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Wilf Director of Housing and Residence Life Jonathan Schwab Leaves YU After 13 Years

By GILAD MENASHE

This article was originally published online on Nov. 30.

Wilf Campus Director of University Housing and Residence Life (UHRL) Jonathan Schwab left Yeshiva University on Friday, Nov. 27, after 13 collective years as a student and employee. While the university searches for a new director, Senior Director of Student Life Rabbi Josh Weisberg will be the acting director of housing for Wilf Campus.

Schwab's role as director of UHRL consisted of ensuring residence halls operated smoothly, developing relationships with resident advisors (RAs) and students, and RA recruitment and training. He will now be the director of Tikvah Online Academy, a growing program part of the Tikvah Fund, a "philanthropic foundation and ideas institution committed to supporting the intellectual, religious, and political leaders of the Jewish people and the Jewish State," according to their website. "This position is a chance for me to grow and be challenged in a new way, which is really important to me," Schwab noted.

"I have seen first hand the amount of heart and care that Jonathan Schwab has put into his job," Head RA Yonatan Raskin (YC '21) said. "Every single day on the job he has gone above and beyond his job description, and is a huge part of the reason why the resident experience at YU has been so positive for the last 5 years."

In his 13 years at YU, Schwab has held several roles. During his time as a student at YU, Schwab was involved with student life on campus, acting



Schwab talking to members of the resident advisor team

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

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COVID-19 Cases Spike in YU Following a Month of Stability

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was originally published online on Dec. 2.

11 COVID-19 cases were reported at Yeshiva University on the New York School COVID-19 Report Card from Nov. 21 to Dec. 2, almost tripling the total number of reported cases since undergraduate campuses reopened on Oct. 21.

The COVID-19 Tracker records on- and off-campus administered tests of students and employees on campus. YU's original COVID-19 Tracker reported two cases between Oct. 10 and Oct. 23, and its new one — which, unlike the original, includes "Wilf and Beren Campuses" in the title — records four cases between Nov. 7 and Nov. 20 for a total of six cases in its first month. That figure combined with the 11 newest cases brings YU's COVID-19 cases to 17 since reopening. According to the tracker, 24 students are currently quarantined on campus with 18 rooms in use.

"We are continuing to monitor for positive cases on campus," Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel told The Commentator. "Most of the cases that are listed on the DOH [Department of Health] website as of today reflect infected students

who were already in quarantine prior to the holiday weekend as a result having been identified as close contacts of another infected student."

Nissel explained that it's "not easy to pinpoint where people may get infected," but students are reminded to follow safety precautions and avoid social gatherings.

"Per our protocols, we continue to consult with our medical director [Dr. Robert van Amorengen] and to conduct contact tracing when notified of a positive case on campus," he added. "We provide guidance based on each individual case. For those students who are quarantining on campus, our Office of Residence Life ensures they receive meals and support."

The rise in positive cases at YU follows spikes in COVID-19 across New York State. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced on Monday, Nov. 30 that new safety measures will be implemented in response to the rising COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and daily fatalities. He tweeted on Wednesday, Dec. 2 that there were 69 deaths and 3,924 hospitalizations across NYS, in line with increasing COVID-19 cases over the past weeks.

According to YU's COVID-19 Code of Behavior, students and employees on campus must submit daily screenings regarding COVID-19 exposure and common

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YU Holds Virtual 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner, Declines to Disclose Funds Raised

By YOSEF LEMEL

Yeshiva University held its 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner on Sunday, Dec. 6 at 5:00 p.m. using a virtual platform. The university declined to disclose the amount of funds raised at the dinner to The Commentator.

The Hanukkah Dinner, usually an in-person event, is generally held in a midtown hotel; last year's dinner was at the New York Hilton Midtown Hotel. This year, the dinner was live streamed on a virtual platform due to health measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The dinner has historically functioned as a major annual fundraising event for the university.

The 2020 Hanukkah Dinner was the second organized by the Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) under the leadership of Vice President for Institutional Advancement Adam Gerdtts. The OIA "manages all fundraising for the University, including donations, planned giving, grants and events." Gerdtts assumed his vice presidential position in April 2019 after a period of administrative restructuring of the OIA following Seth Moscovitz's resignation from the position the morning after 2016's Hanukkah Dinner.

"The dinner has evolved from a one night event to a season of giving that builds

as part of the entire fiscal year's worth of development activity," Gerdtts told The Commentator. "The entire year's worth of fundraising will be announced after the fiscal year closes June 30." Gerdtts indicated that the "majority of unrestricted funds raised will underwrite student scholarships."

For past Hanukkah dinners, the university has generally released a figure on funds raised. Last year, the university raised \$5.6 million, a 12% increase from the \$5 million raised from 2018's dinner. The last time funds raised during the annual dinner remained unreported was 2011.

There were over 4,600 registered participants for the event, according to a university press release. As The Commentator previously reported, the university instituted a scaled entrance-fee system based on "participation level." "Young Alumni," graduates of the classes of 2015 through 2020, were required to pay \$180, the fee for "Friends" was \$500 and "Donors" paid \$1,000 to gain admittance. Some student leaders, including members of student council, resident advisers and executive leadership of the student newspapers were invited to attend the event, free of charge.

The university also introduced the President's Society to recognize "annual donors starting at \$1,800," with seven levels of

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Combatting Anti-Semitism Today

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Death of an Undergraduate

By JOSH LEICHTER

I recently found myself among friends reminiscing about my time at YU. See, I began my journey at Yeshiva University three and a half years ago, arriving at a pivotal time not only for myself but for the university as well. That year, 2017, saw the inauguration of President Berman and with it a new era was ushered in at YU. I remember prior to the investiture ceremony, at the start of the orientation week, when incoming-President Berman made his rounds in the cafeteria and introduced himself to the incoming classes of students. He sat at my table and conversed with us on how we felt to start this next stage of life and our academic experiences prior to arriving in that brightly lit dining hall. I don't recall the specifics of the conversation, yet I do remember not knowing who he was, assuming he was just another one of the rabbis that was getting to know the students. It was only a few weeks later that I put two

are the hours that I spent attempting to crack the code of making a club have a lasting impact but ultimately having them devolve into nothing more than vain attempts at passion projects. I can think back to the conversations I had with people about various ideas that were floating around, ideas I thought were good but ultimately lacked that extra edge to really stick. It was like using old tape to hang a poster to a wall and hoping it wouldn't fall off. At some point, I ought to have learned to cut a new piece from a new roll, that maybe if I would have worked harder it would have had more staying power. Yet not all clubs are meant to last and events tend to be forgotten when we walk out of the room and move on with our lives. This is not to say that there aren't club events that matter — there certainly are — however there are also the ones that you go to for a nice chill and then forget, like we do with many things.

In all this time, it isn't as though I didn't try; but perhaps I didn't try hard enough. I ran for five different student

as good as that felt, more so than it was a chance to better see the world around me. It was never about leaving parts of myself behind but understanding who I was as a person and who I wanted to be.

And maybe that's the whole point of college, at least that is how it's marketed to us. It's not only about learning from a textbook or in a classroom; sometimes the most important lessons are the ones we have outside and off-campus. That when we succumb to our self-destructive instincts, we are still able to look at ourselves as more than the mistakes we made, and on the flipside, when we accomplish something great, we are able to celebrate accordingly in a manner that is rightfully deserved. As part of life, we learn to live with our mistakes and our successes, knowing just why each one happened even if it takes months or years for us to fully appreciate everything that transpired during those times.

Now, as I reach the end of this final article, this swan song to try to capture all three and a half beautiful

How have I tried to work towards making the university a better place and in what ways have I become a more complete person from my time here?

and two together and understood who he was and the role he had just begun to undertake.

As I think back on my time at YU, I find it interesting that in a way, the role of the President and that of the Student are not so drastically different from one another. While the gravity of the positions certainly cannot be further apart, when broken down, it becomes obvious that there are similarities between each job. Both the President and the Student must learn to listen to others, the President to better understand the needs of the institution he represents, and the Student ought to pay attention to succeed in their courses. In a similar vein, the President and the Student must understand that they are in a position to make great change in the long run, whether by meeting with donors who can ensure the long term financial security of the university or by partaking in clubs and initiatives that promote positive change for student representation and life. To simplify it further, both must know when to let their environments mold them and when to mold their environments. It is a constant game of give-and-take, all with a singular purpose, to improve themselves and those around them.

In these three and a half years at YU, this is a question I have constantly asked myself: How have I tried to work towards making the university a better place, and in what ways have I become a more complete person from my time here? It is easy to look at the clubs that I was involved with as a measurement of success or improvement, yet scrolling through the pages of time it becomes painfully clear that few of them are still active. What has always stood out to me

council positions and came up empty each time. Sure, there were different factors that played their part, from a lack of posters to a candidate debate performance that probably resulted in me losing a large bloc of votes I never would have won in the first place, but I would still make the same decisions I made then. With every loss, I learned that it is not about how many votes I lost by — records show that it was often by a large number — but that at least some students actually thought my positions were worth voting for. On this note, it is as many students who were more successful at playing the game of school-level politics told me: It's not necessarily about what the poster says or how many you put up, but ultimately about who you know and how you get them to rally for you. Yet it's also easy to look back at each semester and pinpoint what was going on at every point in my life and how that took up much of my time. Much of it was wasted, of course, yet even in those long hours I still had the opportunity to grow. With every unpublished article, unsuccessful event or short-lived interaction, I still carved out the time to get to know and collaborate with both like-minded and different students who wound up becoming close friends, not by providing an echo chamber but by challenging me on certain positions and giving me the opportunities I desperately needed to refine myself. With every verbal sparring match, debate or casual conversation over the phone, in person at the library or over text, I was able to research and polish my arguments or even learn something that helped me learn a new way of approaching a subject. It was never about being right,

years, I'm at a loss for words, wasting each precious minute scrambling to cobble together some kind of meaning of what this time has meant. And I can look through the pictures from when I first arrived until now or pour over everything I've written and said, yet I draw blanks. No matter how I put it together, I feel like I could have done so much more. Every aforementioned idea that I never took action on, from something benign like wanting to start my own WYUR show with a friend to other, more major, activities like writing more for The Commentator at an earlier time or creating more clubs on campus, will be left now to rot and decay until they are finally forgotten.

I look now to the audience as the lights go dark on the stage, a single spotlight that I tried to avoid yet craved all the same begins to turn off at last. I'm left with what I deem a paltry bag of on-campus accomplishments that will ultimately be ignored as those that knew me, *really knew me*, eventually graduate. Maybe that's okay, I think, as I look to the wings and see everyone who was with me as I ventured out on this grand experiment. Those that I speak to now and those that broke away and took different paths are now waiting for me to finally join them. And maybe I no longer need the applause or adulations — it never did me any good either way, especially now in a semester that feels more like an epilogue to a story I began writing years ago. So as those curtains close on the stage, simply and silently, I take my final bow and wait to disappear into the empty crowd as just another student to pass these parts.

That's it.

THE COMMENTATOR

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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.



1 We Made it to Print, Baby!

Deeply inhale the scent of wet ink pressed onto a fresh sheet of newsprint. Listen to the rustle as you open up and refold the paper, right before your eyes. Feel the grainy pulp of the gray tinged page in between your fingers. Ah, this is what a real newspaper is supposed to feel like.



2 Shuttle School Bus

Driving us right back to middle school. Good times.



3 Zoom Family Chanukah Parties

Politics, the Shidduch Crisis, what you're majoring in and your future career options. Someone will still show up late and the goodbyes will still take twenty minutes. Same conversations, different (virtual) venue. Some things never change.



4 Where Did the Dimmer Switch Metaphor Go?

Dimmer, Brighter, Blinded. We may have lost the dimmer switch analogy, but nobody can take away "robust." (Though I have a feeling @ylemel might have had something to do with this.)



5 Vaccination Has Begun!

And with it, comes hope.



6 Menorahs Everywhere!

That cozy feeling inside you when you walk past all those plastic light up menorahs in the windows of your local grocery store, bank, barbershop, ice cream truck and next door neighbor's apartment.



7 YU Virtual Chanukah Dinner

T'was the most expensive Zoom session of the year, and there were no lamb chops to be seen.

7 UP by Zahava Fertig
NMODZ

86.6 **1**



Oh, so you've just now realized that you've missed the last 5 editions of 7 up/7 down? No problem, go check them out in the PDF's on the Commentator website for some solid outdated YU entertainment.

Overdue Library Books 2



Check'd that one off my YU bucket list! Now, all I gotta do is figure out how to pay the fine ...

Is it Swag Day Yet? 3



To Whom This May Concern, with the new semester beginning shortly, the students of Yeshiva University are in dire need of a new Swag Day YU sweatshirt solely for the purpose of throwing it on a minute before Zoom class begins. In a year like this one, the best day of the year has now become even more dire. Please do not dissappoint us.

After YU ID Doesn't Scan, YU Security Bars Entry of Minyan Man 4



This incident requires no further attention other than the fact that the alleged "Minyan Man" happened to be PRDAB.

Wearing Last Year's Seforim Sale Sweatshirt 5



Do the pheromones wear off after a few months of washes?

Morg Fire Drills: a Recurring Phenomenon 6



The closest YU came to hosting a superspreader event.

January Graduates 7



They all could use a little TLC. Text "Congrats grad!" to (310) 770-0475 as our own January graduates embark into a cold dark world, with nothing but a lawn sign, a YU thermometer and two handfuls of chocolate miniatures from the YU COVID testing center.

SCHWAB LEAVING

Continued from Front Page

as senior editor of *The Commentator* and a member of the Yeshiva College Honors Council. Upon graduating in Spring 2011, Schwab served as a presidential fellow in the office of President Richard Joel for a year, after which he worked as an assistant director of admissions for nearly three years, followed by five years as director of UHRL.

"Yeshiva University has meant so much to me over the last 13 years," Schwab told *The Commentator*. "I became the person I am today at YU. I feel incredibly indebted to the countless people who have mentored and cared for me, from my faculty to my supervisors to my colleagues to many, many students."

Other RAs were appreciative of Schwab's work at YU. "Schwab is unique in his genuine care for the people he interacts with," Moshe

Gordon (YC '22) said. "His willingness to make the needs of residents his top priority, and his natural, easy way of understanding people and putting them at ease combined to make a very likeable and effective administrator. With his departure, these qualities have become rather scarcer at YU, and will likely be sorely missed."

Some administrators expressed a similar sentiment about Schwab's departure. Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel said, "We thank Schwab for all he has done for our students. Schwab's creativity, energy and easy going nature helped make him an exceptional director of housing and residence life. The connections Schwab built with his RAs and the degree to which he cared about every student were truly exemplary."

According to their job posting for the next director of UHRL, YU is seeking an individual possessing skills including "strong leadership, experience in the development and implementation of student leadership training and student event programming, excellent communication and interpersonal skills, and the ability to effectively work with staff, students, parents, and colleagues in a meaningful way."

Schwab's departure comes at a time when other employees have left YU, including former Assistant Director of UHRL Natan Bienstock, who departed in Aug. 2020. The university continues to seek a replacement for Bienstock. This is in addition to Avi Schwartz, who recently stepped down from his position as the Wilf Campus student life coordinator, and Geri Mansdorf, the

former director of undergraduate admissions, who left in Sept. 2020. Former Senior Vice President (VP) Josh Joseph also left YU in September to join the Orthodox Union as executive VP and chief operating officer.

"If I was able to give to some students even a reflection of the positive that I got, I feel really fulfilled and happy as I look back on my years in YU," Schwab said. "And of course, this is hardly the end of my connection to YU; though I won't be working here every day, I will stay closely tied to YU as a grateful alumnus, and it's only about 13 years before my children will be getting ready to apply for their spots in the class of 2038."

COVID SPIKE

Continued from Front Page

symptoms. People on campus are also required to participate in COVID-19 testing, which was downgraded from twice-a-week to once-a-week, according to a Nov. 5 email by Nissel. On Nov. 13, President Ari Berman emailed students that twice-a-week testing would be reinstated until Thanksgiving and possibly continued, citing the rising cases across NYS and New Jersey. As of publication, the twice-a-week testing is still in effect.

NYS guidelines mandate that if the lesser of 100 students or 5% of a university's on-campus population test positive within a

14-day period, all in-person learning must move online and campus activities must be limited for 14 days.

Some students were nervous about the spike in cases and felt campus COVID-19 guidelines should have been stronger. "The current rise in cases scares me that we aren't being careful enough on campus," said Adina Passy (SCW '21), a resident advisor (RA) for Brookdale Hall on Beren Campus. "We weren't quick enough to catch patient zero which is causing all of these outbreaks. I feel that just because we were doing well with

cases, we lessened our safety rules, which should have been the opposite. I am scared that I might get the virus before coming home and then bring it to my parents."

Other students felt confident in YU's preventive measures thus far. "YU is doing the best they can, and are going above and beyond by requiring testing twice a week from all students on campus," shared Sophomore and Isaac Breuer College Rep. Baruch Lerman (YC '23). "Ultimately, students are adults and need to take personal responsibility to stay safe and protect others."

One RA felt this spike was to be expected and stressed the importance of students remaining safe. "It was inevitable that there were going to be COVID cases on campus, the amount of cases is totally up to the actions of students," said Eli Seidman (SSSB '22), a Ruben Hall RA. "As the numbers are going up in NY/NJ we all need to make sure that we are doing our part ... I think for the most part people are doing their part, but now is especially important to make sure we are vigilant to make sure cases on campus don't rise."

HANUKKAH DINNER FUNDS

Continued from Front Page

contribution. The society "offers additional benefits providing exclusive opportunities for greater involvement with the University." The Etz Chaim Society, for example, which is the highest tier for donors who give in excess of \$1,000,000 annually, provides for "family functions with top leadership," along with the benefits of the other tiers. Members of the President's Society are featured on a virtual "Scroll of Honor."

Guests to the dinner were first shown a video presentation, in which President Ari Berman addressed the participants about the challenges YU faced during the pandemic and his hopes for the future of the institution.

"If someone last Hanukkah Dinner would have told me what laid in store in the coming months I would never have believed him," declared President Berman. "And now, after all this time, still locked in the grip of an uncertain winter with potentially promising news of effective vaccines, there is little we can say with certainty about the future. But I can tell you this: That our community as a whole, and Yeshiva University specifically, will emerge from this time even stronger."

President Berman also paid homage to the late Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, the third president of Yeshiva University and one of his mentors. "With a preponderance of brilliance, erudition in Torah and secular disciplines and an overabundance of compassion, Rabbi Lamm built this institution and personified the philosophy and worldview of our community," he said.

In his address, President Berman stressed the theme of "rededication" in the university's path forward. "Rededication is focused on transforming for the future. And this is what we've been doing at Yeshiva University... We are all seeking a new beginning. And as the world shifts to a new normal, Yeshiva University will be right by your side and together we will continue our

mission of educating our next great generation, the leaders of tomorrow," concluded President Berman.

After President Berman's address, guests were provided with links to six "conversations," pre-recorded panel discussions streamed on Zoom. The conversations were live streamed twice at 5:14 p.m. and 5:34 p.m., allowing guests to view two full-length panels. According to Gerdts, the panels "are exclusively available to donors and their guests, faculty, staff and student leadership until December 31"; it is unclear whether the conversations will be publicly released.

The topics were titled "Jewish Values in Professional Sports," "Risks vs. Rewards of Bringing Cutting-Edge Science and Technology to Market," "A New Era of Opportunity," "Medical Ethics during a Global Pandemic," "Halacha during a Global

Pandemic" and "Supreme Friendship in a Polarized Age: Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia."

Panelists included Mark Wilf, president/CEO of the Minnesota Vikings and a member of YU's board of trustees, Anne Neuberger, director of cybersecurity at the NSA, Ambassador Danny Danon, chairman of the World Likud and a visiting professor of political science at YU, Senator Joseph Lieberman, former Democratic vice presidential nominee and a professor of public policy at YU, Dr. Tia Powell, director of the Montefiore-Einstein Center for Bioethics, Rabbi Herschel Schachter, a *rosh yeshiva* of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Christopher Scalia, director of academic programs at the American Enterprise Institute and son of the late Justice Antonin Scalia, among others.

Following the panel discussions, the university presented a five-minute video showcasing various alumni reminiscing about positive experiences they had during their time as YU students. Featured alumni included Dr. Ariella Agatstein (SCW '05), Dr. Erica Brown (SCW '88), Evan Axelrod (SSSB '19), Lee Lasher (SSSB '99) and members of the Wildes family.

A pre-recorded speech by Yeshiva Student Union President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) concluded the event. Greenberg encouraged guests to donate money for the purpose of financially assisting students. "Your generosity provides scholarships to students like us — leaders on campus today, leaders in the world tomorrow," he said.

"In a year that has presented unprecedented challenges and opportunities, we are thrilled that our esteemed faculty, rebbeim, thought leaders and lay partners were able to showcase the extraordinary discourse of YU during our virtual event," President Berman reflected on the dinner. "Through this program, the broader YU community had the opportunity to learn together and celebrate our values in support of scholarship funds for our students, the leaders of tomorrow."

Chayim Mahgerefteh (SSSB '20), an alum and former president of the Sy Syms School of Business Student Council, expressed his positive experience watching the dinner. "An aspect of the dinner that I liked was how there were diverse conversations taking place and being given the opportunity to attend two of them," he said. "I think the organizers of the Chanukah Dinner did a great job making the best out of our circumstances. I look forward to attending the actual dinner next year and many more years to come."



President Berman spoke at Yeshiva University's 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

YU's 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner to be Held Virtually

By RIKKI KOLODNY

This article was originally published online on Nov. 30.

Yeshiva University's 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner will be held virtually this year on Dec. 6 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vice President of Institutional Advancement Adam Gerdtz announced on Nov. 6.

The dinner will be held virtually instead of the New York Hilton Midtown, where it has taken place for the last two years. According to Gerdtz, the dinner is a major fundraiser to "support the university and one way we help fund student scholarships." The guest list usually consists of donors, alumni and current student leaders. President Ari Berman will address the guests, who will be given the opportunity "to experience a number of YU Conversations," Gerdtz said. The attendees will then have the chance to hear from different speakers on multiple topics relevant in the Jewish world today. It is unclear through which medium the event will take place.

This year's topic-sessions include "Jewish

Values in Professional Sports," "Risks vs. Rewards of Bringing Cutting-Edge Science and Technology to Market," "Halacha during a Global Pandemic" and "Supreme Friendship in a Polarized Age: Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia." Some of the highlighted speakers include Stan Kasten, president and CEO of Los Angeles Dodgers, Anne Neuberger, director of cybersecurity at the NSA, Ambassador Danny Danon, Israel's former ambassador to the United

number. Gerdtz did not respond to The Commentator's request for comment regarding this year's monetary goal.

Guests will be required to pay an entrance fee based on their participation level, which has not been done in previous years. To participate as a "Young Alumni (2015-2020)" the fee is \$180, as a "Friend" the fee is \$500 and as a "Donor" the fee is \$1,000. There is also a higher level of participation known as the "President's Society" which

for donors who donate \$100,000-\$499,999 annually, "President's Cabinet" for donors who donate \$500,000-\$999,999 annually and the "Etz Chaim Society" for donors who donate more than \$1,000,000 annually.

Current students were asked to film a short prompted speech that will be shown at some point during the event. The film will include both current students and alumni as well as a thank you speech to the donors for attending the dinner and for the donations that will contribute to student scholarships. Gerdtz did not answer The Commentator's queries regarding the allocation of the funds that will be raised and what proportion of the funds will be allocated for student scholarships.

"In a year that has presented unprecedented challenges and opportunities, we are thrilled that our esteemed faculty, rebeim and thought leaders will be showcasing the University's values during our virtual YU Conversations panels during this year's Hanukkah Dinner," President Berman told The Commentator. "Through this program, the broader YU community will have the opportunity [to] celebrate and learn together to support scholarship funds for our students, the leaders of tomorrow."

"Through this program, the broader YU community will have the opportunity [to] celebrate and learn together to support scholarship funds for our students, the leaders of tomorrow."

President Ari Berman

Nations and a new visiting professor of political science at Yeshiva University and Rav Hershel Schachter, a *rosh yeshiva* at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, among others.

In previous years, the dinner was able to generate more than \$5 million in donations. In 2017 the dinner raised \$4.3 million; in 2018, \$5 million; and in 2019, \$5.6 million was raised, a record-breaking

recognizes donors who donate \$1,800 or more annually. Among the seven total levels above \$1,800 donations are "Chai Supporter" for donors who donate \$1,800-\$4,999 annually, "Scholars Circle" for the donors who donate \$5,000-\$9,999 annually, "Minyan Club" for donors who donate \$10,000-\$24,999 annually and "Dean's List" for donors who donate \$25,000-\$99,999 annually. Additionally "Senior Leadership" is

Former Israeli Ambassador to UN Danny Danon Named Visiting Professor in Political Science Dept.

By RAPHI SINGER

Danny Danon, former permanent representative of Israel to the United Nations (UN), has been named a visiting professor in YU's Political Science Department, according to a press release sent to The Commentator.

The press release stated that he will be giving seminars and lectures, mentoring students and writing about his experience of "promoting Israel and the Jewish People" at the UN. Additionally, it noted that he will focus on "building bridges in the world community and the legal and diplomatic practices to combat the global and domestic surge of anti-semitism." Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Selma Botman clarified that Danon will not be teaching "semester long classes."

"I am honoured and excited to work with colleagues at Yeshiva University," Danon said. "One of my main objectives will be to strengthen relations between Israel and the rest of the world. Connected to this will be attention to the global fight against anti-semitism."

During his tenure in the Israeli government, Danon held several positions, including deputy minister of defense (March 2013 - July 2014), minister of science and minister of technology and space (March 2015 - September 2015), and ambassador to the UN (October 2015 - July 2020); Gilad Erdan subsequently replaced Danon at the UN. Currently, Danon is a member of the Likud Party and serves as the chairman of the World Likud.

"Ambassador Danon exemplifies YU's core values," said President Ari Berman. "He is a champion of the Jewish people and his strong leadership will be a role model to our students and community."

Danon was previously the keynote speaker at YU's 87th commencement in 2018 and accepted an honorary degree

from the university. Last week, he spoke at YU's virtual 96th Annual Hanukkah Dinner in a session called, "A New Era of Opportunity," which was moderated by Sen. Joseph Lieberman.

Students majoring in political science expressed excitement about Danon's hiring. "Ambassador Danon joining the Political Science department is an amazing opportunity and I am excited to hear about his experiences in the Israeli Knesset," said Aderet Brenner (SCW '21), executive board member of engagement at the Yeshiva University Political Action Club (YUPAC). "I think it is important for there to be professors who

"I am honoured and excited to work with colleagues at Yeshiva University," Danon said. "One of my main objectives will be to strengthen relations between Israel and the rest of the world."

have experienced what they are teaching and I think we will all be able to learn a lot from the ambassador."

"As Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon proved himself to be a champion for Israel who could hold his own and stand up for Israel against attacks," said Alex Friedman (YC '22), co-president of the JP

Dunner Political Science Society.

Friedman added, "Stationed in New York at the UN for five years, Ambassador Danon has also become a friend of the Jewish community, and he will continue to foster this relationship as a visiting professor. Students should be lining up to hear from him."



Danny Danon has been named a visiting professor in YU's Political Science Department

Joey Chestnut, World Record-Breaking Competitive Eater, Speaks to YU Students

By CHARLES SCHAECHTER

This article was originally published online on Nov. 30.

Joey Chestnut, a world record-breaking competitive eater, spoke to Yeshiva University students over Zoom on Monday, Nov. 23, in a Q&A event sponsored by the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU), the Yeshiva College Student Association (YSCA) and the Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC).

According to his website, Chestnut is “the world’s greatest competitive eater” with the most competitive eating records — over 40

— in the world. The event was organized by Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21), president of YSU, who also moderated along with Jared Benjamin (SSSB '21), YSU’s vice president of clubs. Chestnut answered questions submitted by students the day before, and spoke about his unexpected career path and love for competitive eating. The winner of 13 annual hot dog eating contests, Chestnut attracted over 60 Zoom participants to the event. According to multiple student council sources familiar with the matter, the event cost \$2,000 contributed by YSU, YSCA and SCWSC.

During the event, Chestnut reflected on his career path. Chestnut told the audience of the first eating competition he won at

“It was awesome to be in a zoom meeting with a world record holder, the legend Joey Chestnut, and to hear the secrets to his success.”

Sammy Lekowsky (SSSB '22)

the age of 21 after being signed up by his brother. He spoke of the great feeling of winning that competition and his hunger for more success. “[My] first win in overtime solidified for me that I want to put more energy into it,” Chestnut said to students during the event. “If I didn’t get that little win in overtime I might never have been

motivated to put energy into it to justify to keep pushing myself, but I got lucky.”

Students asked Chestnut questions about how competitive eating affects his body, to which Chestnut responded that there are times where the food makes his stomach feel the effects of the large quantities he consumed up to a day and a half after a given event concluded. Speaking about the challenges of eating wet hot dog buns and his method, Chestnut emphasized the importance of having the right mindset. He told students, “I trained myself [to think that] it’s not a wet bun anymore, it’s a sip of water.”

Some students in attendance were impressed and enjoyed the opportunity to converse with the food-competing celebrity. “It was awesome to be in a zoom meeting with a world record holder, the legend Joey Chestnut, and to hear the secrets to his success” shared Sammy Lekowsky (SSSB '22). “The event was a great success with the students leaving the Zoom having met and learned from a record breaking athlete.”

Greenberg expressed his interest in getting more celebrities for YSU events after having Chestnut. “I was super happy with how it went and Joey and I are now connected on LinkedIn!” Greenberg said. “Best event of the year for me! I hope we can have more events like this one and bring in even more celebrity speakers!”

“It was such a blast,” Benjamin said. “Joey is awesome and he was so friendly and passionate about what he does, it was great talking to him. Also I’m glad he could finally answer the question of is a hot dog a sandwich? That was something I think everyone wanted to know.” Chestnut maintained that a hot dog is not a sandwich and expressed surprise that the question was raised in the first place.



Chestnut holds over 40 competitive eating records in the world.

ZACHARY GREENBERG

Inter-Campus Shuttle Service to Resume Service

By YOSEF LEMEL

This article was originally published online on Nov. 30, before the shuttle service resumed.

Yeshiva University’s inter-campus shuttle service will resume on Monday, Nov. 30, after the shuttle ceased operating in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to an email sent by YU Campus Security to the undergraduate student body on Nov. 29. Additionally, for the first time, the university will provide a one-way 8:00 a.m. shuttle from the Wilf Campus to the Beren Campus.

The first shuttle will depart from the Beren Campus at 5:15 p.m. on Monday. The service will only be open to YU undergraduate students who make reservations in advance. The university will use a school bus instead of the van that was previously used for the service to accommodate social distancing protocol.

“We hope to continue service between

campuses as long as ridership is consistent and health conditions permit,” the email stated. “Students who reserve a seat on the shuttle and do not use the space, or who do not adhere to our safety protocols, will put the sustainability of the shuttle at risk.”

“I’m excited to be able to go uptown and know I’ll feel safe leaving later at night because I don’t need to take the subway.”

Neeli Fagan

Safety protocols cited in the email include mandatory face masks for the duration of the ride and a requirement for students to sit in every other seat “so they are not directly next to, behind or directly across from someone.”

The service will run on a limited schedule from the Beren and Wilf campuses from Monday through Thursday. The hours that the shuttle will depart from the Wilf Campus are 8:00 a.m., 6:15 p.m., 8:15 p.m. and 10:15 p.m. The shuttle will depart from the Beren Campus at 5:15 p.m., 7:15 p.m. and 9:15 p.m. There will be no morning shuttle that

departs from Beren. Regarding the morning shuttle from Wilf, Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer Apfelbaum told The Commentator, “The morning run from Wilf to Beren is to accommodate students who live in Washington Heights who wish to go

to the Beren campus.”

The pickup locations are the same as last year, with the corner of 186th and Amsterdam Ave. being the location for Wilf and the entrance of Brookdale Residence Hall being the location for Beren.

The reinstatement of the inter-campus shuttle service follows the announcement of the temporary closure of the 181st St. 1 train subway station due to construction starting on Dec. 5. Apfelbaum clarified to The Commentator that the “reinstatement of the inter-campus shuttle is not related to the

181st 1 train subway closing because there is another available subway at 191st.” Rather, according to Apfelbaum, “the inter-campus shuttle is being reinstated for the convenience of our students at their request.”

“It seems like they are actually taking the students’ complaints and comments into consideration, which I really appreciate,” said Neeli Fagan (SCW '21). “I’m excited to be able to go uptown and know I’ll feel safe leaving later at night because I don’t need to take the subway.”

The email sent to the undergraduate student body did not mention any plans for resuming the local shuttle service, which transported students to various locations on both campuses. When asked by The Commentator about the possibility of resuming the local shuttle service Apfelbaum stated, “At the present time, we do not expect to run a local shuttle due to social distancing requirements. The local shuttles are typically driven by YU’s security officers in a small van which do not provide adequate social distancing.”

Dr. Sara Asher Appointed Assistant Dean of Students on Beren Campus

By SHLOMIT EBBIN

This article was originally published online on Nov. 27.

Dr. Sara Asher will be the new assistant dean of students for the Beren Campus, according to an email Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel sent to Beren students on Monday, Nov. 16. In this new role for Beren Campus, Asher will oversee residence life and student life offices and work with student leaders.

The Assistant Dean of Students is a new position at YU. Previously, these responsibilities had been taken care of by various staff members who divided their time between the Beren and Wilf campuses; however, Nissel told The Commentator that he felt there was “a need to have a senior student affairs person on the Beren campus to direct the various student facing areas.”

In addition to supervising the housing and student life offices, this new role includes working with students on both a communal and an individual level to ensure that all needs are addressed, according to Asher. This new job also involves managing programming on campus and working closely with student leaders on events and

the student experience. Asher added that she will be coordinating with many other departments to “continue to make the YU undergraduate experience growthful and enjoyable.”

“I am really hoping to meet the students and would be delighted for students to come by just to say hi and introduce themselves,”

“I am excited to be back at YU and am committed to working with our wonderful students and the dedicated Beren staff to continuing to make this a special place to be.”

Dr. Sara Asher

Asher expressed to The Commentator. “I am excited to be back at YU and am committed to working with our wonderful students and the dedicated Beren staff to continuing to make this a special place to be.”

Asher earned her doctorate in psychology at Pace University in 2010. She began at YU as a postdoctoral fellow at the Counseling Center, working under the leadership of Counseling Center Director Dr. Yael Muskat and Nissel as the then-associate dean of students. Following her postdoctoral year, she continued to work at the YU Counseling

Center from 2011 until 2018. For the past two years, Asher worked as the Director of School Psychology at Yeshiva of Central Queens (YCQ), an elementary school in Flushing, NY.

When reflecting on her supervisory responsibilities at YCQ, Asher stated that “the experience I received there prepared me to manage a team of professionals, direct the

student affairs, working under Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman.

Part of Nissel’s role as dean of students was directing all undergraduate student life, including housing, counseling, health and disability services, academic support, student government, activities and campus programming, many of which Asher will now be overseeing in her new position. Nissel told The Commentator that he does not anticipate creating a similar position on the Wilf campus at this time.

“[Dr. Asher] is very excited to meet with students and we are thrilled to have her as part of our team,” Nissel expressed. “Having someone of Dr. Asher’s caliber involved in the various services on Beren, and available to help individual students navigate college life, will undoubtedly help enhance the student experience.”

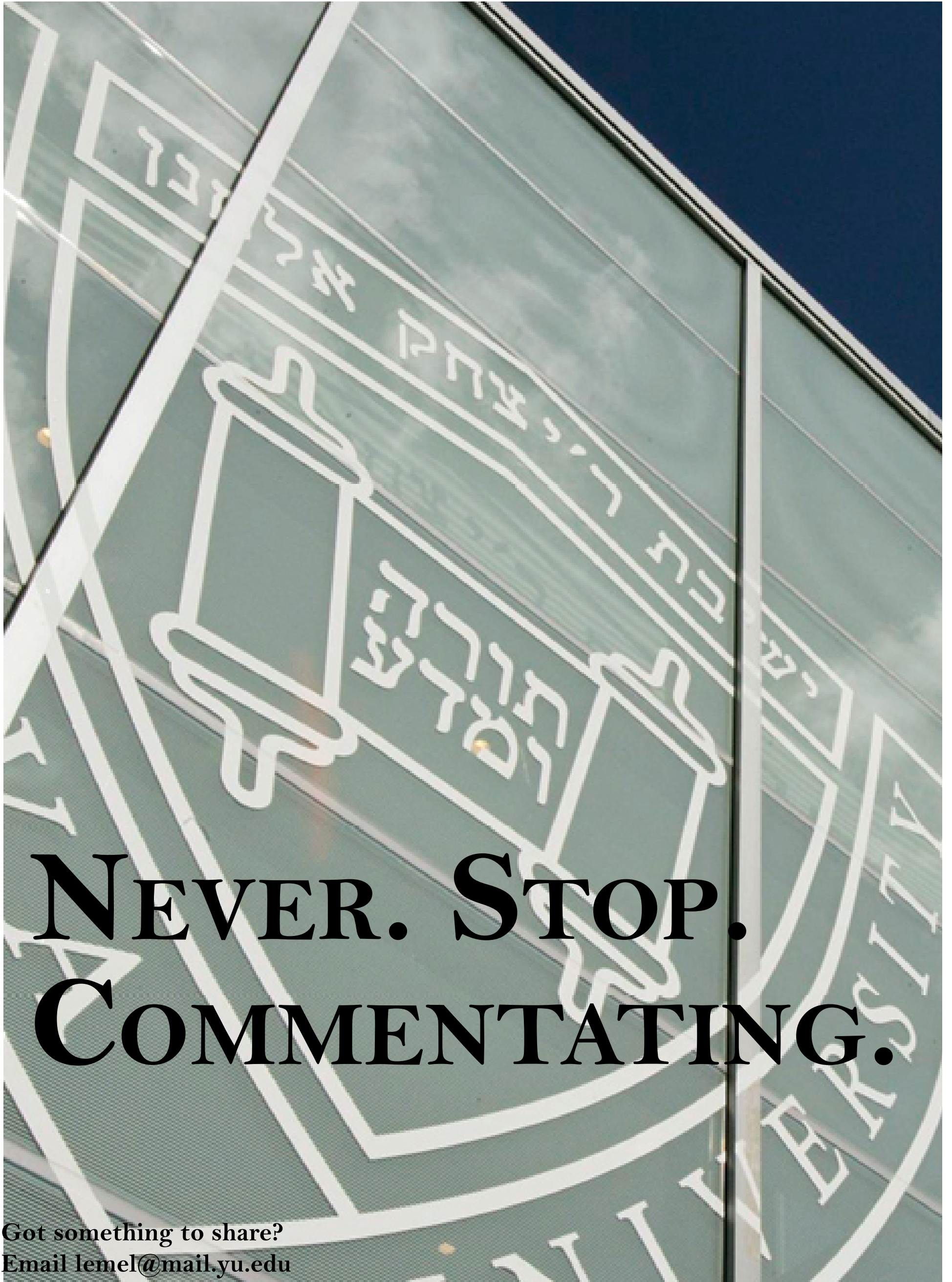
“I’m so excited that Dr. Asher has joined the team, and I very much look forward to working with her,” said Stern College for Women Student Council President Shira Schneider. “I’ve heard great things about her and know that we will definitely benefit from having an Assistant Dean of Students that is full time on the Beren campus.”

overall running of a department, and to simultaneously pay close attention to the needs of each student. These are all skills that will help me be successful in my new role at YU.”

The appointment of Asher follows a sequence of administrative changes over the course of this past year. Former Senior Vice President Josh Joseph left YU at the end of Spring 2020 to become executive VP and chief operating officer at the Orthodox Union, and Nissel was promoted from university dean of students to vice provost for



Brookdale Residence Hall



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Got something to share?
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Combatting Anti-Semitism During COVID-19: A Panel With Neil Lazarus and Rudy Rochman

By GILAD MENASHE

Israel and Jewish rights activists, Neil Lazarus and Rudy Rochman spoke to Yeshiva University students via Zoom on Sunday, Dec. 6, addressing the topic of combating anti-Semitism during COVID-19.

According to his website, Lazarus is an “internationally acclaimed expert in the fields of Middle East politics, public diplomacy and effective communication training... Neil speaks to over 30,000 people a year and his presentations are causing an international sensation.” Rochman is a notable speaker and writer on both Israel and Jewish activism and uses social media as a platform to display his work and spread awareness about the issues he is an activist for. He frequently speaks on college campuses to various organizations and facilitates conversation with anti-Semitic and anti-Israel protesters. According to The Forward, Rochman “founded [Columbia University’s] Students Supporting Israel group where he [served] as president.” Additionally, Rochman “was selected in 2018 as one of The Jewish Week’s 36 Under 36 young leaders for his pro-Israel activism,” per The Jewish Week.

The event was organized and hosted by YU’s Israel Club and was moderated by the club’s co-president, Michael Akhavan (YC ‘22). Yeshiva Student Union (YSU), Yeshiva College Student Association (YSCA), Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) and Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) sponsored the event. The night began with opening remarks from Lazarus and

Rochman, and concluded with questions from Akhavan and the attendees. The panel was a success, with a turnout of over 30 participants.

“Both Rudy and Neil showed incredible passion, almost more than we were expecting. But that passion made this event a success. This event was eye-opening and informative but also packed with practical advice.”

—
Michael Akhavan

Lazarus and Rochman both reflected on the issue of the Jewish people historically being targeted as scapegoats, and the extent to which anti-Semitism continues to be a problem. “Anti-Semitism is unique in that it provides the scapegoat for everyone’s cause,” Lazarus noted. He further added, “wherever there is strife, anti-Semitism reemerges.” Rochman agreed with both sentiments, adding that, “the formula for anti-Semitism is finding the source of suffering and pain that a community faces and [then] blaming that on the Jewish people... when it comes to anti-Semitism, it is rising, and we are doing nothing about it.”

Rochman and Lazarus followed their interpretations as to why anti-Semitism exists by offering practical advice on combatting it. “We have to empower, educate, and expose,” Rochman asserted. “Once we understand the younger generation, we have to be able to speak in a language that communicates a message.” Lazarus added, “If you really want to fight this [anti-Semitism], I think we should be less worried about what they [anti-Semites] are doing, and [be] more

worried that people aren’t being attracted to Judaism.” Rochman and Lazarus agreed upon most issues, but gave differing perspectives on their approaches to

explaining why anti-Semitism continues to exist. “The reason they’re blaming us for all the problems that exist is not because we’re creating those problems, but because we have the responsibility to fix those problems. And when we fail to do so, there is a subconscious reaction towards the Jews that can’t be explained,” voiced Rochman. Lazarus disagreed with Rochman’s approach, arguing that “at the end of the day it is hatred against the Jews... we don’t need to spend time examining why they hate us.”

Sunday night’s panel was both Lazarus’s and Rochman’s second appearance at YU, but it was the first time they spoke together at the university. Both Rochman and Lazarus spoke in Feb. 2020 on separate occasions. “I was fortunate enough to help bring both of them to YU separately last semester, but this event having them together was a great combination of two experts in the area,” former Israel Club Board Member Chayim Mahgerefteh (SSSB ‘20) told The Commentator. Akhavan echoed Mahgerefteh’s assessment, adding, “we definitely plan on bringing both Neil and

Rudy back to YU the next opportunity we get.”

“Both Rudy and Neil showed incredible passion, almost more than we were expecting. But that passion made this event a success. This event was eye-opening and informative but also packed with practical advice,” Akhavan told The Commentator. “All in all, those who attended left with a more nuanced view... along with a great deal of practical takeaways.”

The panelists insisted that as representatives of the Jewish people, we must not wait for the issue to become severe to start taking action, but rather start now. As I understand it, this is analogous to an aching tooth. One would comfortably save the tooth if they decide to attend to the issue as it arises, but if they act too late, harsh consequences will result. Similarly, we must work together as a nation now, and our collective actions will make a difference.

The key message Lazarus and Rochman wanted to convey to the audience is that the Jewish people have been targeted time and time again for both global and community issues, and the first step towards combating this cancerous form of hate is through empowering and educating ourselves. Ultimately, we need to connect and expose the Jewish people to their culture and identity. The audience who attended, as well as the readers of this article, have hopefully gained key insights regarding these issues, and can now take tangible steps in fighting anti-Semitism.



Rudy Rochman stresses a key point.

The Commentator's 2020 Chanukah Gift Guide

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS AND
COMMENTATOR STAFF

Chanukah is right around the corner, and you know what that means! Reading week and lots of end of semester assignments. But it also means it's time to scramble to find presents for your friends and loved ones. Luckily, we're here to help.

Each Commentator editor and staff writer had the chance to share a gift they think is worth giving this Kislev. Here they are, in no particular order.

Yosef Lemel (Editor-in-Chief)

'Josephus: The Complete Works' — \$22

I know, I know. "Books are boring," the children will wail. Well, this gift isn't for children. If anything, some of its contents rival the best and most gory HBO series. Yet, it contains some of the most important elements of Jewish history. Josephus offers a survey of Jewish history — warts and all — from the creation of the world to the destruction of the Temple to the rise and fall of the Hasmoneans. If you won't read it, it at least makes you look like some sort of aspiring intellectual when guests snoop around your bookshelf.

Elazar Abrahams (Senior Features Editor)

Shabbos is for the Boys Flag — \$7

This take-off of Barstool's famous "Saturdays Are For the Boys" flag is the perfect decor for any Heights apartment. For the Syms crowd, it's a shtark but relatable alternative to hanging the real thing, and for the YC chevra, it serves as an ironic piece of wall art. In terms of gift giving, it's the ideal blend of shticky and practical. Rav Portnoy would be proud.

Shira Levitt (Social Media Manager)

Pajamas — Variety

PJs! What's great about this gift is that pajamas are something that everyone uses and loves, and you can never have too many pajamas! Plus they come in so many colors and variations. Make sure your friends and family are nice and cozy for the rest of the year and beyond!

Raphi Singer (Staff Writer)

Fossil Hybrid Smartwatch HR Collider — \$195

This men's hybrid smartwatch is the perfect gift to give your dad, uncle, grandfather or little brother. After getting it for my birthday and using the features every day, I highly recommend it as a present. The watch tracks your movements, workouts, heart rate, and displays the weather. And with an option to sync it to your phone, you can receive text messages and calls all from your wrist! With the added feature of being able to customize the face, this Fossil watch is every guy's must have!

Sruli Fruchter (Senior News Editor)

'The New Jim Crow' by Michelle Alexander — \$13

Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" completely changed my Shana Aleph experience and is a must for this Chanukah. She paints a deeply troubling and evidence-based picture of the racism ingrained in America's prison system, specifically its manifestation through mass incarceration. If we want to be

allies in the fight of anti-racism, we need to begin by learning and listening to the Black community and those subjugated to age-old flaws in the American system. A book like this will promise important and overdue conversations, which we all desperately need in these times.

Jared Scharf (Junior News Editor)

A Copy of the Banned Sefer 'Making of a Godol' — \$499

When I first heard about "Making of a Godol," I thought it would be a great book and an even better substitute for some of the trashy and religiously problematic novels that exist today. I ended up finding a PDF of it online for free and it was super boring. I'm happy I didn't pay \$500 for it. The book used to be like \$30 until it was banned by half of the Gedolim. I think the only reason it even gained so much momentum was because of its ban. Nevertheless, I think a physical copy of this book is a good present and good shtick for anyone who likes good shtick. It's good for a coffee table book that will never be opened.

Shlomit Ebbin (Staff Writer)

Pink Tool Kit — \$19

Do you have a really handy, anti-feminist female friend who won't touch tools because it's a "man's job?" This toolset is for the girl who knows she can fix her own kitchen sink and broken broom but is too proud to go against her misogynist beliefs. This Chanukah gift is perfect for any housewife as she "builds" a bayit ne'eman b'yisrael. According to the reviews, this product is "sexist but good. Four stars."

Netani Shields (Junior Features Editor)

Blue Light Blocking Glasses — \$18

If there's one thing I've learned this semester, it's that this is Zoom's world, we're all just living in it. Facing 8+ hours of screen time a day is certainly a strain for the eyes, and when carrots don't seem to do the trick, these Blue Light blocking glasses might be the move. Stylish and effective, these glasses bridge the gap between work and play: perfect for all types of activities. Like all pieces of eyewear, this item truly presents an aura of sophistication for whoever is lucky enough to wear them. And for only \$17.99, not buying these spectacles is the true expense.

Josh Leichter (Junior Opinions Editor)

'Solutions and Other Problems' by Allie Brosh — \$19

Though many of you probably feel like you've advanced beyond the stages of reading picture books or think graphic novels are solely a medium to tell superhero stories, you're just wrong. In this followup to her first book, "Hyperbole and a Half," author Allie Brosh succeeds in telling humorous and human stories about her own life through a collection of (intentionally) poorly drawn images and some (presumably) well-written words. It'll have you laughing in some chapters and crying in others, but when you hit the final page, you'll be left wanting to read it all over again.

Zahava Fertig (7 Up/7 Down)

Subscription Boxes — Variety

These days everything comes in a box. But this box is a gift that keeps on giving. Here's how it works. After the wonderful and ever so gracious gift giver pays a monthly fee, (starting at prices lower than a month of Netflix,) a new gift box arrives at their doorsteps every month. With dozens of different themed subscription boxes to choose from, ranging from: makeup, earrings, men's clothing, wine, books, fragrances, art supplies or even your father's favorite, bagel of the month, each month delivers (see what I did there) a new box that arrives just as they began to forget about it. This gift is sure to make you the best friend, sibling, child, spouse or relative for at least an entire year.

Naftali Shavelson (Junior Opinions Editor)

YU Hunting and Fishing Apparel — \$50+

Granted, it's not every day that you're waiting at the crosswalk on 185th and Amsterdam, spot a Great Manitoban Elk on the other side of the street, and have enough time to grab your Remington 870 Tactical, load a 12-gauge slug and bag the near-extinct 500 lb trophy — all before the other light turns green. For those days, however, you'll definitely want to check out the Hunting and Fishing section of the YU Macs' official online store. Featuring staples like "Mossy Oak Camo Challenger Jacket" (\$99.98) and "Light Blue Short Sleeve Performance Fishing Shirt" (only \$49.98), all bearing various iterations of the YU Macs' logo, this

collection is sure to have you covered next time you go big game hunting, or happen to encounter a West African Hippopotamus outside the Beit Midrash on your way to Night Seder next week.

Yonatan Kurz (Staff Writer)

AirPods Pro — \$250

Conspicuous? Definitely. Expensive? Yes. Cliché? Indubitably. But the fact is, the AirPods Pros are all of these things because simply put, they work really well. The AirPods Pro have up to five hours of battery life on a single charge, one hour of listening time from just five minutes of charging, and a charging case with over 24 hours of listening time, making them incredibly convenient for a student glued to Zoom all day. They're small enough to easily fit into a pocket or on a keychain, perfect for a person on the go from one side of the quarantining room to the other. And with silicone ear tips that come in different sizes, the AirPods Pros can be worn for hours at a time with no discomfort — something that can't be said for their predecessors. And with active noise cancellation and a powerful microphone, it's no wonder that these are commonly spotted across campus, whether it be in Glueck, Gottesman or Grandma's.

And if you're waiting for the next generation of AirPods, have a personal vendetta against Apple, or think that \$250 is an absolutely ludicrous price to spend on earbuds, these earbuds provide an incredible value for only \$23.

Elishava Kohn (Managing Editor)

Laptop Table — \$22

My friends recently bought me a different version of this laptop desk, and it is perhaps the most brilliant object currently in my possession. It's great for breakfast in bed/Zoom class in bed/Netflix in bed, and also serves as a useful platform for your laptop when you don't want that double chin showing in your Zoom job interview.

The Commentator wishes our readers a Chanukah Sameach!



All Commentator staff members had the chance to share a Chanukah gift idea.

Avi Schwartz: The Exit Interview

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS

Rabbi Avi Schwartz has spent the last decade as part of the Yeshiva University family. After spending a year and a half at Israel's Yeshivat Sha'arei Mevasseret Zion, he started Yeshiva College in Jan. 2011, majoring in Psychology. He graduated in 2014 and immediately began his time in Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, staying on the Wilf Campus for another year before learning at the Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem for the following three. After leaving the Gruss Institute, he enrolled in the Wurzweiler School of Social Work in June 2018 and graduated this past May.

"I tried to be the bridge between all different walks of life at YU, on either campus, on any kind of hashkafa. I felt like every single person that's at YU belongs at YU, and my goal was to help them feel comfortable."

—
Avi Schwartz

Shortly after beginning Wurzweiler, he found out that the vacant Wilf Campus student life coordinator position could count for his degree's required fieldwork. It was a no brainer. Schwartz spent the last two years in the hands-on role. He was a friendly face present and visible on campus, always available to help students and implement ideas to enhance the undergraduate experience.

Schwartz left YU in late November to assume the role of co-director of the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at Rutgers University in New Brunswick along with his wife Sarah. He will also practice therapy, specializing in youth mental health and counseling families.

The Commentator had the chance to sit down with Schwartz for an exclusive exit interview.

Hey Avi, thanks for taking the time to answer some questions. First off, how does it feel to be leaving YU after so many years?

It's very bittersweet. I just turned 29, and I'm finishing up my tenth year at YU. That's literally about a third of my life spent here. It's one of those things where it's time for me to move on, but I'm happy to leave with a good taste in my mouth — all the connections I made with students, all the things I was able to accomplish. I have the utmost *hakaras hatov* because I would not be who I am if not for the different schools at YU I was able to be a part of.

And what are your hopes for your new role at Rutgers?

My hope is to bring the love and appreciation of Judaism and Torah to the students, and be able to give them a "home base" to come to with questions, and have a frum rabbinic role model for them that they can feel comfortable talking to about anything.

Nice. Changing topics, I know you're very active and popular on Twitter. Can you tell us a little about the pages you run?

My personal account is @MyNamesAviJ, but I am also the Frum Tweet Explainer. I

use that account to try to explain funny jokes and tweets. Also, me and a bunch of friends together are @VaadHaBadchanim, literally a "council of jokesters." We collaborate on shtick and memes and stuff like that.

Combined that's nearly 7,000 followers, so clearly people respond to your sense of humor. How do you come up with a good tweet? Do you look at the trending page to get a sense of what topics people are talking about, or do these jokes naturally come to you?

It depends. Sometimes you're talking to people, there will be a funny line, and you're like "this would be a very funny thing to tweet," and you tweet it and it completely falls flat. Sometimes it's Shabbos and you say, "okay, I'm going to remember to tweet this after Shabbos, that's really really funny," but by that night you've completely forgotten the line. Most often I have the joke in advance, it's just about knowing how to write it as a tweet.

The hardest thing about Twitter is that some people feel that validation of who they are in real life is reflected on Twitter. That is not and should not be the case. When I was younger and on Facebook and Twitter a lot more often, every "like" I would get filled my brain with good chemicals. When I didn't get any "likes" — and had the absence of those chemicals — I felt very down. So I used to connect my self-worth to my social media presence. Thank G-d over time and maturity, I realized that my self-worth is not determined by other people's validation of my wording of a certain joke on social media. I have an inherent worth regardless. I think that mindset made it a lot easier to use social media in a healthy way.

You've been involved in so many great YU events over your time in the Office of Student Life (OSL), and even as a student you were a part of a ton of shtick — in fact just last week I realized that's you in the Epic Rav Battles of History video. Do you have a favorite YU thing you've been a part of, or anything that particularly stands out to you as special?

That's a good question. Yeah, the Epic Rav Battle got a lot of views. I was the director of the Purim shpiel for two years, both in 2014 and 2015. Epic Rav Battle was in 2014. In 2015, we did a sketch called Neo-Chassidus. It was a song based on Hakuna Matata. I think that bit was the best bit I was ever a part of in my time as a student.

As a staff member, the thing I am most proud of is working with student council and individual council members, and being *mechazek* them. I find that student council members tend to get burnt out very quickly because they try to accomplish a lot and they get stuck at a certain point. If they can't get past the high bar they set for themselves, they get frustrated and burnt out very fast. Using my intersection of social work and position in OSL, I would work with a lot of the student council presidents individually to make sure that their self-worth wasn't determined by if an event was successful or not. I remember working with students who got very depressed after an event just did not go their way and they felt like they were failures as a council president. I told them, "No, absolutely not. Even if this event didn't go the way you wanted it to, it sets the ground in motion for future events and future presidents." Working with them to make sure their beliefs didn't translate into negative feelings is something that I am very proud of.



Student Life Coordinator Avi Schwartz left YU at the end of November.

AVI SCHWARTZ

Your background as a former YU student must have also helped with that position.

Yes and no. I'll tell you why. My counterpart in OSL my first year there was Zehavya Stadlan. She was an NYU student for undergrad and basically did my job at Beren. Me and her worked on a lot of programs together — we ran the Yoms together, we helped with the YU trip to the west coast and more. It was very good to have the perspective of a YU student but also having an outsider, like someone from NYU, to help and give her perspective. "This is what we do at NYU, maybe this could work here." I think having that insider-outsider balance is very helpful in OSL.

But really, I think the most important quality that anyone can have to work in OSL is empathy. This was my goal over the past two years. I know that there's very much a polarized environment at YU between the right and the left. You can have the most yeshivish KBY guy and you can have the most atheist non-KBY guy, but *l'maisa*, they're at YU for a reason. So my goal was that whatever my own personal *hashkafic* views are, I want to make sure these people can have their YU experience that they came for. That this guy over here doesn't have to affect what the other guy experiences and vice versa. No toes need to be stepped on. I tried to be the bridge between all different walks of life at YU, on either campus, on any kind of hashkafa. I felt like every single person that's at YU belongs at YU, and my goal was to help them feel comfortable.

What parting message do you have for students just beginning their time at YU? How can they make the most of their time here?

I have found that YU has the best things to offer if you look for them. I remember a *mashal* I had in yeshiva. There are two flies trying to find some food and they go to the palace and see two doors. One fly goes to the right, one fly goes to the left. The fly that goes to the right finds the most beautiful feast ever, has a great time and eats a lot. The fly on the left finds the royal garbage

dump and has the best meal a fly could ever have. They both come out and say their meal was fantastic. It all comes down to the perspective of what you're looking for. YU has the best of the best if you're looking for it. But if you're looking for garbage, you'll also find it.

If your mindset is "I'm going to YU looking for the best rabbis, the best teachers, the best experiences," then take advantage of it. Yes, you're in Manhattan, so you can find all the worst things in the city also. But Yeshiva University has the best things to offer for every single individual person. YU is not a perfect place by any means, but I think every person that tries to make it a little bit better puts another brick in the wall to help build YU's future.

We're all going to miss you. I guess my final question is, what will it take for you to come back?

Who knows! Maybe in like five years, if there's an opening in the Counseling Center or MTA is looking for a social worker. I would love to maybe teach in Wurzweiler one day. Again, I have the utmost *hakaras hatov* to YU and what they gave me. I hope to pay it back somehow, in any way possible. Either schmoozing with students who are considering going, helping out in any way that I can with students already there, something like that.

I think it's very easy for people to criticize YU on the outside, but they don't see how hard people are working on the inside to make it a really good place. I find it's very easy to yell from your ivory tower and say "YU stinks for everyone" and so on. They don't see all the hard work being put in. Again, YU is not a perfect place, but it's a place that allows people to grow as much as they want to grow. I find people can make the conscious decisions to find the right things, to find the right people to connect with academically, spiritually and anywhere in between.

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We Asked, Y(O)U Answered

Is Campus Life All the Hype?

By **DEBORAH COOPERSMITH**

It has been about two months since Yeshiva University reopened its campus and dorms to undergraduate students. For this article, The Commentator reached out to the student body to learn about what factors encouraged students to return to campus, live nearby or remain at home. We also asked if they have in-person classes and how has that experience been, whether there are social opportunities on campus, how face-to-face services have been provided and their hopes for the upcoming spring semester. The responses of six students are provided below.

Rivka Moskowitz (SCW '23)
Major: Psychology
Current Living Situation: Brookdale Hall

"I decided to return to campus because I think living on campus with peers is a really important aspect of college life, especially life at Stern. The last few months we have really been living in isolation, so it was especially important to me to live with friends.

"I have one in-person class — Intro to Anthropology with Dr. Jill Katz. This has certainly enhanced my learning. There is no comparison between Zoom learning to in-person learning. It is much easier to pay attention and engage when a class is in-person.

"I didn't know my roommates before coming to campus, so meeting them was definitely a great experience. Otherwise, I feel like I have been able to meet people who are in my Zoom classes, which has been nice. I definitely don't feel like there are many communal or social opportunities; I think that you have to seek them for yourself.

"I've had an in-person Academic Advisement meeting, which was very

beneficial. All of my other meetings, however, have been virtual. The dining situation has been a bit tough. There is a lack of the variety that apparently usually exists, and because everything has to be packaged, it's even more difficult. Instead of a salad bar, there are premade salads, which means I don't get them because I don't like many vegetables. I know many people who are very

"I returned to campus because I wanted to be able to see my friends and feel independent... I wanted to feel like I had a home. I have no classes in-person, but I do go to shiurim and it is amazing. I am able to actually concentrate and not have Zoom fatigue."

Haviva Tirschwell

upset with the dining conditions this year.

"[Next semester,] I really hope that more people come to campus, and that more of my classes will be in person. I also hope that the dining situation improves. If students can use their caf cards to buy food from restaurants, as it used to be, this will give students more dinner options."

Natania Birnbaum (SCW '22)
Major: Biology
Living Situation: 36th Street Dorms

"I wanted to come to campus mostly for the in-person lab, as well as seeing my friends on Shabbat. A change of scenery was also a big factor.

"I have an in-person lab, which is infinitely better than it was at home. I also have one class that is partially in-person, which may or may not be that much better. The rest of my classes are online.

"I'm not a very social person, so the interactions that I have on campus are sufficient. Shabbat, especially, is a time I might spend talking to more people in an hour than I did the entire quarantine.

"I hope that people will continue to cooperate with the anti-Covid measures in place so the dorms won't shut down. I'm fine with all the classes being online, but I really like the on-campus life."

Seth Jacobs (YC '22)
Major: Computer Science
Current Living Situation: Apartment near campus

"The reasons why I decided to return to campus was for in-person morning *seder* and in-person Shabbatot with programming.

"I have one class in-person and it definitely enhanced the experience. However, it was worth it to return even without this class.

"The Shabbos programming makes it all worth it on top of having access to the *beis* daily. My hope for next semester is for there to be more classes and people on campus."

Yael Levy (SCW '23)
Major: Undecided
Current Living Situation: Brookdale Hall

"One of the reasons why I returned to campus was because I felt that I was missing out on the social aspect. What I found was

that many of the social opportunities were on Zoom so being on campus didn't add to my social life unless I stayed for Shabbos.

"The YU in-person services have been good. Everyone has been extremely welcoming and accommodating.

"I hope that there are more in-person options next semester."

Haviva Tirschwell (SSSB '21)
Major: Management
Current Living Situation: 36th Street Dorms

"I returned to campus because I wanted to be able to see my friends and feel independent. I was living with my sister for seven months and my parents for two months and I wanted to feel like I had a home.

"I have no classes in-person, but I do go to *shiurim* and it is amazing. I am able to actually concentrate and not have Zoom fatigue.

"There are so many opportunities to see friends, whether it's a floor party or just eating dinner with them.

"There is Covid testing twice a week on campus and it only takes a maximum of five minutes. I feel much safer with it and you can also have Academic Advising meetings on campus. The dining services have actually gotten better and it's been such great food. They have also been so clean and supportive."

Sruli Fruchter (YC '22)
Major: International and Global Affairs
Current Living Situation: At Home

"The fluctuation in COVID-19 case numbers between last spring and this past summer didn't help the case living on campus for Fall 2020. Ultimately, I wanted to see the trajectory of where things were going, and specifically if there would be a second wave. Another side factor was that I'm studying for the LSAT now, so I didn't see much benefit in living on campus when I wouldn't gain as much from the social advantage, as almost no classes were actually in person.

"Like most things, there's definitely a FOMO aspect to living at home, but I think that's more centered around being with friends than being on campus per se. Also, I think hindsight is 20/21 (20/20 clearly isn't good), so even if I wish I did stay on campus, I don't think I could have justified that decision at the time.

"Assuming the COVID-19 cases don't spike and NYC isn't all but shut down, my hope is to live on campus next semester. It's hard to say whether or not this will happen given the rising cases across NYS and even in YU, the latter of whom was doing really well for the first month. For now, it's definitely going to be a wait-and-see type of thing."



YU graphic of current life on campus.

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

AVI SCHWARTZ

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I very much agree. That's a perception I hope to improve with my work in The Commentator.

It's been an absolute pleasure to work with The Commentator specifically. I had a really good relationship [former Editors-in-Chief] Benjy Koslowe, Avi Hirsch and [former Managing Editor] Yossi Zimilover,

and now Yosef, Elisheva and you. I think it's a really special thing that the OSL and Commentator could and should work together for the benefit of the students.

One last point again is that finding the people in your life that will help bring out your strengths is the key to being successful at YU and wherever you go. I was very lucky at YU to have found the people — specifically

Josh Weisberg and Linda Stone — who have been the most incredible mentors and bosses. Linda is literally like another mother to me. She has probably been my biggest advocate both personally, professionally, academically and even spiritually. And Josh Weisberg has been very similar. Anywhere I go now, it's all downhill in terms of bosses. I was very lucky to have the biggest supporters

at OSL to help bring the best out of me and find those strengths that I knew were inside me. I think that should be the goal for every person at YU: to find those people.

Shabbos Programming Returns to Campus

By YOSEF LEMEL

With the return of in-person campus life in late October came the return of the Shabbos experience on both the Wilf and Beren campuses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant health precautions and policies, many aspects of Shabbos life have been altered from those of years past.

As stated in YU's Fall 2020 Plan, the university "encourage[s] all students in University housing to remain on campus for Shabbat and the entire weekend" to "prevent unnecessary exposure to COVID-19" through "student travel off campus." No specific policies were outlined in the plan to encourage students to stay. However, the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) on the Wilf Campus and the Torah Activities Council (TAC) on the Beren Campus have rolled out incentive programs to promote student participation in on-campus Shabbos programming.

According to SOY President Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22), the overall number of students who sign up for meals — excluding the first week and Thanksgiving weekend — have varied with a low of around 90, a high of around 180 and an estimated average of 150 students. "We have every indication to believe that the Shabbos incentives have consistently boosted weekly turnout," he said.

On a Yeshiva University community call on Dec. 8, Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, the associate dean for men's undergraduate Torah studies, remarked that while the overall percentage of students on campus is lower than usual, the Wilf Campus is "averaging a larger number of students who are here for Shabbos on campus on any given week" than previous years. TAC Vice President of Shabbat Eliana Feifel (SCW '21) told The

Commentator that "on average there have been over 100 students that have stayed on [the Beren Campus] for Shabbat."

Both SOY and TAC have offered free and subsidized Shabbos meals as incentives for students to stay in. Once every three weeks, Beren students have the opportunity to sign up for Shabbos meals free-of-charge. Wilf students who sign up for on-campus meals for two specific weeks in a row are provided with free-of-charge Shabbos programming for the third week. For instance, students who signed up for meals for the Shabbosim of Dec. 4-5 and Dec. 11-12 will be able to sign up for the Shabbos of Dec. 18-19 for free.

In addition to the meal incentives, SOY has conducted raffles to incentivize on-campus learning during Shabbos. \$600 worth of gift cards to Eichler's — a *seforim* store based in Brooklyn — were raffled off to Wilf students who learned on-campus during the Shabbos of Dec. 4-5; overall, 79 students participated in the learning program that week.

Eric Lenefsky (YC '22), who won a \$125 Eichler's gift card, shared his thoughts with The Commentator. "I think the raffles are definitely a nice addition, but I think what really packs the beis on Shabbos is that everyone is excited to be back on campus, learning and enjoying Shabbos with their friends," he said.

"It is incredible to see the level of participation, excitement, and gratitude which has emerged from our learning programs," remarked Poppers. "It is an honor for SOY to be able to run programs which create a strong learning environment on campus, while also placing students in a setting which has COVID protocols in place for their safety and well-being."

Students who stay in for on-campus programming must register in advance, noting which specific programs — including

shiurim, *tisches*, and meals — they would like to attend, due to health restrictions mandating capacities on event sizes. Those who would like to attend Shabbos *minyanim* on the Wilf Campus must sign their names on a separate Google sheets form.

Minyanim take place in various locations and times on the Wilf Campus, including the Morgenstern Hall shul, Rubin Hall

which are accessible to women," expressed Tamar Yastrab (SCW '21). "The women's section in the Heights Lounge was very poorly set up, and Rabbi Kalinsky happily and promptly responded to feedback from students and set up a better women's section. In unprecedented circumstances I have felt extremely impressed and grateful for YU's efforts toward making *minyanim* pleasant and accessible for all students."

While there are no official YU *minyanim* on the Beren Campus, students can attend *minyanim* at the nearby Congregation Talmud Torah Adereth El. In previous years, YU offered Wilf students the opportunity to form a *minyan* and experience Shabbosim on Beren free-of-charge, while residing at a midtown hotel for the weekend; this service is no longer provided. Instead, Beren students experience a student-led Kabbalas Shabbos in Koch Auditorium followed by the Friday night meal.

Students can opt to eat meals in official locations designated by the university or take their meals to eat in their apartments, dorm rooms, or floor lounges unsupervised. Official meal locations on the Wilf Campus are the Furman Dining Hall, the Heights Lounge and the Rubin shul, while those on the Beren campus include Yagoda Commons and Kushner Dining Hall. Tables in official locations sit two diners per table — some with and some without plexiglass barriers, depending on the location — while accommodating for social distancing. After forming a queue, students are provided with food for the meal and snacks in a separate bag.

"I find that meals run very smoothly and that students are enjoying their meals and are happy to be with friends," remarked Avraham Walkenfeld (YC '23), a member

"It was so nice to spend Shabbat with my students and see how beautiful Shabbat is on campus, as it's always been, even during these difficult times."

—
Dean Shoshana Schechter

shul, Glueck *beis medrash* and the Heights Lounge, with varying levels of capacity — *minyanim* in Glueck can accommodate a maximum of 135, while those in the Rubin shul can only fit 28. Some *minyanim*, including those in the Morgenstern shul and Heights Lounge, allow for female attendance, with *mechitzas* set up; this is not the case for *minyanim* in the Rubin shul. As The Commentator previously reported, students in Washington Heights — both men and women — are also able to sign up for *minyanim* at the Schenk Shul.

"I have had a very positive experience with YU *minyanim* both during the week and on Shabbat. There are numerous *minyanim* times for nearly every tefillah, most of

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Shabbos programming returns to the Wilf and Beren campuses.

Torah U'Turkey: Thanksgiving 2020 at YU

By **BARUCH LERMAN**

This article was originally published online on Nov. 29.

Thanksgiving this year was different for everyone. Instead of traveling to visit relatives, families around the country stayed home, doing their part to curb the spread of COVID-19. Forgoing large gatherings, dinner tables across America were less crowded on the last Thursday of Nov. than ever before. For many of Yeshiva University's out of town students, including myself, the usual trek home was out of the question. So like the rest of my college peers from outside the tri-state area, I did not join my family back in Maryland, and instead found myself on campus for the long weekend.

Although only about a third of the undergraduate population is on campus this semester, due to the CDC's travel guidelines and New York's quarantine rules for those returning back to the state, it's possible that this Thanksgiving had the largest number of students on university grounds ever.

The Office of Student Life planned activities for the entire weekend, from a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade viewing party at

Lounge, an all-women's meal in the Beren caf and a co-ed feast in the Furman Dining Hall. All meals were catered by Mendy's

Thanksgiving morning, running from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. over Zoom. All of the lectures were Thanksgiving-themed, focusing on the centrality of *hakarot hatov* in Judaism. For example, RIETS *rosh yeshiva* Rabbi Jeremy Wieder relayed how the themes of the Korban Todah relate to the current COVID-19 pandemic and Director of Semikah Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz discussed the theme of "gratitude in the thought of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt"l."

Although many students acknowledged that being at YU for what is generally considered a family holiday was less than ideal, most were appreciative of the experience. "I appreciated the zoom *shiurim* and loved to see all the different perspectives on being grateful and thankful," shared Ariel Wernick (YC '22), a student from California.

"Even though it was not as large as Thanksgivings in the past, it was incredibly thoughtful and I am thankful to YU that they went the extra mile to provide a full dinner and social event on campus," said Josh Leichter (YC '21).

Although only about a third of the undergraduate population is on campus this semester, due to the CDC's travel guidelines and New York's quarantine rules for those returning back to the state, it's possible that this Thanksgiving had the largest number of students on university grounds ever.

Stern College for Women to a Shabbat catered by Paprika. Both campuses also offered outdoor excursions. On Thursday morning, Beren students were invited to take a walk to Bryant Park with Eim Bayit Dr. Elisheva Rosenzweig, meanwhile, Wilf students attended a hike across the George Washington Bridge.

When it came time for the evening's dinner, there were three options available for a \$10 fee, provided students signed up a week in advance: an all-men's meal in the Heights

and consisted of turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed sweet potatoes, salad and pumpkin pie. Despite the social distancing precautions that were in place, those present felt a real sense of community. At the co-ed meal, participants went around the room and shared what they were thankful for this year, a very meaningful experience in these unprecedented times. It helped that the food was pretty great.

But Thanksgiving at YU isn't just about the food. There were four *shiurim* held on



For many of YU's out of town students this year, a normal Thanksgiving at home was out of the question.

PIXABAY

SHABBOS PROGRAMMING

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of the waitstaff on the Wilf Campus. "The waiters are all very careful to make sure that all safety guidelines are followed and that we properly wash our hands and wear gloves and masks."

In general, there have been no *z'miros* at the designated meal locations. According to Rabbi Kalinsky, this is due to COVID-19 restrictions established by University Medical Director Dr. Robert Van Amerongen. On the Shabbos of Chayei Sarah, Nov. 13-14, the restriction was temporarily lifted and students on Wilf sang two *z'miros* during the meals in the designated meal locations while wearing masks. In the weeks following Nov. 14, however, the no-singing policy in designated meal locations was reimposed. Similarly, singing is limited during *davening*, even for portions of the service that are traditionally sung, like *lecha dodi* and *El adon*, during which students can often

be heard lightly humming the tunes of the songs.

The university has also featured various guests for Shabbos. Guests on the Wilf Campus generally include *roshei yeshiva* or rabbis in the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary such as Rabbi Baruch Simon, Rabbi Michael Rosensweig, Rabbi Daniel Feldman and Rabbi Menachem Penner. Aside from the Beren Campus Couple, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Jacob and Penina Bernstein, Shabbosim on Beren have featured notable figures such as President Ari Berman, Shoshana Schechter, associate dean for Torah Studies at Stern College for Women, and Dr. Deena Rabinovich, the chair of the Stern Judaic Studies Department.

"Being on campus for Shabbat was a wonderful experience and not just because I hadn't been away for Shabbat since March! It was so nice to spend Shabbat with my

students and see how beautiful Shabbat is on campus, as it's always been, even during these difficult times," remarked Schechter on her experience as a Shabbos guest on Beren. "The students followed the protocols which made my husband and I very comfortable being there. We are looking forward to coming back again."

Shabbos guests on both campuses have delivered *shiurim* and hosted Q&As and Friday night tisches. Notable programming included a Nov. 13 "Potluck Oneg," in which Beren students shared quotes and teachings from the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and an over-five-hour discussion in the Rubin shul on Nov. 20 with then-Director of University Housing and Residence Life Jonathan Schwab in which he announced his departure from his position at the university.

"I anticipated that I would not enjoy Shabbos on campus this semester, but YU

surpassed my expectations," expressed Aharon Traurig (SSSB '22). "Shabbos has been a positive experience this semester, despite all the health guidelines we are facing due to the pandemic. I've enjoyed getting a chance to see friends on Shabbos and Schwab speaking to us for over five hours about his experiences from his 13 years at YU."

On a similar note, TAC President Nina Siegel (SCW '21) had a positive impression of Shabbos life at YU. "Although the way Shabbos runs is different than other years, I'm so glad that Shabbos on campus is able to bring people together during these crazy times," she said.

Eli Saperstein and Elisheva Kohn contributed to this article.

Headlines Are Not Just Headlines: Reflections on the Nov. 2 Terror Attack in Vienna

By ELISHEVA KOHN

In recent months, I have grown accustomed to witnessing events of great significance from afar; my screen, whether via Zoom, online newspaper outlets or social media, has served as a blaring window into The Incidents That Shaped 2020. Protests, coronavirus outbreaks, political crises in the U.S. — these all seemed highly relevant to my life, though also somewhat removed, perhaps due to the sheer distance between myself, a student watching world events through a screen, and the context surrounding these events. On the afternoon of Nov. 2, however — after I returned from Vienna to campus in New York — I found myself following the news in horror, geographically distant yet so close to me, as yet another “2020 Moment” unfolded: Vienna, my hometown, was the target of a terror attack. For hours, the residents of Vienna hid in fear, as news outlets and social media channels released updates (many of them including fake news and inaccurate reports of death counts) and bloody videos of multiple shootings in the city.

Sitting at my desk in Washington Heights, I sat glued to my screen for hours, watching awful footage of the numerous shootings that took place on the streets that I know so well and love. Witnessing these events through a screen from a safe distance did not instill a sense of security in me — on the contrary, I felt like I was completely helpless.

Seitenstettengasse — the address of the main synagogue in Vienna and the center of the Nov. 2 attacks — is a street both familiar and meaningful to me. I have walked this street an infinite number of times to go to shul, visit my grandparents or have a Wiener Schnitzel in the nearby kosher restaurant. On Nov. 2, it was the center of attention as Austrians around the country watched a terror attack unfold. For hours, people in Vienna hid — some in obscure places, such as the Opera House — as a counterterrorism operation was underway. My grandmother was walking just a few meters away from

where shots were fired and ran to hide in a nearby building, where she stayed until 3 a.m. before police officers came to walk her home. Total chaos ensued in the interim. Nobody knew how many terrorists were on the loose, how many victims there were and whether or not people could leave their hiding places. The feeling of utter helplessness made me panic — I wanted to *do something* and contribute in some way or another, but realistically speaking, a 20-something-year-old college student across the ocean is rather useless in a counterterrorism operation.

Nov. 2 was not the first time

*When terror strikes in a place
you call home, you are not
able to move on.*

Seitenstettengasse witnessed a tragedy. In 1981, two members of the Jewish community were killed in the very same street in a mass shooting and grenade attack during a bar mitzvah. One of the victims, Sarah Kohut, was killed by Abu Nidal terrorists as she jumped in front of my uncle, only three years old at the time, to shield him from a grenade moments before it detonated. My uncle named his daughter after her. May Sarah’s memory be a blessing.

I remember some terror attacks more vividly than others; in 2012, a terrorist killed a rabbi and three schoolchildren at the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse, prompting 12-year-old me to reflect on what it means to be a Jew in Europe. The photos that emerged after the 2014 attack on the Kehillat Bnei Torah shul in Har Nof still haunt me until this day. In 2015, the Hypercacher kosher supermarket in Paris was put under a siege, just days after the Charlie Hebdo massacre. More recently, a mass shooting took place in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, marking the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the U.S. As we approach Chanukah, the Jewish community



Seitenstettengasse, a few days after the Nov. 2 attack in Vienna

JONATHAN KOHN

mourns the victims of the horrific stabbing in Monsey, NY, and the shooting in Jersey City, NJ, which took place exactly one year ago. I am listing these events because they struck me in a particularly intense way for various reasons, which are beyond the scope of this article, though I very much acknowledge that readers may have been more affected by other tragedies, such as anti-Semitic terrorist attacks and school shootings in the U.S. Either way, tragic headlines, which are really just brief virtual summaries of real-life tragedies, ought to instill within us a true feeling of empathy and solidarity towards our communities.

In the months leading up to the attack in Vienna, I read hundreds of headlines about tragedies that had struck all over the planet. In most cases, I briefly reflected on these events, perhaps even discussing them with friends and family, before moving on with my life. In retrospect, I am taken aback by the borderline indifference I felt when reading these stories; the only possible explanation I have — and it’s a poor excuse — is that there were simply too many awful stories this year. When the headline concerned my hometown, however, I cared — a lot.

In a year that has been dominated by numbers — infection rates, electoral votes and unemployment rates — something that might seem distant to a reader living on the other side of the planet hits home for a Vienna native watching the city she grew up in fall into utter chaos. It is this observation that prompted me to reevaluate how I had dealt with all the other events that shaped 2020 — events that, one may argue, have affected an even greater number of people, including myself. On Nov. 2, I felt torn; as a political science major who had taken numerous classes on terrorism and security, I knew that my feelings — fear, uncertainty and the inability to focus on my computer science midterm which was literally taking place at the same time as the attack — were precisely what terrorists hoped to achieve by

committing attacks. Wasn’t this a moment in which I should, for the sake of not letting terrorism win, feel just a bit more indifferent?

When terror strikes in a place you call home, you are not able to move on, and perhaps that feeling ought to teach us a lesson: We should not passively stand on the sidelines as the world experiences tragedy after tragedy, even if we are only able to witness them through a screen. Rather, we should take action, however small, to address the situation. Indeed, on Nov. 2, friends, professors, classmates, rabbis, acquaintances and colleagues reached out to me to inquire about how my family was doing. When I asked my computer science professor whether I could start the midterm late because I was not able to function while my grandmother was still in hiding and things seemed so uncertain, he responded with grace. My grandfather, whom I spoke to multiple times that night, comforted *me* (though he was the one who had to sleep over in a different district because he couldn’t go home), emphasizing that Vienna had been a safe city up until that point, and that we should just be grateful for our health and that we have benefited from such a lovely city for a long time.

Nov. 2 was objectively a rather awful day. Nevertheless, it was also a testament to how supportive my family, friends and random-people-I-know-from-YU are, and to some extent served as a wake-up call. Headlines are not just headlines, but a call to action, a prompt for empathy and solidarity. Nov. 2 taught me that reaching out to people who may have been affected by something I read about in the news could go a long way, and it reaffirmed my wish to pursue a meaningful career that will — in some way or another — contribute to global security. Above all, Nov. 2 proved, once again, that the Viennese community is resilient and united in the face of terror.



JONATHAN KOHN

A memorial plaque honoring the victims of the 1981 terror attack in Vienna, just steps away from where my uncle was saved.

Letter to the Editor

Yeshiva University — Brighter than Ever

By **JOSH APPEL**

This past Thursday New York public schools shut down without knowing exactly when they will reopen. State and city colleges also closed down when the Thanksgiving weekend began without a clear reopening date. Other universities, including Harvard, are allowing only half of their student body on campus per semester, offering few in person classes. Penn and Princeton have transitioned to full remote learning, after previously announcing that half their student body would be allowed to return to campus. Would it be fathomable that amidst this crisis a single college offered every student the opportunity to return to campus? That a college would offer an in-person faculty presence, weekend programming and social events, all while keeping the spread of a highly contagious virus low? Somehow, (by way of G-d,) Yeshiva University has stood out from amongst the crowd, slowly moving back to normalcy, offering students a first-class experience.

Last week, a Commentator editorial criticized the efforts of administration, Rebbeim and staff regarding this year's "unique" fall semester. Many students were shocked to read arguments claiming that YU has offered a subpar and lackluster experience during this global pandemic. For many, the fall semester has actually highlighted YU's wonderful campus life even amidst a raging disease. What emerged from the editorial were three key assumptions that need to be addressed: (1) YU has thus far done a less than acceptable job in reopening its campuses for the Fall 2020 semester. (2) YU has the ability to do a better job. (3) Therefore, the legacy and contributions of YU are undermined.

Let us begin with the first component, namely, that YU's performance has been rather poor lately. What other institution

at the moment offers an open gymnasium, library, cafeteria, dormitories, Beis Midrash, dozens of daily Minyanim, in-person learning opportunities, in-person Shiurim, a select number of in-person classes, weekend events including question and answer sessions with Jewish communal leaders, meals with friends and top notch Shiurim from leading Rabbanim? The answer, of course, is none. There are many moments throughout the days and weeks in which, if not for the Covid precautions, YU would be indistinguishable now from what it was in previous years. Indeed, it would be nice if more classes were in person, but YU cannot force teachers

This year only highlights the care and concern YU has for delivering world class Torah and academic education to their student body while balancing guidelines for health and safety.

who are fearful of a real threat to return to campus. Only 4% of colleges in America do not have a hybrid model of learning. In terms of in-person classes, YU offers no less than the average college which is offering most, if not all, of its course catalog online. Thus far, hundreds of students have returned to the Wilf and Beren Campuses creating an energetic, thriving environment. Hundreds can be found in the various Batei Midrash day and night (with masks, social distancing and plexiglass per CDC guidelines and medical guidance). In the afternoon, students eat lunch with one another and find friends to sit with in the library or lounge while taking classes. As one YU student put it, "YU is essentially the same as last year but with less food."

The second issue raised in the editorial is that YU has the ability to deliver a better experience. In many cases this claim is false. As the article states, the gyms in New York cannot legally be open past a certain

hour. If students wish for other venues to be opened, that should be sent in an email to the administration, not an open letter claiming that YU has done something wrong. Moreover, the end of the article describes students who are fearful that their graduation will not be what they hoped for. Indeed, this is true and saddening. Unfortunately, due to a global pandemic which has seized the lives of millions across the globe, the university cannot hold the normal graduation festivities. This is not a YU problem nor something which YU can fix. Additionally, perhaps the graduation last semester was a disappointment, but please let us put things

into perspective: YU, as well as every other institution in the entire world, was dealing with implementing new and never-before-used methods of delivering programming and content to students. I would not have expected the graduation online to rival the normal in-person graduation and I would not expect any future online event, or any Covid social gathering for that matter, to rival any previous social interaction we can imagine. YU has held many programs this semester which of course have been hindered by health restrictions. This is the drawback to a worldwide pandemic that we pray daily should end.

Lastly, it is really quite strange to suggest that YU's legacy and students' overall experiences will be completely undermined because of an uncontrollable virus. It is surprising to say that years of high-level Torah and academic learning from some of the most intelligent minds of this generation could be tarnished simply because of

a locked fence or miscommunications with security guards (which, as the editorial said, the administration handled straight away). To make these claims does not help defend YU's legacy, as the author suggests, but in fact contributes to the undermining of YU's monumental legacy in American Orthodoxy. Let us not restrict YU's illustrious history to our three-year experience and believe that, if an election viewing party had a small turnout, this dwarfs YU's more substantial accomplishments. YU's legacy will go far beyond this semester and far beyond the unfortunate experience of an individual or two who weren't allowed into the library one day. In fact, this year only highlights the care and concern YU has for delivering world class Torah and academic education to their student body while balancing guidelines for health and safety.

Last week I was sent home (even though YU offers isolation on campus) because a chavrusa of mine tested positive for Covid. Although I enjoy being home, I was counting down the days until I could return to campus yet again. For many, the return to campus has been overwhelmingly enjoyable. For months we were home, affixed to screens alone in our rooms. Now, Yeshiva University, through dedicated effort, has offered students an opportunity to return to campus for in person learning and interaction. The consensus of students I have seen is that they are refreshed and appreciative to be back in a place where they can grow and connect. Granted, things are not as seamless as they were previously, but this does not detract in the slightest from YU's successful start to the fall semester.

Thank you to the administration, staff and Rebbeim at YU for continued hard work and positivity amidst unprecedented conditions within our lifetimes.

The Editor Responds

Blinded in Illusory 'Brightness'

By **YOSEF LEMEL**

Last week, I published an editorial outlining certain flaws of the university administration's handling of the return to campus and current academic shortcomings. The editorial received a letter to the editor from a student who seemed troubled about the conclusions I came to. The response overgeneralizes and mischaracterizes the essence of my argument; a clarification, therefore, is necessary.

The response alleges that I criticized "the efforts of administration [sic], Rebbeim and staff regarding this year's 'unique' fall semester." However, the author fails to offer specific examples of this "criticism." Indeed, there is nary a mention of *rebbeim* — nevermind their efforts — in my editorial, yet the author of the response felt the need to suggest that I tarnished "years of high-level Torah and academic learning from some of the most intelligent minds of this generation," words that shouldn't have been expressed lightly.

I, in fact, did not happen to state my views on the university's handling of the "Torah" half of *Torah Umadda*. If the author of the response would like a clarification of my views on that subject instead of assuming it, well here 'tis: I actually believe the *roshei*

yeshiva, by and large, have done an excellent job providing their *talmidim* with a high-class Torah education while balancing the rigors and obstacles of these trying times. There are many in-person *shiurim*, in-person *chavrusas*, Friday night *tisches* and even

Sitting back in complacency and accepting current affairs as an ideal, while blinding oneself in some sort of illusory light, will inevitably lead towards a reduction in student power and expression.

shiur hikes — I had the pleasure of going on one last week; this is one of the areas, at least for the men in YP, that Yeshiva University has mostly succeeded in accommodating.

My editorial, however, was very clear about *Madda*, the long-neglected child of Yeshiva that it still plays lip-service to. I wrote, "The university must incentivize professors to come and teach in-person classes ... or else *Madda* will, of necessity, be sacrificed; otherwise, current and prospective students will question the value of higher education." I believe that Yeshiva is currently prioritizing Torah to the exclusion of *Madda*, whereas the mission of this institution is to accomplish an "interdigitation" — as Rabbi

Lamm would put it — of those two concepts. This is a point that can be — and indeed has been by intellectual giants greater than I — debated on its own merits, but the response to my editorial simply strawman's my argument into being an attack on the

roshei yeshiva, when it was anything but that. My complaint centered around the lack of in-person secular classes and concretely demonstrated how this academic abyss deleteriously affects students' college experience.

The author also attempts to mischaracterize my argument into saying that "YU's legacy ... will be completely undermined because of an uncontrollable virus." In reality, the most direct reference in the editorial regarding the impact and link of YU's actions upon its legacy is this: "Miscommunication in general, I fear, will deleteriously impact the legacy of this institution, all the more so during this unfortunate and uncertain time."

This is a point I think most level headed individuals would agree with, and it certainly falls far short of the strawman presented in the response. I never said that the legacy of Yeshiva will be "completely undermined," but it's certainly reasonable to conclude that it will be impacted — hopefully positively, though I remain skeptical — by the university's handling of the virus.

Notwithstanding the flawed quibbles about how I'm attacking the *roshei yeshiva* or presenting a nightmarish scenario, the response to my editorial seems to misunderstand the fundamental role of criticism. The author of the response may be having a wonderful experience, but there are other students at Yeshiva with different priorities. We are not a uniform and homogenous student body. To cite an example of an academic shortcoming that does not personally affect me, the YU Observer recently published an editorial describing the cancellation of Talmud courses on the Beren campus. For women who want to experience the breadth of the Talmudic sea, this regression is nothing short of disheartening and disappointing.

It is easy for students who are not affected by a change like this to sit back and, with the wave of a hand, discount this example, and the many examples cited in my editorial, as

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From the Desk of the SOY President

Your Civic Responsibility

By AKIVA POPPERS

Hello there, Yeshiva University male undergraduate student.

If you don't know me by now, my name is Akiva Poppers. I'm the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President. I'm also a member of the Amendments Committee here on the Wilf Campus.

A couple of weeks ago, after dozens, if not hundreds, of hours hard at work behind closed doors, deliberating and writing pages upon pages of amendment proposals, the Amendments Committee submitted their final proposals to the General Assembly (GA).

The GA, in turn, decided which proposals to place onto the ballot for this semester's General Student Body Amendments Vote. encourage you to take a few minutes to read through the proposed amendments. While you can read the 13 proposals in their en-

I can personally guarantee you that the amendment proposals this semester are all beneficial to the overall student body, and designed to be controversy-free.

The vote will be held this Wednesday, Dec. 16 through a secret ballot sent via email.

As a student who is bound by the Wilf Campus Constitution, these amendments will affect you, your friends and future Yeshiva University attendees. Therefore, I strongly

tirety, the Amendments Committee has composed a summary document, for those of you who are short on time. Regardless, if you would like to know the context behind any amendment, please read the current Wilf Campus Constitution.

For those of you who are too busy: I can personally guarantee you that the amendment proposals this semester are all beneficial to the overall student body, and designed to be controversy-free. Any amendment proposals which did not have extremely strong backing from either the Amendments Committee or the General Assembly were not placed on the ballot. Please fill out a ballot on Wednesday. It's your civic responsibility.

SOY and the entire Wilf Campus Student Government have done so much to help the student body this semester. It's your turn, and responsibility, to step up. Make your voice heard. Take a minute on Wednesday to vote.

There's Uighur Blood on Your Nikes

By SRULI FRUCHTER

I can't wear my Nikes anymore. I used to love my Nike Free 5.0 shoes — they were lightweight and comfortable, hugging my foot to provide firm support while leaving adequate wiggle-room for my toes. But now, every time I wear them, I'm reminded that they're so much more than mere running shoes; my Nikes are a reminder of the Uighur genocide in Xinjiang, China, a genocide Nike is fighting to defend and a genocide we're all ignoring.

My Nikes are a reminder of the Uighur genocide in Xinjiang, China, a genocide Nike is fighting to defend and a genocide we're all ignoring.

The New York Times reported that Nike — along with Apple and Coca-Cola — is among many companies lobbying against the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, legislation that would ban imports from the Xinjiang region that capitalize on the forced labor of persecuted Muslims.

The House passed the bill in September with an overwhelming majority of 406 to 3. However, the bill threatens the economic interests of those companies, perhaps similar to how the Chinese Communist Party threatens any Uighur Muslim who exhibits the slightest hint of their religious identity, which endangers the uniformity of the Han Chinese majority. Therefore, consumer culture warrants — no, demands — that Nike, Apple and Coca-Cola invest their financial resources to stop this atrocity of a bill.

It's not enough that Uighurs are kidnapped, blindfolded, tortured and detained in internment camps. Nor is it enough that Uighur women are raped, mandated abortions and forcibly sterilized. The organ harvesting couldn't make any big-company executive bat an eye. People need their Nike

shoes and their Apple watches, and Nike and Apple need their money, so the U.S. surely must reconsider this overreactive legislation.

According to the Washington Post, hundreds of Uighur workers in China's Qingdao Taekwang Shoes Co. are forced to manufacture Nike's popular sneaker lines, such as Air Max. Producing about eight million pairs every year, Qingdao has been Nike's supplier for the past 30 years. Workers are workers, and whether or not they're shipped straight from China's internment camp makes no difference. Any professionally composed statement with strong language cannot repaint

the reality: Nike puts profit above people.

Of course, this egregious demonstration of their dearth of basic moral values is not unique to Nike. Apple and Coca-Cola, too, are lobbying against the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. They, among many other companies, will sell whatever remnant of their soul remains to Chinese manufacturers in the hopes of furthering their profit. This is a global problem — the number of companies essentially standing in fiscal solidarity with Uighur oppression is overwhelming. In their eyes, in the clash of morals and profit, the latter will always beat out the former. It's despicable and inexcusable.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke of an unfortunately timeless truth when he said, "There is nothing new beneath the sun" (Koheles 1:9). Human rights atrocities have stained the world's history in recent decades, and each and every time we swear that next time will be different. We lament over how we should have acted differently, how we should have seen the signs and stepped in before it was too late. For the millions of Uighurs locked

away in internment camps, "too late" was three years ago.

The U.S. took a big step forward for justice when the Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 — which sanctions Chinese government officials responsible for human rights abuses — was passed over the summer. But this is just the beginning of the fight for Uighur freedom.

The time for action is now: *Daven* for change. Boycott complicit companies. Email your representatives. Learn about the

Uighur genocide. We need to do *something*. We're beyond the point of blissful ignorance or surprise. A genocide is underway as we speak, and we cannot stand for it.

To take action, email ifruchte@mail.yu.edu and check out the Jewish Movement for Uyghur Freedom.



Nike is one of many companies lobbying against the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

NEVER AGAIN RIGHT NOW

THE EDITOR RESPONDS

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singular "unfortunate experiences." I think the better and more realistic mode of action would be for us to collectively figure out what's going well, what's going poorly and what could be fixed; sitting back in complacency and accepting current affairs as an ideal, while blinding oneself in some sort of illusory light, will inevitably lead towards

a reduction in student power and expression. The author of the response is entitled to believe that all is "bright" and dandy for himself, but I think it would be callous of him to ignore the troubles other students are facing in these uncertain times and to brush aside genuine, constructive criticism of the status quo.

Yeshiva is not "brighter than ever." Nor is it darker than ever. Yet, it's pretty dim. I hope and anticipate that Yeshiva will survive the current health crisis and that it will endure through its many other troubles. Indeed, I pray that, lo and behold, the spring may burst with brightness and all misfortunes will come to an end, but a utopian portrayal

of the university's current situation seems self-illusory at best, and a poor imitation of Orwellian propaganda at worst.

Chanukkah is that time of year when we celebrate the many miracles we've experienced as a nation and as individuals.

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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY JOURNAL of the ARTS

Meme-Based Marketing: What It Is And Why It's Basically The Worst Thing Ever

By **BETZALEL SHAPIRO**

If you've ever taken a collegiate marketing course, there's a pretty reasonable chance that you're familiar with the following scenario:

Class begins. Your professor marks attendance, and takes 10 minutes to fiddle around with the projector, or, perhaps more appropriate for our current age, they share their screen with the class on Zoom. They seem pretty excited to show you something.

"Today we're going to look at a fun and unique approach to marketing," they tell you. You don't entirely believe them. The last time they said this, you were witness to a disturbing Kohls campaign featuring some Muppets doing the Nae Nae. You still haven't recovered. What fresh trauma do they have for the class today?

The answer arrives in the form of a Delta Airlines safety video born in the fiery depths of hell. Or some out-of-touch corporate office. Same thing, really. By the time the video is over, you've seen all flavors of faded internet icons doing the Harlem Shake in a Boeing 737. Annoying Orange. Fred. Ancient beings that were condemned to have been forgotten by the passage of time. 2010 was a weird and admittedly cringey time for the internet's sense of humor. Only, Delta decided to release this video in 2015. And now it's 2020. The fact that you're seeing this thing at all is practically an assault on your human rights. And therein lies the problem. Part of it, at least.

There's a disturbing abundance of these commercials, ads and broader marketing campaigns. Some of the most infamous examples might include the much-reviled, impact text-laden, "EATS SPICY GOODNESS, LIKE A BOSS" commercial that Wendy's decided to run in 2015. Or the 2018 "Memesteins" Xfinity TV video. Point is, there's got to be at least one you've seen or one that you're (regrettably) familiar with.

It's somewhat understandable why college professors like to show students these types of things in class. It's entirely plausible that they think, *Huh, neat. Ad firms are*

*putting this stuff out, and I guess they're a respectable enough authority. Even better, my Gen Z class will love me for it. I truly am the hippest and coolest teacher in this university. *dabs**

Jokes aside, it is all coming from a genuinely benevolent place. But that's part of the issue. Let's say that, in-line with my well-intentioned professors, some of these "meme-based marketing campaigns" were

Annoying Orange. Fred. Ancient beings that were condemned to have been forgotten by the passage of time.

created by an earnest young creative kid in the ad industry. No stodgy old corporate offices involved. Does that change things? No. They still absolutely suck. Because no matter how much one thinks they might be "with it" and understand how to appeal to the "internet generation," chances are, they're *not*, and they *don't*.

It's nothing personal. The internet moves fast. What was peak comedy last week might get someone banned on Twitter today for violating the user agreement to not be terribly unfunny and sickeningly stale.

This stuff is cringey. It's cheap. It's just plain bad ads. Yet for some reason, I cannot escape it in the classroom. So I'm writing this to campaign against it. The real problem is that this type of marketing is often presented by professors as a good thing. It absolutely is not. If meme-based marketing is to be taught, it should be regarded with a fair amount of caution. Because it's dangerous stuff if you'll excuse my hyperbole. If marketing students are going to be shown these ads, they genuinely need a disclaimer. Otherwise, this type of marketing will continue to be produced.

I don't think it's impossible for brands and marketers to occasionally get it right. I'd like to bring up some of the things that have gone down on the wild frontier of Twitter as a prime example. Most of us are familiar with Wendy's Twitter account. If you're not already, here's the gist. A bunch of years ago, Wendy's Twitter, @Wendy's, became known

for its snarky language and clever comebacks aimed at their competition. They had "beef" with Burger King, and slammed Hooters in what were some genuinely funny roasts. Not only that, but @Wendy's didn't take any crap from other users either. It didn't matter if the people tweeting were technically "consumers." No one was safe. If someone, let's call them Dave, tweeted "Wendy's fries suck", rest assured that @Wendy's would

reply, "no, YOU suck, dAve."

Was this in-line with traditional marketing? Absolutely not. But it was fun stuff. A "Human Brand" was something people could latch onto. And for a couple of years, the trend went on. But something eventually changed. It wasn't necessarily that users grew tired of @Wendy's constant sass and attitude per se, but a number of factors eventually led to the formula growing stale. One was the fact that the original person behind the account, at some point, stopped running things. The tweets started to feel less erratic and more scheduled. Some of the edge was dropped. Many of the jokes felt a bit contrived, like they were being produced in a "funny factory" of sorts.

Another contributing factor was that the trend of "Human Brands" on social media grew. Initially, this was welcome. Burger King, IHOP, and a multitude of other restaurant chains were willing to fight for their names on Twitter and it was exciting to see everyone duke it out. The meme grew and it became an accepted thing for brands to be "quirky and relatable" on various platforms. It was a regular occurrence to log onto Twitter and see that Domino's was "in need of a hug." This is not to suggest that Wendy's was the first, but they certainly legitimized the practice. Only, it didn't take long until the gag ran its course. Other marketers who didn't understand that what made the original idea fun began applying the same, tired methods and the formula grew... formulaic.

It's hard to quantify when the shift took place. I'm sure there are some users who still enjoy the whole charade, and to them, the shift isn't detectable. But I'm the kind of person who obsesses over everything I say and whether or not my "quips" hit. It's not exactly healthy behavior, but it *does* mean I notice when something is off about a joke. And I'm definitely not alone.

I don't want to conjure up the following horrible term, but I've got ideas to communicate, so sue me. Most "meme-conscious" people (I think I just threw up a little) are tired of the "lol this brand is tweeting like a person!?!?" trend. What I perceive to have happened, was that a fun concept was eventually run into the ground by marketers hopping on a bandwagon. The whole thing became very transparent in its execution.

As I said, there are outliers. Even after the fall of "Funny Brand Twitter," there remain accounts representing different brands that have a pretty good handle on how to utilize meme-based marketing. I'd like to give a quick shout-out to the Kum & Go Twitter account, @kumandgo. I myself have never been to a Kum & Go. I don't think we even have them in the Tri-State area, but I could be wrong. But what I can say for certain is that they have a very unfortunate name. And @kumandgo knows it too. They lean into it, without ever really being too crude, and you know what? I think it's pretty funny.

Is all of this to say that I'm the authority on what is funny and what isn't? Yes.

Okay, actually, no. I'm someone who tries to be funny and usually fails. Maybe this piece will help you determine that for yourself. But I am a marketing major with an interest in the industry and its practices, and more importantly, I try to be aware. Self-aware. Aware of others. Ideas. What works on a greater level and what doesn't. And it is my belief that as a whole, it is very difficult to get meme-based marketing to work in your favor. Handle it with care. It's very volatile and can easily blow up in your face. And it often does. Which is why it's basically the worst thing ever.



Online Marketing

PIXABAY

SPAC-a-Mole

By NOAH TRADONSKY

Several weeks ago, I read my fellow writer Max Ash's article, "A SPAC-tacular Rise", in The Commentator's Business Section, in which he discussed one of the newer and more popular investments on Wall Street: the SPAC (Special Purpose Acquisition Company). For those who do not know what a SPAC is, Ash acutely summarized it in his article as follows:

"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 public through a SPAC, they are merging with an (already public) SPAC, essentially bypassing the usually drawn-out and expensive IPO process."

Ash then raised several strong arguments in support of SPACs increased popularity, including the interest-gaining return that investors receive on their principle while the SPAC searches for a start-up in which to invest, as well as the option given to investors to withdraw their investment before the SPAC invests in their targeted private company.

Moreover, Ash raised two points to explain why private firms looking to go public might favor an SPAC over an IPO. *"[Firstly], 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... [and secondly,] 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."

These points are valid and true, but it is precisely these points that, I believe, are room for concern.

As proud Americans, who value this country as the land of opportunity, growth, innovation and development, that should worry us, and should spur the creative, entrepreneurial and problem-solving capabilities within our society.

The reason that an IPO requires thorough accounting auditing of the listing-company is that the rules and regulations that verify the financial performance of a private company are significantly less stringent than those that verify the figures of a public firm. Accounting of private companies is necessary for taxation, but the accuracy of their numbers are not checked as scrupulously as a public firm's, and therefore are more prone to over-evaluation ("creative accounting") that estimates the company at a much higher than it may truly be worth.

Once a firm goes public, investors are able to look at the company's performance, both recorded and projected, and decide how much they believe the company is worth. As such, the most impartial and objective evaluation of the company occurs only once they go public. That is one of the reasons that the WeWork IPO never materialized. Bankers from WeWork's underwriters looked at the firm's numbers and simply could not justify to investors the price tag at which WeWork had evaluated themselves. The IPO is a way for a company to "go to market", but it also allows the market to "screen" the company and determine for themselves its true worth. The only reason SPACs are not subject to the same scrupulous rules is because of a liability shield that

Congress gave to public companies over two decades ago. According to that ruling, a public company (in this case, the SPAC — the listing-company is still private prior to actually listing) is allowed to make rosy projections about future results with little risk of lawsuits from angry investors. This allows for more "favorable" or "optimistic" projections for the future profits of public

companies, projections which are based on expectations of future deals and not (as yet) real, tangible, verifiable results, than for private ones (which are held to stricter, more exacting standards). As a result, the SPAC acquisition "sidesteps" the scrutiny that would surround a private company going public via a typical IPO.

This also explains the "IPO-pop" that a listing company hopes for. When the firm actually comes to market, their "numbers" are available for all investors to see, and if investors are pleasantly surprised by what they consider to be the upward trajectory and momentum of the firm, they will purchase the stock, driving the stock price upwards, hence an "IPO-pop." The converse, however, is that if investors are displeased with the firm's figures, the stock price will drop, causing frustration and losses for the many private investors and employees who were sold or given stock prior to the IPO.

The importance of an IPO for investors is that the numbers of the now-public company are verified and audited by an accounting firm, and therefore can be confidently trusted. SPAC's, on the other hand, can "hide" behind the screen of a public company, and therefore greatly obscure their true long-term value.

The other, more macroeconomic,

argument against SPACs is that the SPAC-chase has become a sort of "wild-goose lottery chase" where investors finance the SPAC without initially knowing where their money will go. Yes, before the final acquisition, investors are able to withdraw their investments from a SPAC if they do not approve of the proposed acquisition, but the fact that investors are happier to leave their money in a SPAC instead of investing in public companies must lead us to worry about the lack of positive-NPV (Net Present Value) projects available on the market. If private, accredited investors have to go through "secret SPACs" to achieve above-average returns, what does that tell us about the opportunities for growth available in the rest of the market? The lack of readily available positive-NPV projects essentially means that there is much less innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism in our economy currently than there was in decades gone by. The nation that put man on the moon seems to be losing its innovative touch, its exploratory edge, and that will cause our economy to deflate in unexpected ways in the years to come. As proud Americans, who value this country as the land of opportunity, growth, innovation and development, that should worry us, and should spur the creative, entrepreneurial and problem-solving capabilities within our society.

Perhaps it is no surprise that of the 71 SPAC-acquisitions completed so far in 2020, 15 purchased companies that had no revenue in 2019, and the average return on SPAC investors' common stock has been a loss of 1.4%, according to research and investment management firm Renaissance Capital. These "shots in the dark" in which investors have financed somewhat blindly in SPAC's instead of in public companies whose project earnings are more legitimate and trustworthy suggests a rather pessimistic outlook for the medium-long-term future where American investors may start to find economic less creativity, less technological innovation, and, ultimately less profit.



The enigmatic nature of SPACs prevents investors from knowing what they truly are and often this elusive complexion bars the SPACs themselves from knowing their very own identity.