could have major gains over your next decades of life.

*Dr. Noam Wasserman is the dean of the Sy Syms School of Business. He previously taught at Harvard Business School and was founding director of a center at the University of Southern California. He received a BS from the Wharton School, a BSE from Penn Engineering and an MBA and PhD from Harvard. He is the author of two bestselling books, "The Founder's Dilemmas" and "Life Is a Startup", the author of the "Zemer of the Week" Benchers, and the father of three YU graduates so far.*

## F-35 PROBLEM Continued from Page 19

America's selling of its stealth bombers would be unprecedented, but we live in an age of a presidential administration that both loves breaking rules and has a deep commitment to bettering the welfare of the Jewish State. If there's anyone who will recognize the opportunity this deal provides *and* be crazy enough to carry it out, it's the 45th president of the United States. By opening the B-21 program to Israel, the U.S. gains access to advanced Israeli tech that will doubtless make the new aircraft even better (as happened with the F-35). America also gets an ally to do its Middle-Eastern dirty

work, since Israel's regional goals so closely reflect America's, and since Israel has a history of **actually** implementing them. Finally, America achieves a painless solution to its laws enshrining Israel's QME.

Israel gets a cutting-edge stealth bomber to ensure its regional supremacy for years to come. The UAE gets the fighter jets it wanted. And at the end of the day, the historic Abraham Accord is strengthened, allowing two fledgling allies to work even more closely together to ensure the stability and prosperity of the world's most volatile region.

Everybody wins. That's how it was always supposed to go, right?



A US Air Force F-35A

## Smoke the Paper and Start Again

By JOSH LEICHTER

Somehow about six months have gone by since the closure of campus and now, somehow fall is upon us. As the new “Lost Generation” of the Roaring ‘20s, we found our summers as drastically changed as the remainder of our spring semester. Maybe some of us were supposed to have internships or jobs that never panned out. Perhaps we all too earnestly believed the uncertain promises that this would all disappear in the hot summer weather. Though it is entirely likely that we did not truly believe these statements, rather than be left with nothing to go on, we crossed our fingers hoping that it would at least let up a little bit and that we would begin to see the end of the nearly year-long turmoil. This was not the case. Instead, the stay-at-home orders remained in effect as we continued to get fat on banana bread, because leave it to a cataclysmic event to get the world to realize that maybe banana bread is worth a try.

All this notwithstanding, it is entirely likely that many of us, despite the uneventful nature of the summer vacation, still found ways to stay productive and social in the many ways that are enabled by technology

in today’s day and age. That’s the adaptable nature of people, to find creative solutions to the woefully creative problems the world throws at us, be they large or small. It’s a beautifully underappreciated trait that we now see emerge from the dormant caves of the human condition, the bear woken from a long winter’s hibernation ready to forage and fight once again.

*Alas, this year meet and greets were held over Zoom and many students across the country and the world are staying home to continue their studies.*

But now a new school year is upon us and with it came the hope that we’d be granted the opportunity to see our campus with its lights on once again. Within this hope was the chance for new students to have the same orientation experiences we had when we first began this grand journey, that returning students would be able to see their friends in person and that dorm residents would sleep on those foam mattresses that we may oddly miss without really truly knowing why. Yet this is not the case either, at least for the first month of the fall semester. A time honored tradition for all students is the first day of school, from the kindergartener walking into

the classroom tightly holding onto a parent’s hand, to the elementary schooler with that new backpack and pencil box from Target, to the college student leaving home for the first time to go begin the next steps of life. Alas, this year, meet and greets were held over Zoom and many students across the country and the world are staying home to continue their studies. In the very same way

that this past year’s graduates were robbed of the graduation ceremony they had hoped for, these new classes are starting off their experiences lacking the same pomp, yet still facing those same unusual circumstances that feel like they have only just begun. They are rightly upset, as anyone would be in that situation, not to mention the fact that taking a full day of classes staring a computer is considerably inferior to the classroom, what with the awkward background noise and stoic discussions, no matter how many times we’re told that clicking a “Raise Hand” button makes it slightly easier. Maybe some students will be fortunate to have a few of

their classes in person when campus reopens in October after the holidays, yet for many that isn’t the case. And in the leadup to the semester, we were told that the University was prepping to give students a more “re-warding” experience but from what the past two weeks have shown, this is just an encore of the performance this past spring gave us, though at least that was excusable given the haphazard nature of everything.

Perhaps for the rest of fall and into winter, we’ll be gifted with some sort of reprieve from the disappointments of the past two seasons. Until then, however, it’s yet another sordidly (a)synchronous semester and the most will have to be made of the present situation once again, for better or worse. For all of our sakes may it be the former, which has long since faded away and because the memories of the latter are all too fresh.

Welcome back to YU.

## Three TV Shows to Get you Through Quarantine

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS

After spending your whole day in class on Zoom, aimlessly staring at your laptop screen, it makes sense that the last thing you’d want to do is spend your free time watching TV. But for those of us who can’t seem to quit our streaming service addictions, here are some TV show recommendations for the new semester. Consider these “hidden gems” — all three of these series are superb but criminally underseen. If you’ve already burned through the classics and find yourself spending more time browsing the homepage of your favorite streaming service than you do actually watching a show, try out

### 1) **Ramy (Hulu, 2019 - Present, TV-MA)**

“Ramy” is an incredible Hulu series about, well, Ramy, a young Muslim man in New Jersey and his complicated spiritual journey. The show is so specific in its detailing of the American Muslim experience, and yet I found it crazy relatable. Think Modern Orthodoxy but Islam. Give it a chance and you’ll immediately recognize so many similarities to your own life. Sometimes they’re the little things, like the way the characters throw “inshallah” (the Arabic equivalent of “*im yirtza Hashem*”) at the end of random sentences. But there are some major themes

that your beliefs are obsolete.

The show is also a masterclass in blending comedy and drama. While being bitingly funny, the episodes still carry real stakes and

show forever. The writing and performances are just so clever that even when an episode or story arc among the four seasons doesn’t land perfectly, it’s still laugh out loud funny.

*If you’ve already burned through the classics and find yourself spending more time browsing the homepage of your favorite streaming service than you do actually watching a show, try out one of these instead of binging “The Office” for the fifth time.*



BARBARA NITKE/HULU

The first two seasons of Ramy are now streaming on Hulu.

one of these instead of binging “The Office” for the fifth time.

explored here as well: the struggle between davening maariv with a minyan and hanging out with friends, tension with machmir parents, choosing a rebbe and the reality of being a religious person tied to your morals in a secular world that increasingly tells you

Ramy’s journey is heartfelt. For example, after an eye opening visit to Egypt (where his parents are from) in the first season finale, the second season finds Ramy “flipped out.” This is of course mined for laughs, but it also explores important questions about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and respecting the needs of others.

Two seasons of “Ramy” have already dropped with a third on the way. Catch up!

### 2) **Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt (Netflix, 2015 - 2019, TV-14)**

Kidnapping-victim Kimmy Schmidt is rescued from an underground bunker after 15 years in a cult. Sounds like the plot of a gritty crime drama, but it’s actually the premise of Netflix’s best original comedy. The basic shtick is that Kimmy is perpetually stuck with the brain of a cheerful and optimistic middle schooler, despite being a grown woman. After being saved she moves to New York City and tries to make her way through the modern world.

The joke per minute ratio here is insane. Creator Tina Fey packs every frame with so many gags and one-liners that you can’t possibly catch them all on first viewing. The cast is amazing, especially Ellie Kemper as the titular character. I could heap praise on this

### 3) **Homecoming (Amazon Prime, 2018 - 2020, TV-MA)**

The two shows above are primarily comedies, so I figured I should include a drama. “Homecoming” is a phenomenal mind-bending thriller that actually shares one thing in common with Ramy and Kimmy Schmidt: despite its intensity, it too contains its episodes to a half hour runtime at most. In the age of stretched out HBO epics, it’s refreshing to have a show get right down to business and not waste any time.

“Homecoming” stars Julia Roberts as Heidi, a woman who used to work at a government facility treating soldiers with PTSD. One problem: why can’t she remember anything about her time there? If you’ve seen any of “Mr. Robot,” this show shares the same creative team, including showrunner Sam Esmail, and Homecoming shares that same sinister viber. After just the premiere, you get hooked on the mystery and the payoff is well worth the investment. If you’re a fan of the spy or conspiracy genre, this one’s for you.

# A Defense for Tradition: Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich Methodology

By JARED SCHARF

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published online on September 3.*

In his controversial article “[Peanut-Butter-and-Jelly Sandwich Making Methodology](#),” Doniel Weinreich (YC ‘20) proposes a new method for making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, one which deviates from the modus operandi.

I found the article problematic for numerous reasons. Although the article was published well over a year ago, I felt that a response was necessary, especially since there have been no prior responses to such a contentious piece.

Before examining the fundamental issues of the article, there are a few smaller, but no less significant, issues to address:

One issue is the lack of sensitivity expressed towards those who are gluten-free, have a peanut allergy or any other type of dietary differences. Additionally, aside from the excessive gobbledygook evident throughout the paper, one cannot help but notice the unnecessarily grotesque and strange language, as can be seen, *inter alia*, with the word “leakage” and the term “finger fellating.”

This, however, is nowhere near the issue of the author’s sexist tone in writing that the old method of peanut butter and jelly “would never suffice for a grown man’s luncheon,” a comment engendering gender inequality and endorsing a male hierarchy.

Notwithstanding all of the issues listed above, I was most appalled by the thesis of the article. The author begins by boldly claiming he has invented a newfound method, termed “the alternative method,” to making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. However, the author, in fact, did not discover this method, as I found it online [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), among many, many other sites.

Weinreich first describes what he deems “the more conventional and traditional method,” in which peanut butter is applied to one slice of bread, jelly is applied to the other and the two are then put together. He then presents “his” method of making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in which peanut butter is applied to both slices of bread, and jelly is subsequently applied to

just one side on top of the peanut butter.

The author states three reasons why he believes the “alternative method” to be bet-

from becoming soggy. Thus the claim that the conventional method yields soggy bread is ill-founded and controvertible.

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*Change is not always necessary, and sometimes “alternative methods” can be harmful, deviating from the standard *de rigueur* and confusing the masses; this is especially true when one haughtily believes that his or her opinion should be regarded as better than the experts.*

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ter. The first reason is that “in the event of the sandwich’s delayed consumption, the bread will remain pristine, whereas the conventional method would result in the jelly

The second reason Weinreich states in support of the alternative method is that it “results in a more optimal peanut butter to jelly ratio.” The author does men-

create a proper or perfect ratio.

Weinreich goes as far as to assert that “from both a culinary and nutritional perspective, one would want more peanut butter than jelly.” This is untrue, and opens the question of how the author defines “optimal ratio,” and if that definition is misconstrued or improperly defined. I believe an equal amount of peanut butter and jelly to be ideal. Some want more jelly than peanut butter, and some want no jelly at all. There exist no statistics to support the assertion that “one would want more peanut butter than jelly,” and the proposition is therefore unsubstantiated and irrelevant.

The author then conceitedly offers a new step in the method, suggesting “to leave the very edge bare when spreading the jelly” in order to prevent what he claims would,



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**Making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is a trivial task and should not be treated otherwise.**

rendering its slice of bread soggy.” This claim is simply unfounded. Perhaps the soggy bread Weinreich encounters when using the traditional method could be a result of his own subpar bread or incorrect definition of sogginess. Additionally, toasted bread would not become soggy, and using cold jelly (a.k.a. jelly) would prevent the bread

tion, though, that it is “possible to achieve the goldilocks ratio using the conventional method; however, it would require careful calibration and vigilance.” This claim is rather dubious, as the newfound method is by no means easier to navigate the ratio than the conventional method. Both methods require concentration and shrewdness to

with the traditional method, “result in jelly pouring out the sides.” He goes on to say that with the conventional method, “the only move that can be made in attempt to prevent this persistent predicament is to use less jelly,” which is utterly unfounded.

*Continued on Page 23*

## Letter To the Editor

### Digital Archives at Long Last

To the Editor,

I would like to thank the archivists of the Yeshiva University Libraries for their very important work this past summer uploading the vast majority of old [Commentator](#) and [Observer](#) issues for the public to access and enjoy.

As a Yeshiva College student, I spent countless evenings behind the Gottesman Library’s reference desk poring over binders of old student newspapers dating back to 1935. Beyond satisfying my own interest in Yeshiva University history, these investigative escapades contributed substantially to many of the articles that I published during my tenure as editor of this newspaper, as well as to my senior thesis. I was so enamored by the relatively unknown gold mine that was these archives such that, in my

[inaugural blueprint editorial](#), I decided that my first stated goal would be the objective of initializing and completing a full digitization project of The Commentator and The Observer archives by the time that I would graduate.

Despite early support for my wide-eyed enthusiasm from YU’s librarians, the project proved to spawn various complications. As my graduation neared and the project had yet to take wing, I wrote [another editorial](#) calling on Yeshiva University to actively support the digitization project. Shortly thereafter I graduated, handing off the newspaper to new leadership and resigning myself to the reality that the archives would likely remain accessible only to a privileged small set of undergraduate student journalists.

But something happened then that I did not expect. In the most unlikely time

imaginable — in the throes of an unforeseen global pandemic that reshaped society — I noticed a trickle of intriguing uploads materializing on [YU’s online academic repository](#). I aired my cautiously excited suspicions to two of YU’s librarians, both of whom confirmed that an uploading initiative was underway. As of the publication of this letter to the editor, the YU Libraries have uploaded Commentator archives through the year 2000, and Observer archives through the year 1976.

As it stands, this uploading project is not perfect. Per my understanding, the YU Libraries do not currently possess digital scans of archives past the year 2000; given the typically slow pace at which scanning projects move, this will leave 20 years of archives inaccessible to the public for the time being. Additionally, though most of the

scans are quite readable, a more advanced project would host the files as fully-searchable PDFs with optical character recognition (OCR) (for reference, see such platforms hosted by [The Daily Pennsylvanian](#) and [The Cornell Daily Sun](#)).

Still, the ongoing newspaper archiving project is very good, and the hard work that has gone into this project ought to be commended. To this end, I would like to thank YU’s librarians; specifically, Shuli Berger, Dena Schwimmer, Sara Saiger, Stephanie Gross and Paul Glassman. *Yashar kochachem!* May your hard work be enjoyed by the extended Yeshiva community for many years to come.

Benjamin Koslowe (YC ‘19)

## When Academia Falls Short of its Ideals

By AHARON NISSEL

There's no denying that the world of academia gets a bad rap. It is accused of being irrelevant, too focused on insignificant details and too technical. The typological academy is criticized for being too removed from the world and for being too homogenous in its demographic make up. A "publish or perish" attitude can lead to plagiarized or subpar works. Above all, the academic is accused of being elitist. These are all, to some extent, valid criticisms, each deserving of its own analysis, but here I will focus specifically on the nature of academia to get so caught in its own formalities and conventions that it disrupts its own mission.

The typological academy is centered around critical inquiry, research, and knowledge. Research is (meant to be) objective, as scholars employ critical methods, amassing "permissible evidence," to reach conclusions. Findings are published in peer-reviewed academic journals. At the heart of academia is the pursuit and spreading of knowledge. For a field that is so bent on inquiry and learning, we would think that it is configured to be inclusive. After all, if more people can contribute to a conversation, a more informed conclusion can be reached. And yet, the striking result is that the findings of academics remain largely inaccessible to readers, and the entire field remains exclusionary in its proceedings.

Take for example the case of style guides, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago style, and the American Psychological Association (APA). As a student, you've likely encountered these, and have likely lost points on a paper for messing them up. These style guides dictate various technical aspects of a paper, most notable in how to format citations. Chicago style uses

footnotes, while MLA uses parenthetical in-text citations.

While indeed, having a single standardized set of conventions for formatting and citations might be convenient, the style

of citations at all, and those that do, tend to do so in a more ad hoc sort of way, to suit the specific needs of the moment. Journalism simply mentions the speaker and source directly in the text. For example, in a recent

the simplest idea? Are they trying to make their otherwise trivial research seem sophisticated? Whatever the reason, the result is that readers spend more time trying to figure out the literal what is being said, rather than focusing on the ideas being conveyed.

Next, the cost of academic works is staggering. University publishing presses publish books that **expect** to sell just 200-300 copies. In 2017, the **average** cost of a scholarly book in the humanities was \$72.67, and it's not uncommon for the price to be in the hundreds. Publishing houses sell to university libraries and that's just about it. The books are directed at other academics, and are only easily accessible to those with institutional access. Of course, the reason why the publishing houses sell so few copies, and therefore need to make the books so expensive, is the general reader simply has no interest in the book, nor is it written for them in the first place. But what about the person who interested in the research? They can't afford it and don't have access. Academia cannot complain about being underappreciated when it denies people the ability to engage it, let alone appreciate it.

The unfortunate picture that emerges from all this, is that as much as the world of academia claims to promote learning and broadened knowledge, its own conventions and formalities at times negate this cause. Rather than spreading knowledge and increasing perspectives to reach a more informed conclusion, information stays in the hands of the few, and those not familiar with academia are left without. Of course, much of academia is simply so irrelevant to the average person that they don't mind this at all, but that's already the much larger issue of the fact that most academic research simply does nothing for the world.

*After all, if more people can contribute to a conversation, a more informed conclusion can be reached. And yet, the striking result is that the findings of academics remain largely inaccessible to readers, and the entire field remains exclusionary in its proceedings.*

guides are generally overly complicated. They dictate trivial details, such as at what point a quotation is long enough to constitute a separate block quote or if an author's name should be [First Last] or [Last, First] in a citation. For the academic, these issues may be taken care of by external citation tools and journal copy-editors, but for students they are just time consuming. Students get caught up with the formatting and citations, when they should be focusing more on the ideas within the paper.

Further, the style guides serve as gatekeepers to keep out those who are not already part of the system. They may become second nature to those who have experience with academic writing, but anyone who has not gone through the university system will not know how the style guides work, and their publications will be seen as lesser because of it. Voices are left out of academic discourse for such trivial reasons as non adherence to an accepted style guide.

This is coupled with the fact that unless a student remains in academia, they will likely *never* need to use any of the style guides again. Most professions don't use any sort

Commentator **article** about administrative restructuring we are told that "President Ari Berman announced in an Aug. 7 email to university faculty" and no other sort of citation is given. In some instances in online journalism it is even acceptable simply to link to a source.

Setting aside the issue of whether the content of academic articles are even relevant or significant at all (in general, yes, but sometimes, no), the language of the articles tends to be inaccessible to the average reader. Of course each discipline has its own jargon and specific terminology that won't be intuitive to the common reader, but academics love using the most obscure vocabulary words they can find and writing in the most convoluted way possible. Articles are riddled with sentences with so many subordinate clauses, they ought to be split into multiple sentences. Why do academics feel so compelled to write in ways that are so unnecessarily complex. Are they trying to prove themselves to be smarter than other academics? Are they trying to reach a quota of SAT words per article? Is there a competition for the most convoluted formulation of



In 2017 the average cost of a scholarly book in the humanities was \$72.67.

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PB & J

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Another method could be to place peanut butter on one of the sandwiches and jelly only in the middle of the other; this will even be helpful for the ratio. Or one could carefully spread the jelly on the sandwich through the standard method, while being cautious of not overflowing the edges.

The main issue with the article is Weinreich's claim of the method being less messy. However, with the new method, putting jelly on top of peanut butter will result in peanut butter getting on the spoon which will subsequently be inserted back into the jelly jar. This could be dangerous for one allergic to peanut butter trying to access the jelly and in general will be much messier, as this ineffective prevention will lead to a disgusting contamination within

the jar of jelly. Additionally, when cutting the bread, the same messiness of peanut butter and jelly occurs; the new method the author proposes does not sufficiently address the issues the author raises.

Another issue with the method is that the jelly does not stick well on top of the peanut butter, adding to the issue of messiness. "It kind of slides off the peanut butter, which is very emotionally unsettling to me," commented Elisheva Kohn (SCW '21), a victim of Weinreich's detrimental article.

The author's claim that with the conventional method "there is no reasonable solution for the sticky-mess-averse who don't want to risk dripping jelly" is simply not true and misleading, as it discounts every single method he is unaware of. This

is a bold statement and would require the author to presume he has thought of every possible solution and none have worked, a quite self-reliant and arrogant conjecture.

In review, there is no proof of this method resulting in less "leakage," as well as no assurance of the newfound method yielding a more optimal ratio. Many great people before us had no trouble making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and the author would have one believe that this has been a universal problem.

When one tries to introduce new practices or modes of conduct, it is important to realize human limitations and accept that not all forms of innovation are progressive, and not all progressions are warranted. Change is not always necessary,

and sometimes "alternative methods" can be harmful, deviating from the standard de rigueur and confusing the masses; this is especially true when one haughtily believes that his or her opinion should be regarded as better than the experts. Gastronomical experts deal with these predicaments, should there be any, and one should not make bold conjectures based on his or her own empirical experiences, as Doniel Weinreich has demonstrated.

Making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is a trivial task and should not be treated otherwise. The author tries to intellectualize the process, and in the process, leaves room for confusion and error.

## A SPAC-tacular Rise

By MAX ASH

Whether you're a seasoned investor or you're a newly-minted Robinhood day trader, a certain four-letter acronym has been increasingly popping up on your screen: SPAC. Otherwise known as a Special Purpose Acquisition Company, these so-called "blank check companies" have increased in popularity as an alternative to a traditional IPO or reverse merger. There were 41 total SPAC deals in 2019. DraftKings, Nikola, and Virgin Galactic are some of the big names that have chosen the SPAC route. In 2020 so far, there has been \$31.3 billion of investor cash poured into 78 SPAC deals. And the year isn't even close to over yet.

What exactly are they? SPACs are essentially shell companies that have already gone public with no operating history that are created with the sole purpose of raising money to acquire another company (which otherwise would have gone public through an IPO). When investors pour money into a SPAC, they do not know what company said SPAC will be acquiring. The caveat: if the

SPAC is unable to complete an acquisition within two years of its formation, all funds are returned to the investor(s). A traditional IPO is underwritten by a certain number of banks. When a private company wants to go public through a SPAC, they are merging with an (already public) SPAC, essentially bypassing the usually drawn-out and expensive IPO process.

don't go home empty-handed. Another advantage for SPAC investors is that they are given input in the investment/transaction decision. Were the investor to put his money in a venture capital pool, the investment decision would be made solely by the fund management team at the VC.

Now that we've introduced SPACs, the

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*Otherwise known as a Special Purpose Acquisition Company, these so-called "blank check companies" have increased in popularity as an alternative to a traditional IPO or reverse merger.*

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Those investing in the SPAC actually receive returns even before the SPAC has acquired its target company – the cash raised in the SPAC's IPO goes into a trust and earns interest until the intended transaction is completed. So, worst-case scenario, if a transaction isn't completed within the two-year time timeline, the investors have still made some return on their money and

question still stands: why would a company want to "go public" through one, as opposed to the traditional method of an IPO? Here are some reasons:

**One:** If a company were to pursue a traditional IPO, like WeWork, the negotiations could be drawn-out, leading to investors questioning and critiquing the company's business model. This leads to disputes, and,

in some cases, the IPO crumbling. When you go public through a SPAC, the cash is already there and negotiations are swift.

**Two:** COVID-19 has basically erased IPO roadshows (due to the need for traveling), which were essential in the capital raise for a traditional IPO. Merging with a SPAC, completely bypasses the roadshow step, since the cash has already been raised.

**Three:** Going public through a traditional IPO introduces the possibility of an IPO "pop" and the stock is vulnerable to full market risk, while a SPAC affords the comfort of price certainty much earlier in the process while limiting the risk from the volatility of the market.

Even with the advantages of a SPAC, some companies are still going the way of a traditional IPO; Airbnb recently rebuffed an offer to merge from Bill Ackman's record \$4 Billion SPAC, choosing an IPO instead. That said, its popularity is increasing by the day and has the potential to become a household name, especially among young Robinhood day traders. But what remains to be seen is, if the SPAC craze is a fad, or if it's here to stay.



A spectacular question is if SPACs are here to stay

PIXABAY

## COVID 19's Impact on NBA Salaries

By ALEXANDER WILDES

NBA players' salaries are frequently a topic of discussion amongst fans; for such a relatively non-critical job in our society, NBA players get paid like they matter the most. The best players in the league can get paid upwards of 35 million dollars a year, and that number seems to be increasing every season. In 2016, Memphis Grizzlies star point guard Mike Conley received the richest contract in NBA history, worth \$153 million over five years, and since then, there have been at least ten **contracts** worth more than \$160 million. Today, the NBA season has twenty players **earning** over \$30 million, and another twenty securing at least \$26 million. Although the boom in the NBA's revenue has earned the players more money than ever before, this coming year may look a lot lower than before. To understand why this is the case, we need to take a look at exactly how the NBA players' salaries are determined.

Each year, based on the previous season's league revenue, the NBA determines the coming season's "salary cap," the maximum

amount an NBA team can spend on salaries that season. As a result of a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in 2016, NBA players and their owners have a 51-49 split, respectively, in **basketball-related income** (BRI). BRI is the amount of money NBA teams earn from events relating to basketball, including ticket sales, brand deals and merchandising. The players' 51% in any par-

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*The boom in the NBA's revenue has earned the players more money than ever before, but this coming year the numbers may look a lot lower than previously.*

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ticular season, divided by the total number of teams, becomes the following season's spending limit per team. To illustrate: if the league makes \$3 billion in BRI in a particular season, the next season the players get 51% of that amount, which is \$1.53 billion. When dividing this by thirty, each team's salary cap would be \$51 million. On the other end, 49% of BRI is given to each owner.

Now that we have this background

knowledge, why is the salary cap going to decrease? There are several reasons for this.

At the beginning of the NBA season, in response to China's stifling of protests in Hong Kong, Daryl Morey, the general manager of the Houston Rockets, **tweeted** in support of Hong Kong. China, enraged by the perceived disrespect, terminated all partnerships between themselves and the

NBA, which led to a loss of **\$100-400 million**. Furthermore, the NBA may lose close to \$500-700 million in **ticket revenue** due to the coronavirus, another large chunk of their BRI. The virus's effects on people's income have also decreased the purchases of NBA licensed merchandise. Overall, estimates predict the league could **lose** \$1 billion in BRI, which would significantly lower each team's salary cap. To better understand this,

if the league makes \$6 billion in BRI this season, then each team's salary cap next season will be \$102 million, \$7 million less than this year and \$14 million less than what was projected at the start of the season.

This large loss in BRI will have multiple effects on the players' final salaries. Firstly, according to the CBA, players must put 10% of their **contracts** into the NBA's eschew account in case the NBA's projected BRI is not met. This rule was made to ensure the 51-49 split remains constant between players and owners. Based on how close the NBA's end-of-season BRI was to projections, the players are given back a certain percentage of that money (usually just about all of it). Since this year's issues with China and the global pandemic were not predicted, the NBA will most probably fall short of their projected BRI and players will likely not receive any of that money back. In some cases, they may even owe money this coming season.

Moreover, with the salary cap projected to fall, free agents (players whose contracts expired, and are free to sign with any team) will

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## YU's Summer Internship Innovation

BY ARIEL SCHNEIDER

We watched internships, camps and summer programs get canceled left and right. We watched as 64% of internships that canceled this summer did not offer online or hybrid alternatives. We watched more than thirty million people file for unemployment. It seemed like there was little hope this summer. Despite all of the challenges, however, YU students never stopped hustling to find innovative ways of staying productive. Many students utilized the new Yeshiva University Consulting Force to shape their summer.

This initiative, pioneered by Dr. Noam Wasserman, dean of the Sy Syms School of Business, was created in response to the inevitable loss of internships and jobs due to the pandemic. The leadership course was designed for students seeking summer consulting experience while involving professors and outside organizations.

Samuel Lekowsky (SSSB '21), Sy Syms student council treasurer, decided to give this new program a go. As part of the Consulting Force program, Lekowsky and several other participants took part in a three-week training course consisting of presentations detailing various topics like client management, professionalism and non-profits from professionals in Deloitte, BCG, Accenture and the OU. Students ended the training with a simulator case competition that gave participants a feel of what it is like to work on consulting projects.

In addition to preparatory consulting programming, Lekowsky was doing research for the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) through the YU Consulting Force. His role consisted of meeting with JCRC executives to conduct needs assessments in order to address strategic issues. He also personally contacted companies for their customer relationship management systems, which helps manage and analyze interactions with potential customers.

*This new initiative, created by Dean Wasserman, was a response to the inevitable loss of internships and jobs due to the pandemic.*

Students were not without guidance throughout the program as Avi Giloni, associate dean of Sy Syms School of Business, Tamar Avnet, chair of the marketing department and Tom Kennon, professor of marketing, played an important role in advising Lekowsky and many other Consulting Force team members. Each advisor dedicated their summers to meet daily with students participating in the Consulting Force to provide stronger general business skills going into the workplace. "The advisors [professors] have been extremely helpful in shaping my summer into what it is right now. I really enjoyed the three-week training and all the speakers we had along the way," said Lekowsky. While utilizing the summer opportunities YU offered, others trailblazed their own professional experiences.

Steven Paul (SSSB '23), co-vice president of YU's Networking Club, worked for Brahman Capital, an investment management corporation that works on allocating CEOs that are uniquely shareholder driven. Paul worked remotely on one-pagers, which provides a high-level report of a candidate's qualifications in relation to a specific position. He also worked on investment theses while handling daily research projects for companies and industries that Brahman

Capital partners with. Aside from his work at Brahman, Paul has been working with his fellow editor Noah Pomerance (SSSB '23) on his own initiative, a new business newspaper called "185th and Wall Street." They hope to continue to work on growing their news site on various college campuses.

Abigail Rochlin (SCW '21) also made sure to take advantage of this unprecedented summer. She joined the OU Impact Accelerator, an Orthodox Union initiative that helps grow nonprofit startups while giving college students an opportunity to gain business and leadership skills. "We start with a team meeting on RingCentral, an alternative to Zoom, to catch up and plan out what we have to do that day," she said. "Sometimes we stay on and work together on projects and other days we log off and work solo."

The OU interns were split up between different nonprofits like Ani-Tefilla, an elementary school Tefilla curriculum builder, and Daily-Giving, a nonprofit that allows you to donate daily to various organizations. Rochlin met with the other nonprofits on Mondays and Fridays for a "coffee chat" where they spoke about skills they gained over the week and bounce ideas off of one another to further each other's progress in their respective fields.

Some students, including Benjy Aryeh (SSSB '21), utilized the Axiom Investing Incubator, a program created by a YU alumnus, Evan Axelrod (SSSB '20), where participants work on technical skills in the financial arena. "Originally, I planned on interning for a company in Israel. However, due to the pandemic, my plans were canceled. Thankfully Evan reached out to me and told me about the incubator," said Aryeh. "I have learned how to analyze a company's financial statements along with identifying underperforming companies," he added. Impromptu programs like these have afforded students valuable experience that they wouldn't have otherwise received.

Although uncertainty permeated the minds of internshipless students throughout the latter half of the year, the innovative spirit both within the character of students and administration allowed for an unforeseen professional success. The world might be on standby but YU will never stop pioneering new and creative opportunities in the face of uncertainty.



The world of remote work has afforded some students a second chance to gain real-world experience

PIXABAY

### NBA SALARIES

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receive a lot less money than they deserve, simply because teams will have less money than was projected to be free to spend. Therefore, not only will certain players have contracts smaller than they deserve, but they will also have to pay a small amount

if they owe any money to the owners from this season.

Lastly, max contracts, a contract with the first year as a certain percentage of the team's cap, with small incremental increases for future years, will be worth less than

previously thought. If a player signed a max contract that kicks in after this season, the amount they were expected to be paid will be lower than previously thought, as their contracts are tied to a percentage of the cap. Consequently, all future years of the contract

will also be lowered by default. This will affect rising NBA stars such as Ben Simmons, Pascal Siakam and Jamal Murray. At the end of the day, NBA players will still be paid an absurd amount, given their profession, just not as much as in past years.