

THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

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The YU Pride Alliance, three YU alumni and a student are suing YU for LGBTQ discrimination. Full story on page 6.

THE YU PRIDE ALLIANCE

YU Plans In-Person Return for Fall 2021

By JARED SCHARF

This article was originally published online on April 28.

Full in-person instruction and operation will return to Yeshiva University for Fall 2021, announced President Ari Berman in an email to students on Apr. 28. Additionally, the university will require all returning students in graduate and undergraduate school to be fully vaccinated by the opening of the fall semester.

Before they return to campus, students will require full COVID-19 vaccination.

The email stated that the planned shift to in-person instruction is due to the increased efforts regarding the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine on a regional and national level. In addition to classes, the university plans to offer “more on-campus activities” and offer more space

in university housing. The university will institute “appropriate health and safety modifications.” Details regarding safety measures were not specified in the email, including whether masks will be mandated indoors.

According to the 2021-22 academic calendar, there will be remote instruction for certain sets of days in both the fall and spring semester, such as the five school days between Rosh Hashanah and Simchat Torah.

Before they return to campus, students will require full COVID-19 vaccination. Berman stated that “medical and religious exceptions will be considered” for vaccinations, but the email did not explain what constitutes a medical or religious exemption. The university will aid in the vaccination efforts of international students who cannot be adequately vaccinated in their home countries.

On April 22, NYC officials announced that all NYC operating vaccination sites will begin offering walk-in appointments for all New Yorkers, including those who work or study there, ages 16 and older.

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April 2021 News Briefs: Bagpipes, Elevator Malfunctions, Gottesman Pool and More

By SRULI FRUCHTER
AND YOSEF LEMEL

YU Alum Recuses Himself From LGBTQ Discrimination Lawsuit

Hon. Shlomo Hagler, a 1988 graduate of Yeshiva University, recused himself from presiding over the LGBTQ discrimination lawsuit against the university on April 29 to “avoid the appearance of impropriety.” Hon. Lynn Kotler will serve as his replacement.

A 1991 graduate of the City University of New York’s School of Law, Hagler was elected to the Supreme Court Bench in 2013 and has served on the New York County Supreme Court since then. He is also a member of the Association of the Bar of New York and the Jewish Lawyers Guild.

The Return of ‘Bagpipe Guy’

After a long hiatus, Jerry Dixon, commonly known by students as “Bagpipe Guy,”

returned to the Wilf Campus on Tuesday, April 27.

The last time Dixon was seen on campus was in February 2020, prior to the closure of the Wilf and Beren campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “I was very busy,” he explained. Dixon told The Commentator that during the pandemic he was performing in locations such as Crown Heights and Flatbush.

The day before Dixon’s return, Baruch Lerman (YC ‘23), the Yeshiva Student Union vice-president elect of clubs, reposted a 2017 Commentator article on Facebook about Jerry with a caption saying “Come back Jerry!!! - We miss you!!!” After seeing Lerman’s Facebook post, Akiva Lipschitz (YC ‘22) reached out to Dixon and asked him to return to campus, which he did the next day. Many students, including Lerman, were able to listen to Jerry’s tunes from around 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on April 27. Dixon returned on the following day, April 28, to continue performing for onlookers.

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FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

In Retrospect: Institutional Memories

By YOSEF LEMEL

A KBY *bochur* upset a five-year streak of “Commie” editors-in-chief from Gush — my greatest claim to fame. Other than that, perhaps I may be remembered as the editor who presided over The Commentator during such “unprecedented times.” Or, more likely, I will not be remembered at all.

Yeshiva University is a school plagued by an extremely short sense of institutional memory. If asked, the standard student probably knows little about the Klein@9 controversy, the Rabbi Klapper controversy, the Rabbi Shulman controversy and any sort of contentious situation that predates the last two years. Generally, students are only at Yeshiva for three undergraduate years — not four, as is the usual case in academia — which has undoubtedly contributed to this lack of institutional memory (tangentially, I would encourage all students to check out The Commentator archives, uploaded online this year, to expand their sense of institutional memory).

This phenomenon has obviously been

exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. First-year students never received a true COVID-free Yeshiva experience and second-year students only received a half-year's worth. Of current students, it is only the graduating class — my year — that has an inkling of what Yeshiva was. Only we have a small sense of institutional memory that is lacking among the underclassmen, much more so than the average year — and I don't mean to be overly pompous.

Yeshiva University is a school plagued by an extremely short sense of institutional memory.

I had the privilege of attending MTA, Yeshiva's high school, and being on the Wilf Campus for seven years. I remember when the 185th plaza was a normal street with cars driving on it. I recall the excitement in my 10th-grade chemistry class when we heard a Dunkin' Donuts

would open up near campus and the disappointment we felt when Subaba closed. Sometimes, I played football in Tenzer Garden, an area that currently cannot legitimately be termed a “garden.” In place of the artificial grass that was there in 2018, there is only concrete and pipes. Large scaffolding now encircles Zysman Hall, the building which houses MTA. This campus and university have changed in many ways, both physically and institutionally, for better and worse, since I first stepped through those gold-plated doors of that then-scaffold-free building in 2013.

Importantly, I constantly reminisce on the Torah values that were imparted to me from my high school and college *rebbeim*, notably through the *shiurim* of Rabbi Jeremy Wieder for the past two-and-a-half years and the almost-daily lunch-table conversations I had with Rabbi Shalom Carmy last year. I can dwell for hours on positive memories from my time at Yeshiva, from the after-*minyana* hock at the Kehillas Shulchan Baruch to expanding my base of knowledge and

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A Conclusion

By ELISHEVA KOHN

As we approach the conclusion of a peculiar academic year, and by extension, an unusual yet successful year at The Commentator, I find myself in awe of just how *anticlimactic* it all seems. Covering the happenings at YU, graduating university and transitioning to real adulthood despite marking more than a year since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic — life has been full of drama this past year, and it appears that there is none left to celebrate this particular occasion: the end of Vol. 86. If I may, these are my concluding thoughts.

From the start, our team was acutely aware that this year would be different, and that the student body, as well as faculty members and staff, relied on us to keep the YU community informed. My co-editors and the entire team rose to the occasion; we successfully published The Commentator's first ever summer issue before the academic year even started, and transitioned to virtual editorial meetings and events. Our team dedicated hours to The Commentator's mission, bypassing technical issues and time difference, and triumphing despite the overall sentiment of uncertainty that was present in the YU community. Above all, we were cognizant of our responsibility to

the historical record of The Commentator and made sure that our articles, especially news reports, were thoroughly written so future students and editors would be able to use our coverage as a primary source to examine how the coronavirus pandemic shaped YU — for better or worse.

When I first arrived in the United States to pursue my degree at YU in August 2018, the thought that I would one day publish my final editorial in The Commentator would not have crossed my mind.

Student journalism, and more importantly, the collective student voice, is more crucial than ever, and has successfully implemented countless positive changes at YU — the most monumental of which was the administration's decision to hold an in-person commencement ceremony despite an earlier announcement that it would be conducted virtually. This reversal, to some extent, is a direct result of all the students — student government

leaders, Commentator team members and so many others — who respectfully and consistently pressed the university to reverse their original decision regarding graduation. When I first discovered that commencement would be held in-person, I was ecstatic; not only because it meant that I would be able to celebrate the conclusion of the most wonderful and complex years of my life with my loved ones, but also because it marked an unparalleled success story for the collective student voice. I urge my successors, as well as any reader involved on campus, to let their voices be heard. Ultimately, I do very much believe that the university has our best interests at heart, and it is our duty (as well as theirs) to make sure that we are included in every major decision.

This past year, our editors reported on myriad events: some internal and some public, some focused on the Jewish community and others more universalistic, some on American affairs and some more global in nature, many celebratory and others more tragic. We covered the passings of prominent Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Norman Lamm and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, numerous coronavirus-related updates that directly affected the academic, spiritual and social lives of the YU student body, YU's policies on LGBTQ inclusivity on campus and

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Baruch Dayan HaEmet — Meron 2021

By THE COMMENTATOR EDITORIAL BOARD

We of The Commentator Editorial Board are utterly shocked and saddened by the horrible tragedy that took place on

Lag BaOmer in Meron, Israel. We extend our deepest and heartfelt condolences to the loved ones of the victims and our brothers and sisters of Am Yisrael.

Among the 45 who passed was Donny Morris (YUHS '20) ז"ל, a member of our YU community. Donny was known for his selflessness, his commitment to his

values and his love for Torah, friends and family. There are no words for his devastating loss.

May Donny's family and all the families of the victims be comforted amongst the mourners of *Tzion* and *Yerushalayim*.

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.

INSTITUTIONAL MEMORIES
Continued from Page 2

literary skills on The Commentator to forming connections with friends and professors. I am indebted to this institution for all of these experiences.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has cut short the experience of the Yeshiva student. It is useless for me to expand on this point. Anyone who has had cognizance of their existence for the past year-and-a-half must be aware of the obstructions to basic standards of living.

The most significant shift has obviously been to online learning. I have previously expanded on the idea that there is no replacement for the physical classroom. Indeed, while Torah remains strong in the institution, due to the constant in-person opportunities offered by Yeshiva, Maddah — if that concept has ever truly existed — has clearly deteriorated with the shift to the online model.

While I was recently reminiscing about my time at Yeshiva, my thoughts centered on my experience learning Hebrew, a subject that straddles the line between Torah and Maddah. Although during my year in Israel, I attended a *hesder* yeshiva, I never received a sufficient grammatical background befitting of an ideal Jewish student. When I entered Yeshiva University, I constantly required the use of an English translation — sometimes, to the horror of many, an Artscroll — to learn Torah. However, although I undoubtedly learn less Torah than my time at KBY, I understand much more of the grammatical nuances in that much-hallowed text. I can express with confidence that it was the Hebrew courses that primarily aided, and provided a base for this growth in knowledge.

In our previous issue, The Commentator editorial board unanimously published an

editorial essentially pleading with President Berman to halt the clear deterioration of Judaic Studies at *Yeshiva*. Editors from different backgrounds and *hashkafas* came together to say in unanimity that Yeshiva must desist from continuing in the path it is currently on.

I don't have much to add to the board's words. The editorial soundly put forward our case. Based on the administration's plans, if I was entering Yeshiva in two years from now, I would be presented with a weaker educational environment than the one I found in 2018. As a graduating student, I have no skin in the game. I will not be affected by the changes to the Hebrew program and other radical alterations; but Yeshiva, as an institution, will. Yeshiva must change course in this respect, before students forget what in-person Hebrew classes consisted of, before students forget what Judaic Studies

were.

On a different note, when I personally ask most students and professors what aspect of Yeshiva needs to be urgently fixed the answers mostly center on communication. On the administrative side, not much needs to be said. There is a general trend of the university to not announce policy changes to students before they happen. Rather, it is left to us, The Commentator, to attempt an accurate reporting of the details to the Yeshiva community — if the administration is willing to provide us with information. One need look no further than two recent stories we covered, regarding the 2021-22 academic calendar and the changes to the Hebrew Department. There was no university-wide email that was sent explaining the changes

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most recently, the Accellion security breach which resulted in the release of students and employees' personal information. We expanded a then-recently introduced column, titled "We Asked, Y(O)U Answered," which aimed to provide a platform for student sentiment on issues ranging from the 2020 presidential election to the coronavirus vaccine, and continued the tradition of regularly publishing archival pieces. The Commentator served as a "kinetic vehicle" for students to express their opinions on a variety of topics, including the Uighur crisis, academia's shortcomings, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's passing, as well as an epic showdown between latkes and hamantaschen. We interviewed faculty members and outgoing university officials, reported on the Macs' incredible season and analyzed the student body's political leanings over the years. We also had the honor of publishing pieces from members of the YU administration and rabbinic leadership, such as Dean Noam Wasserman and Rabbi Yosef Blau, among others. It is a testament to The Commentator's perseverance that these articles, which are only a fraction of the totality of our publications, were successfully published during an extraordinarily crucial year in YU history.

This feat would not have been possible without the dedication and talent of our editors and staff. Our news, features, opinions and business editors, staff writers, as well as those on the web, business, social media and layout teams have formed a true *chevra* — with a we-can-do-it attitude, and above all, a sense of camaraderie. Our readers may not be aware how much effort it takes to recruit writers and manage a team, as well as write, research, edit, format, publicize and print issues — it figuratively takes a village to do so successfully. I am thrilled by the appointment of Sruli Fruchter as the incoming editor-in-chief — he has a keen sense of journalism and its moral implications, and has proven himself worthy of that title since his very first article for The Commentator.

The press has always had a complex relationship with the Office of Communications at YU, but Senior Director of Communications Mechal Haas never made us feel like we were rooting for two different teams; quite the contrary — she always emphasized how much she cared about the YU student body, and I can attest to her genuineness. A former editor-in-chief once wrote that Mechal is a "true professional" and that "YU is lucky to have her" — I couldn't agree more.

When I first arrived in the United States

to pursue my degree at YU in August 2018, the thought that I would one day publish my final editorial in The Commentator would not have crossed my mind. As I reflect on my experience at the paper and YU, I would like to dedicate a few paragraphs to the individuals who guided me to where I am today.

I joined The Commentator during orientation week; at the time, I lacked confidence in my English writing skills and had no intention of ever exposing my writing to the public. Nevertheless, I had been reading The Commentator prior to my arrival at YU to learn more about the institution and its community and was passionate about college journalism, and so I applied to be social media manager under the leadership of former Editor-in-Chief Benjamin (Benjy) Koslowe. Expressing my gratitude to Benjy in a mere few lines is practically an impossible feat.

I urge my successors, as well as any reader involved on campus, to let their voices be heard. Ultimately, I do very much believe that the university has our best interests at heart, and it is our duty (as well as theirs) to make sure that we are included in every major decision.

Over the course of my three years at The Commentator, he has consistently served as a source of guidance, offering words of praise and critique effectively, and above all, leading by example with unparalleled leadership and dedication to this paper. It is thanks to Benjy that I am where I am today — in more ways than one could possibly imagine.

It is under former Editor-in-Chief Avi Hirsch's leadership that I transitioned from social media managing to writing, and finally, news editing. Avi believed in my potential, regularly took my ideas into account when making decisions that would affect the paper, and above all, instilled within The Commentator the value of doing the right thing. I am honored to have worked with Avi, as well as to call him my friend.

Beyond the echelons of "Commies," as members of the Commentator team refer to one another, there were many others who have contributed to my time at The Commentator, YU and my overall experience in the United States. Zahava Fertig, 7 up/7 down columnist and my roommate of three years, and Elyanna Saperstein, my long-time confidante, have time and again opened their homes to me, brainstormed

articles with me and offered a listening ear when things got tough. Neeli Fagan — whom we fondly refer to as "The Commentator's Top Commenter" for her ability to provide quotes on and for practically *every issue* — deserves an honorable mention not only for her service to the paper, but also for her friendship and kindness to me.

I am honored to have learned from stellar instructors at YU, and I am especially grateful to the following professors: Dr. Ronnie Perelis for his commitment to highlighting international students on campus and offering guidance for various projects of mine, Dr. Hill Krishnan for sparking my interest in nuclear security, Rabbi Dr. Soloveichik from whom I had the pleasure of learning Torah and philosophy from at various different stages of my life, Dr. David Glaser for exposing me to the beautiful works of

Rabbi Ari Solomont, who helped facilitate my enrollment to YU and was always available to answer any questions I had as an international student.

My home in Vienna, Austria, boasts an extensive archive of Commentator issues, arguably the most comprehensive in all of Europe. To this day, my mother insists on me bringing physical copies along (not to mention swag items) every time I fly home, and she reads them cover to cover. She, along with my father, always fostered my curiosity and ambition and raised me and my two brothers — both of whom are proud Commie fans and very much in the know about YU affairs — in a home filled with laughter and love. I am the first in my family to graduate university (and God willing, my family will be watching me at commencement in-person!), and I know how meaningful it is to them that the institution I chose to attend is YU. My parents are a testament to what it means to never stop learning in life, and I owe them everything.

Acharon acharon chaviv — Hillel has been a source of joy and adventure in a year of chaos, and a devoted supporter of my endeavors at The Commentator and beyond. I am grateful for his edits, but more importantly, for our partnership.

Bidding farewell to The Commentator has proven to be sentimental. For three years, the paper played a central role in my life — not quite an "extracurricular," but a meaningful endeavor that, admittedly, took up more time than my course load. Nevertheless, I am confident in The Commentator's incoming leadership and team, as well as its continuity, which are based on a strong, 86-year-old legacy of dedicated students. Whatever the future may hold, I look forward to regularly reading this paper, as well as attending #commiesocials and offering advice to current and future members of The Commie. I wish them all the best.



INSTITUTIONAL MEMORIES
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and their ramifications. One might think that radical changes require public explanation ... one might think.

Sometimes, even when asked for details regarding certain policies and initiatives, administrators will ignore students. In articles that we have published, it is common to come across the phrase: "As of the time of publication, X did not respond to The Commentator's request for comment." As a result of this occasional disregard, students are left in the dark about many important and relevant details regarding their university experience.

To illustrate this point, why is the old Wilf Student Constitution still on Yeshiva's website instead of the new one voted by the student body last semester? I don't know; the director of student events said that he would only comment if the correspondence was "of [sic] the record." I can cite many other examples of disregard from other administrators as well. The question lingers: Why shouldn't students be aware of the reasoning for policies that affect them? "Not your concern; just sit back, enjoy your classes like a good student and donate money as a good alum," seems to be the attitude of some administrators.

Maybe, if I will be charitable, the pervasive lack of communication is due to sheer incompetence and/or laziness. Or, if I will be more cynical, perhaps, the powers-that-be fear that students don't want to hear changes that will undoubtedly disappoint them. "If we tell students that their reading week is reduced, perhaps they won't donate," they might think. "Perhaps [gasp] there may even be a protest!"

If this is the notion of some administrators — and I hope it isn't — their fears are misplaced. If a change is being made regarding the university's policies, students would like to be apprised of it before its implementation, even if they don't agree with it. It should not be — although it currently is — the job of the student newspaper to be the sole conduit between the administration and students on such issues. This situation actually creates more resentment among students than would otherwise be the case.

I would like to stress that this negative aspect of university life is not the fault of Senior Director of Communications Mechal Haas. In fact, through all of my correspondences with her — and there are too many to count — Mechal has responded with the seriousness and professionalism expected of a university administrator. Most readers are unaware of her efforts — her name has only appeared in three news articles. Despite this, over the past few years she has been the primary liaison between The Commentator team and various members of the administration, working tirelessly to get us the information that students deserve in a timely manner. While, at the end of the day, we worked for different interest groups, our combined goal was to make Yeshiva a better place.

The lack of communication is exacerbated by a broader group of administrators. Yeshiva can be compared to a large machine with many parts. While one part may work individually, the other parts must also work together for the machine to run. I am, of

course, not negating the efforts of administrators who have communicated effectively to students. They should be commended for doing their job. However, senior administrators must go the extra mile and create a culture of professional communication. The following standard should be set by the administration: "We should send out complete and accurate information to students, faculty and parents regarding new university policies — like calendar changes — as often as

If my team had not investigated and criticized certain unsavory aspects of this institution's underbelly, my job on The Commentator would have been a simple line on the resume, and not the experience of growth I had.

we send out emails to the community asking for donations."

One area on which there is less general criticism is the lack of communication from the student body to the administration. The mission statement on our masthead states that The Commentator provides a "reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life." In many ways it doesn't. The opinions of the student body are an integral part of student life, yet, regrettably, that aspect is not reliably reflected in this newspaper.

If one takes a look through The Commentator archives, they would witness ideological scuffles between faculty members, administrators and students. The writers were blunt with their critiques and sharp in their observations. Each side in a debate made their full viewpoint known to the newspaper's readership without constant qualifiers or apologetics being appended to their arguments.

I perceive a general fear among students resulting in an unwillingness to share their opinion. The position of such students is completely understandable. They probably surmise, "If I share my hot take on X, I won't be hired for a job in the future, or worse, get a good *shidduch*." Before writing certain Commentator articles, I will admit, I have considered these factors. There are some opinions I hold that I never revealed publicly because I didn't want certain aspects of my personal life to be compromised. It is a valid, legitimate and understandable position, especially during the modern internet mob culture.

Such a position, however, comes with deleterious consequences for the body politic. For example, if a certain group of students feels more comfortable expressing their opinion than another group of students — who fear general societal repercussions — the administration has no idea what the student body broadly wishes for. They might, therefore, enact certain policies or hold certain events that are counter to what the student body *en masse* prefers in favor of the loud minority.

There must be a general acknowledgment, both at Yeshiva and in America, that the social dialogue requires healing. Without bouncing opinions back and forth — especially those that are controversial — there can never be social progress. I hope that

five years down the line, The Commentator will not turn into an echo chamber, with each opinion reflecting a singular, bland, unoriginal viewpoint. If it does, that may not be the fault of the editorial board, but rather the fault of American society and the nature of the modern world.

Students must be aware that The Commentator is their paper, that it offers them a forum to freely express themselves. They must also develop a certain resilience

to outside pressure that would enjoin them from publicly expressing their viewpoints for the purposes of constructive change. Otherwise, policies in this institution will have no way of developing in a manner that reflects the will of the student body.

My qualms regarding the communicative aspect of the university — or lack thereof — between both the administration and the students may be noticed by readers immediately after this editorial's publication. But, due to the low level of institutional memory, it will most likely be forgotten in a year or two. Then the cycle will probably repeat with another editor-in-chief in a few years lamenting a lack of communication and dialogue or some related concern, and no constructive action will probably be taken. Indeed, with a little research one can find many similar points being made in the reflections of previous Commentator editors-in-chief with no demonstrable change in university policy. This view may sound cynical, but it is the cyclical nature of Yeshiva.

Hopefully, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the administration, faculty and students to understand which aspects of Yeshiva need to be immediately worked on and adjusted. So far, I remain concerned for the future of this important institution — as evidenced by my previous editorials and the sentiment provided above — but I have confidence that, if provided with the right leadership, Yeshiva can thrive and be a beacon for Orthodox Judaism. President Berman, please impress me.

Alas, through the trials and tribulations, The Commentator survived the year, as I hope and expect it will survive for many years to come — under the presumption, of course, that Yeshiva survives as an institution. After all, wrote Commentator editors of years past, "As long as there's a Yeshiva College, there will always be a Commentator."

Our newspaper has served Yeshiva for 86 years under 99 editors-in-chief; it is an indispensable part of university life, spurring discussion and action on a host of issues. As operationally dysfunctional as Yeshiva might currently be perceived, without The Commentator acting as a check on power it would be dystopian.

As I pass the baton over to the 100th editor-in-chief, I would like to thank him

for his stalwart dedication and *loyalty* to the paper. It is why I appointed him to a position requiring much responsibility and seriousness. Readers can be assured that I am leaving this newspaper in worthy hands.

Sruli, I hope you are not provided with difficult choices comparable to those I have faced during my tenure — which I will not dwell on publicly. That's not what you're signing up for; no editorship of a college paper would be worth it. But, if you are provided with the toughest of choices, take it in stride, deliberate and expect that your team will have your back. Don't let the antagonists and detractors frustrate your noble mission.

I believe that next year's team, emerging from the COVID-19 era, is set to be one of the strongest in The Commentator's history, and I am proud to have overseen its formation and development. They have certainly grown, as a team and as individuals, through this time of adversity and challenge. I have left a paper that is more financially comfortable (thanks, in no small part, to the efforts of Meir Lightman) and editorially experienced than the one with which I was initially provided when entering this position (in fact, it was unclear at the beginning of the year whether we would even have enough money to regularly print — we ended up printing eight issues).

Going forward, it will be incumbent on the next generation of Commentator editors to establish themselves as student leaders. I will be happy to provide advice when asked by my successors, though they can rest assured that I do not plan on snobbily dictating The Commentator's path in the times to come.

To my successors on The Commentator, be sure to trust and be on the same page as each other. And, if you don't agree on something, try to civilly work together for the betterment of the paper and the university — questioning each other's sanity, judgment and capabilities will only make things worse. Future editors must take this lesson to heart: In general, trust Commentator leadership, or else you may risk sinking the ship, and this is not a ship worth sinking.

Euripides was once quoted as saying: "When a man has for his words a noble subject, it is easy to speak well." It would have been easy for me to speak exclusively in a positive sense about Yeshiva — there are, indeed, many reasons to do so. It is more difficult to dig beyond the surface than to express the basic predilections of the administration. Finding and publicizing the truth is a frequent cause of hostility and ill-will. However, if I did not take that path, if my team had not investigated and criticized certain unsavory aspects of this institution's underbelly, my job on The Commentator would have been a simple line on the resume, and not the experience of growth I had.

I'm somewhat glad to finally breathe a sigh of relief, though, overall, I remain fond of my three years of experience on the paper, including the challenges I faced, and reflect on them as maturing moments. I look forward to seeing what the "Commie" has in store for students, administrators, faculty and alumni — like me — in Vol. 87!

CORRECTION: Hedi Steinberg Library Renovations

The article about the Hedi Steinberg Library, which appeared in The Commentator's last issue, was updated on April 28 after The Commentator learned that

it received incorrect information regarding the schedule for the library renovations. The Hedi Steinberg Library renovations are unlikely to take place over the summer due to

NYS spending controls instituted during the COVID-19 era, and a timeline, at this time, is unclear. Other aspects — specifically the background of these plans and the funding

— were clarified and corrected as well.



1 And That's A Wrap

It has truly been an honor writing 7 up / 7 down for the past year, but when you start classifying everything in your life as either a "7 up" or a "7 down," that's how you know it's time to retire.



2 BAGPIPE GUY!!!

Miracles are real! God does exist! ... and I forgot how loud bagpipes can be. You think he'll be back during reading week too? Will he be YU's keynote speaker at commencement?



3 The Zoology Club Field Trip

There's nothing like a pleasant stroll in the Bronx Zoo on a Sunday afternoon in April.



4 24 Days Until Commencement

Cue Pomp and Circumstance! Don those caps and gowns and make sure to adjust your tassel. Commencement may not be the most exciting way for most people to spend their Wednesday afternoon but to the graduating class of 2021, it means the world.



5 Table of Contents

Okay, the jig is up: 7up/7down is really just a deceptive way to incorporate the Table of Contents for this issue.



6 That's Meta

Writing an article for The Commentator about writing ... for The Commentator. And yes, that was a shameless plug.



7 The Rosh Yeshiva Game

The game is simple. You go around in a circle and each person names a different RIETS rosh yeshiva until you can't think of a new one. I almost beat a Gush guy, a RIETS bochur and a Viennese girl but then I forgot about Rabbi Bleich.

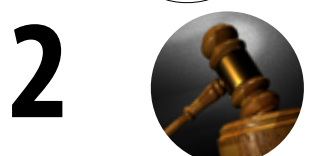
7UP NMODZ by Zahava Fertig

Gee, Thanks!



That moment when you get more feedback on one article than on an entire year's worth of 7 up/7 down.

Lawsuits



YU: Whatever you do, don't let the Wilf Student Court give you any legal advice.

Not Getting a Stimulus Check



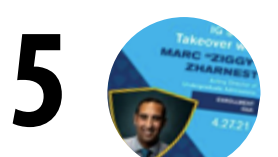
When you're making too little money to be an Independent, but you need the check because you're independent.

StuCo Elections



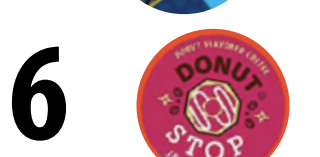
'Nuff said.

Getting Information from Insta Stories



Classes will be in person?! Thanks @YUAdmissions for letting us know.

Flavored K-Cups



Who the heck thought that making jelly donut flavored coffee was a good idea?!

7 up/ 7 down Vol. 86 Honorable Mentions

Some traditions are too good to give up on. Here are some headlines that didn't make it through the final cut for 7 up/ 7 down: Covered But Not Disguised, Mazal Tov Grandma and Lenny ... The Cage ... Bring Back Nagels... Roomies of Commies Support Group ... Graduation Present: AARP Membership ... YU's Bubbie; Dean Bacon ... Jewish Pick Up Lines ... Kumzitz Coup d'etat ... The Yenta Network ... Rabbi Dr. Ari Bergman is Not a Typo



YU and Administrators Sued for LGBTQ Discrimination by YU Pride Alliance, Students and Alumni

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was originally published online on April 27.

The YU Pride Alliance, three Yeshiva University alumni and a student announced an LGBTQ discrimination lawsuit against the university, as well as President Ari Berman and Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel, at a virtual press conference on Tuesday, April 27. The plaintiffs allege that YU illegally discriminated against them when the university thrice rejected their proposal for an official LGBTQ club in 2019 and 2020.

The plaintiffs — the Alliance, Molly Meisels (SCW '21), Amitai Miller (YC '20), Doniel Weinreich (YC '20) and an anonymous student — are being represented by Emery Celli Brinckerhoff Abady Ward & Maazel LLP, a litigation boutique in New York City that focuses on civil rights, commercial, criminal and ethics matters. The Alliance is an unofficial student club for providing LGBTQ student support to “feel visible, respected, and represented,” as per its Facebook page.

The lawsuit, which was filed on April 26, alleges that YU has violated its own non-discrimination policies and New York City Human Rights Law. It specifies that 50 years ago, YU elected to be a non-sectarian institution, subjecting itself to NYC Human Rights Law, and has collected hundreds of millions of dollars in New York State funds and benefits. “Because it is a secular institution,” the suit says, “it cannot pick and choose which New York City laws apply to it and which do not.”

In a statement emailed this morning, 48 faculty members of YU’s Cardozo School of Law called on Berman to allow an LGBTQ club on campus. They called the university’s actions “hurtful,” adding that its decisions are “unlawful under federal, state, and city civil rights laws, all of which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual

orientation.”

“What I want Yeshiva University students, faculty, staff, and administrators to know is that I am partaking in this case out of love for the university,” Meisels told *The Commentator*. “The institution has so much potential to be a safe, loving, and supportive environment for queer students and allies. This potential has yet to be realized. Hopefully this case will provide queer students with the club they deserve.”

Katherine Rosenfeld, lead attorney on the case, noted at the conference that YU is like New York University and Columbia University, both of which are also non-sectarian institutions; therefore, she said, YU does not have protected status as a religious institution.

“There is no exemption that shields [YU’s] conduct. It operates on paper with all the benefits of non-sectarian status, and now it must operate that way in reality by treating its students equally.”

Lead Attorney Katherine Rosenfeld

“There is no exemption that shields [YU’s] conduct,” she said. “It operates on paper with all the benefits of non-sectarian status, and now it must operate that way in reality by treating its students equally.”

Students filed a motion this morning for a preliminary injunction to have YU recognize the club in time for Fall 2021, Rosenfeld said at the press conference. They expect to be in court in the coming months regarding this motion.

According to the plaintiffs’ timeline, in February 2019, a Gay-Straight Alliance received club approval from student council presidents, which is the traditional route for receiving club status. The university overruled the students’ decision and rejected the club. The lawsuit says that Nissel “stated that the existence of the Jewish Activism Club should negate the need for a GSA.”

In September 2019, students marched for LGBTQ equality on the Wilf Campus. The following January, students re-applied under the new name the YU Alliance — to avoid using LGBTQ in the name — and student council presidents abstained from voting, bumping the matter to administrators.

The following month, Nissel and former Executive Vice President Dr. Josh Joseph did not answer questions about approving the club, and YU administrators “again refused” to grant status for Spring 2020.

In September 2020, the Alliance applied for club status, and the administration released a statement announcing new LGBTQ inclusivity policies and that the club would not be recognized at YU since it clouds the Torah’s “nuanced message.”

The Alliance approached the NYC Commission on Human Rights in February 2020, and while they talked to an investigator prompting an investigation, a formal legal complaint was never filed, according to one of the plaintiffs and former member of the Alliance. Rosenfeld also noted in the press conference that the current lawsuit is the first formal legal action taken by the Alliance against the university.

Yeshiva University was designated as a non-sectarian institution in 1970, allowing it to receive state money such as “Bundy” funds. Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a spiritual leader of the institution, was publicly opposed to the change in the university’s designation. He feared that with non-sectarian status, YU would “have only a limited right to formulate rules” with regard to religion.

In 1995, lawyers hired by YU advised the institution that, under the human rights ordinance of the City of New York, “YU cannot ban gay student clubs” and “must make facilities available to them in the same manner as it does to other student groups.”

“Yeshiva University is the bearer of a 3,000 year-old Torah tradition, which we hold sacrosanct,” said a university statement sent to *The Commentator*. “At the heart of our Jewish values is love — love for God and love for each of His children. Our LGBTQ+ students are our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, family and friends.”

The statement added, “Our policies on harassment and discrimination against students on the basis of protected classifications including LGBTQ+ are strong and vigorously enforced. Our Torah-guided decision about this club in no way minimizes the care and sensitivity that we have for each of our students, nor the numerous steps the university has already taken. We are actively engaged with our students, faculty and rabbinic leaders to facilitate productive discussions with an eye toward understanding and embracing diverse perspectives.”

Since the September 2020 policies, the university has held several LGBTQ-themed events such as “Mental Health and LGBTQ: What Helps and What Hurts.” In December 2020, a panel of LGBTQ students and alumni spoke about their experience in the Orthodox community, which was the first event of its kind since 2009.

Most recently on April 12, YU’s Jewish Activism Club partnered with Jewish Queer Youth to run an event about sensitivity when discussing LGBTQ-related topics in an “LGBTQ+ Specificity Workshop.”

Elisheva Kohn and Yosef Lemel contributed to this story.

FALL 2021

Continued from Front Page

Three days later, on April 25, Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel emailed all YU students that “effective immediately, the Covid vaccination site on the Wilf campus can accept walk-ins for New York residents, including students attending school in New York, who are over the age of 16.” The vaccination site is open Sunday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is expected “to run through June.”

Some students expressed excitement following the announcement. “I was so happy to read President Berman’s announcement about in-person classes next semester,” Justin Carl (SSSB '23) told *The Commentator*. “Rabbi Adler’s *shiur* has been held in person for a while now and I have found it to be much more enjoyable and productive; I’m looking forward to being able to continue my afternoon studies in person as well. It will be refreshing.”

Berman said that more information will be coming out in the coming weeks which will be posted on an FAQ section on the university’s website.



Full in-person instruction and operation will return to Yeshiva University for Fall 2021.

THE COMMENTATOR

In Reversal of University's Original Decision, Several SCW Jewish Studies Adjuncts Rehired for Fall 2021

By **ELLIE GOFMAN**

Several Jewish Studies adjunct professors at Stern College for Women (SCW) were told they will be returning for Fall 2021 after previously being notified by email on March 17 that they would not be rehired, The Commentator has learned.

The Commentator was in communication

with two professors, both of whom received the original email and spoke under the condition of anonymity. Near the end of April, the two professors were informed that they would be returning in the fall. One added that he will be teaching two courses at SCW.

The university has not responded to The Commentator's repeated inquiries regarding which adjuncts will not be rehired, why they reversed the initial decision and what

the original reasoning was behind the move.

On March 18, The Commentator received a tip that adjunct professors in the department — some of whom had been teaching at SCW for several decades — were told via email that they would not be returning for Fall 2021.

One of those professors described the original email as "very terse and just said that I am no longer being offered courses at

Stern College." He added that he was "not aware that the 'dismissal' email was coming and a formal period of notice, although not required, would have been a *menschlich* [kind] thing to do." He received an apology after reaching out about how the news was communicated.

Provost and Vice President for Academic

Continued on Page 8

NEWS BRIEFS

Continued from Front Page

"I'm so happy that I was able to get 'Bagpipe Guy' to come back to campus," expressed Lerman in an official statement to The Commentator. "I would like to give a special thanks to 'Bagpipe Guy' for showing up."

Five Beren Students Stuck In Elevator for Over Two Hours

Five Beren students were stuck in an elevator in Stanton Hall, located on 245 Lexington Avenue, between approximately 1:00 p.m. and 3:25 p.m. on Monday, April 26.

The elevator was stuck on the fifth floor for over two hours. Its outer doors closed while the inner ones remained open.

Eventually, the Fire Department of New York pried open the doors to rescue the students. According to Jacqueline Rabih (Katz '24), a student who was stuck in the elevator, the university has not yet contacted the students involved in the incident.

Rabih told The Commentator that the students passed the time getting to know each other, even singing "happy birthday" to a student who turned 20 that day. "[We] tried to laugh it off as much as we could," she said. Rabih also stated that some of the stuck students were nervous that the elevator would freefall.

On April 11, as The Commentator previously reported, an elevator in Brookdale Residence Hall fell five floors with a student

inside. These incidents follow many other elevator malfunctions over 2019 and 2020. The Commentator previously found that Yeshiva University was fined thousands of dollars for building code violations, mostly relating to elevator hazards.

"We take safety very seriously, and continuously maintain our elevators," said Randy Apfelbaum, chief facilities & administrative officer. "We plan to commence even more extensive maintenance on all the elevators this summer, and planning is also underway for a major project to replace many of the older elevators."

Two Gov. Cuomo Banners Removed from Wilf Campus in 'Periodic Update' as Investigation of Sexual Harassment is Underway

Two banners featuring New York State Gov. Andrew Cuomo — who is currently under investigation by the state attorney general for mounting allegations of sexual harassment — were removed from two different areas on Wilf Campus on April 6. Other banners in the same rows were also removed and replaced with new banners.

When sexual harassment allegations against Cuomo began emerging in March 2021, The Commentator reached out to the university regarding the status of his banners. A YU spokesperson said at the time, "We periodically update our on-campus banners and signage. In light of Covid that

process has been somewhat delayed but we expect to refresh our signage in the coming months."

The university did not respond to The Commentator's follow-up inquiries about the banners' removal.

One banner was on an exterior wall of Furst Hall, and the other was in the Furst Hall lobby. The one outdoors was replaced by a generic picture of students in the Wilf Campus plaza with the slogan, "Building Tomorrow Today," while the lobby banner was not replaced, leaving a blank space on the wall.

MTA Construction

Zysman Hall, Yeshiva University's oldest building located on the Wilf Campus, is undergoing renovations to its outer facade. The construction first began in the middle of March.

According to Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum, the "building exterior is undergoing a complete restoration which will include restoring the roof turrets and dome." He stressed that the "project is very complex and weather dependent" and will likely continue through the summer of 2022.

Tenzer Garden Planned to Reopen In the Coming Months

Tenzer Garden, a lot that was previously

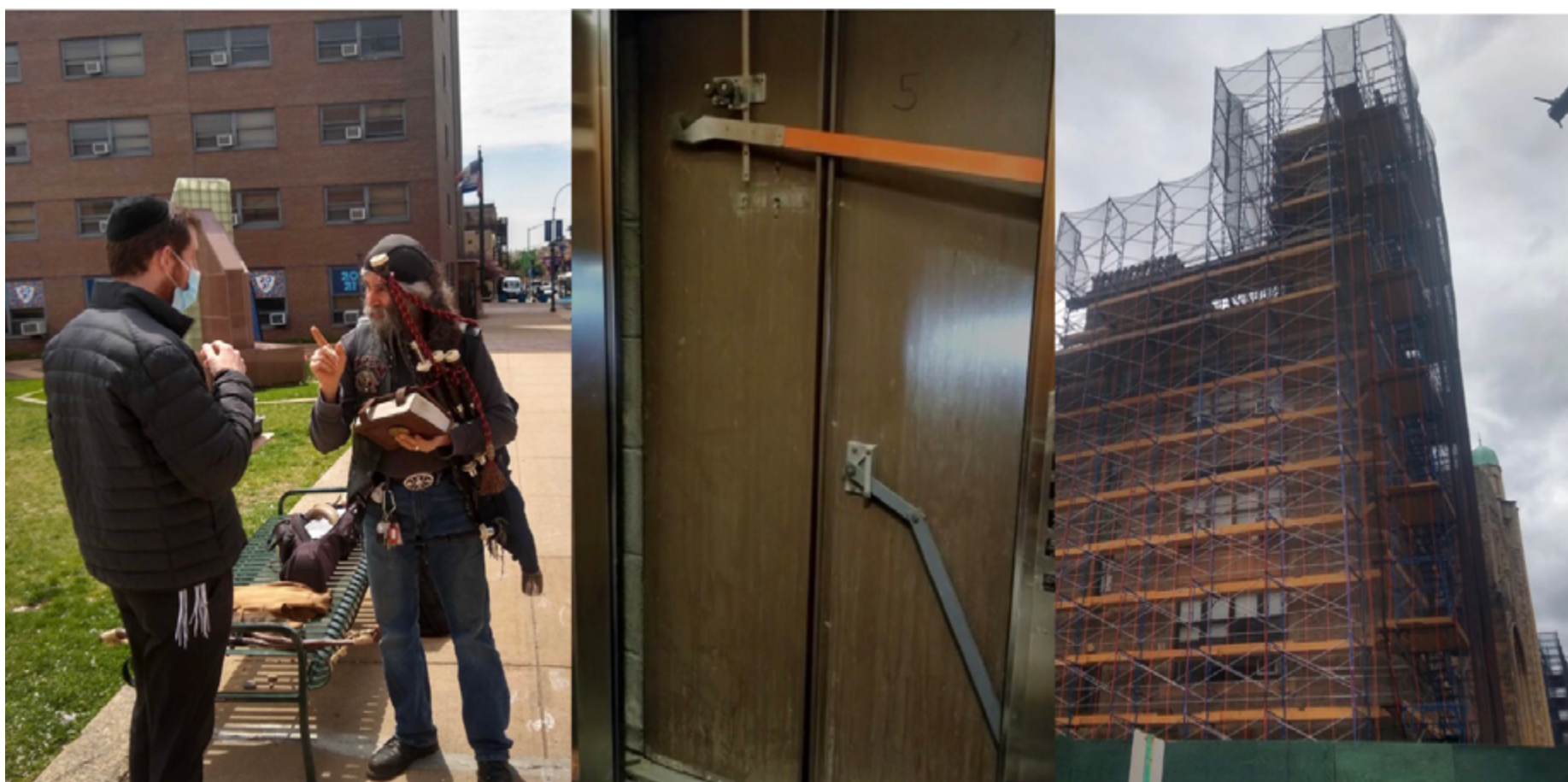
filled with artificial grass on the Wilf Campus, has been closed for over two years. The field was historically used by students for sports games, barbecues and other events.

Randy Apfelbaum, chief facilities & administrative officer, explained to The Commentator that the area "is actually a roof over storage rooms, part of the kitchen area and the loading dock." An effort by Con Edison to convert the facilities in Belfer Hall to "high pressure gas," which is part of an "overall campus wide conversion from oil to gas ... required trenching both the street and part of the Tenzer area," he explained. Apfelbaum stated that the university hopes to reopen the area "in the coming months."

Gottesman Pool Remains Closed Despite Plans To Reopen Before Pesach

The Gottesman Pool on the Wilf Campus is still closed. The Commentator previously reported, based on information it received from members of the administration, that the pool would reopen before Pesach.

Joe Bednarsh, director of athletics and recreation, told The Commentator that the university "had every intention of opening the pool several weeks ago," but wasn't able to do so due to "unforeseen mechanical issues." Bednarsh stated that the university's Facilities Services have given Athletics "a reopening timeline of the first week in May."



Left to right: Bagpipe guy, elevator malfunction and construction by Zysman Hall

Spring 2021 Wilf Student Government Election Results Released After Delay

By YOSEF LEMEL AND DANIEL MELOOL

Results for the Spring 2021 Wilf Campus Student Government elections have been released after a delay caused by a Wilf Student Court case determining the eligibility of Post-Pesach Program (PPP) students. PPP students were granted the right to vote by the court and were provided with a voting period, from Friday, April 30 at 2:31 p.m. until Sunday, May 2, at 1 a.m. All other voters cast their ballots on April 29.

The results were released by Dovie Solomon (SSSB '21) to the student body on May 2 at 1:43 a.m. after first releasing them to candidates at 1 a.m. Solomon told students that a breakdown of the results will "come in the future," but he did not specify a date. As of the time of publication, Solomon did not respond to The Commentator's inquiries on the matter.

"We will really be representing the diversity of YU and I look forward to working with Jonah, Yoni, and Akiva to improve student life for everyone."

Incoming YSU President Elazar Abrahams (YC '22)

Commenting on the makeup of next year's student government, Elazar Abrahams (YC '22), the incoming YSU president stated, "It's so amazing that all of the Wilf presidents have different majors and come from different high schools and Israel yeshivot. We will really be representing the diversity of YU and I look forward to working with Jonah, Yoni, and Akiva to improve student life for

everyone." As student government presidents are prohibited from serving on The Commentator, according to the Wilf Student Constitution, Abrahams, currently the senior features editor of The Commentator, will vacate his position on the paper before assuming the YSU presidency.

"Thank you to everyone who voted, whether for me or for one of my opponents," expressed Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22), the outgoing SOY president and incoming SYMSSC president. "My work to make your 2021-22 Syms experience great starts tomorrow."

The following are the results of the elections:

SOY President: Yoni Laub
SOY Vice President: Aryeh Bienstock
SOY MYP Representative: Ephraim Klein
SOY BMP Representative: Joey Yellin
SOY IBC Representative: Max Friedman
SOY JSS Representative: Marc Ziarno
SOY PR Secretary: Ezra Emerson

SYMSSC President: Akiva Poppers
SYMSSC Vice President: Eden Taranto
SYMSSC Treasurer: Gilad Menashe

YCSC President: Jonah Chill
YCSC Vice President: David Lifschitz
YCSC Treasurer: AJ Book

YSU President: Elazar Abrahams
YSU Vice President of Clubs: Baruch Lerman
YSU Vice President of Class Affairs: Michael Stark
YSU Senior Class Representative: Joey Wajsborg
YSU Junior Class Representative: Yisroel Tannenbaum
Makor Representative: Menachem Aharon Wallach

The YSU Katz Representative position was not filled in the election.

Eight proposed amendments to the Wilf Student Constitution appeared on the ballot, six of which garnered the three-fifths majority necessary for ratification. The following amendments were passed:

Amendment #1 (Clarifying Status of Makor Students and Grammar Edit)

This amendment clarifies the term "undergraduate student" to include full- or part-time in the Sy Syms School of Business, Yeshiva College, the Makor Undergraduate Experience or the Post-Pesach Program. S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program students are not included in the "undergraduate" student body.

Amendment #2 (Changing Requirement to be Treasurer)

This amendment stipulates that the treasurers in SYMSSC and YCSC must be full-time students in their respective schools "for at least two semesters prior to taking office." The amendment also gets rid of the requirement that the SYMSSC treasurer must be a junior or senior.

Amendment #3 (Addressing Fall-2 Vacancy)

This amendment provides that various positions in a student council, if vacant after fall elections, would be filled by a candidate supported by a majority vote in the council with the vacancy and a majority of the General Assembly (GA).

Amendment #5 (Making Student Court Suits Public and Establishing a Temporary Chief Justice)

This amendment requires that all suits filed with the Student Court must be made public. This will prevent frivolous lawsuits and allow students to present an informed defense. It also establishes a process for establishing a temporary Chief Justice in the event the Chief Justice is unable to preside over a case.

Amendment #6 (Leave of Absence Permission)

The amendment changes the procedure for any member of the GA to take a leave of absence. A member of the GA may take a leave of absence only if it is approved by a majority vote of the GA. This amendment also gives the GA, with a 3/5 majority vote, the ability to file a request to the Office of Student Life to dissolve any club.

Amendment #8 (Minimum Student Body Vote Needed to Pass Future Amendments)

This amendment establishes a minimum threshold of two-fifths of the student body to vote in order for an amendment to pass.

The GA — which approves amendments forwarded to it by the Amendments Committee (AC) — passed three amendments that were not approved by the AC to the student body for ratification, according to David Tanner (YC '22), chair of the AC. Two of those amendments (#6 and #8) were ratified by the student body.

Tanner brought a suit against the GA in the Wilf Student Court, but the court declined to hear the case. He urged students to "think twice before legitimizing GA amendments that were voted on without the prior approval of the AC, in blatant disregard for the Wilf Constitution."

SCW ADJUNCTS Continued from Page 7

Affairs Dr. Selma Botman commented at the time that the university "do[es] not comment on personnel matters." Every semester they "review the needs for adjunct professors based on the courses being offered." She added, "We are working to provide our faculty with the opportunity to teach on both campuses when possible and appropriate."

At the Town Hall held by the Rebecca Ivry Department of Jewish Studies on April 21

"[T]he message from YU should be a positive one regarding Jewish studies, which is the main reason that most students actually go to YU."

Anonymous Jewish Studies Adjunct Professor

and April 22, Jewish Studies Chair Dr. Deena Rabinovich was asked about the decision to not rehire adjunct professors. "We have adjuncts that are coming to join us," she explained. "We also have been collaborating a lot with the faculty uptown [at Yeshiva College], and we've been benefiting from a lot of the faculty coming downtown so we're using our full-time faculty and filling in with adjuncts as we have done in every single semester."

The department also announced at the Town Hall the end of the "core" model for Jewish Studies at SCW, a change in the credit value of the Jewish studies classes — with

Jewish studies classes now worth two credits instead of three — among other changes.

Until this meeting, the university had not made any public announcements regarding the rehiring of Jewish Studies adjunct professors.

This shuffle of professors and adjustments of the curriculum follows a series of changes by the university regarding Jewish Studies.

The Commentator recently reported that YU is planning to eliminate its in-person Hebrew programs for Wilf and Beren students, transitioning them to an online, asynchronous model beginning in Fall 2022. In January 2021, the Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva College was dissolved, with Jewish History and Jewish Philosophy professors moving to the History and Philosophy departments, respectively. The Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies was subsequently formed.

Regarding the adjustments, Abby Goldberg (SCW '23), a sophomore at YU,

remarked, "I'm scared for what all these changes mean for the future of Jewish studies at Stern. Will these decisions be followed by more cuts to Jewish studies just because it's easy?"

"The reality is that the university is cutting back on Jewish Studies courses," the aforementioned anonymous professor said, "and surely this is a message which will not encourage students to attend YU when they can go to a much more economically viable college and get Jewish studies courses from many other sources, including YUTorah.org ... I am not sure if this will be to the benefit of the college in the future and surely the whole raison d'être of YU is to promote and increase Jewish study and knowledge."

After discovering he would be rehired, the professor told The Commentator, "My comments are still relevant in that the message from YU should be a positive one regarding Jewish studies, which is the main reason that most students actually go to YU."

Some students expressed support for the university retaining its adjunct professors. Ayelet Topp (SCW '23) said, "One of my favorite parts of Stern is the diverse options for Jewish Studies classes. The adjunct Jewish studies faculty add so much, giving more class options to fit everyone's interests, and I really hope Stern recognizes this."

This is a developing story.



Stern College for Women

2021 Beren Undergraduate Student Government Election Results

By YOSEF LEMEL

This article was originally published online on April 30.

The undergraduate student body on the Beren Campus voted in the Spring 2020 student government elections on Thursday, April 29.

The Beren Election Committee, which oversees student government elections, shared the results of the Beren student council elections with the student body.

Polls closed on the Beren Campus at 5:00 p.m. on April 29 and the results were released to Beren students at 1:30 a.m. on April 30. The delayed release in the results

was “due to questions of eligibility and technical difficulties” according to a statement by the Beren Election Committee sent to The Commentator.

A breakdown of vote totals was not released by the Beren Election Committee. The following are the results of the Beren Campus elections:

SCWSC President: Talia Leitner
SCWSC Vice President of Academic Affairs: Hadas Hirt
SCWSC Vice President of Clubs: Shaina Matveev
SCWSC Vice President of Programming: Nina Anina
SCWSC Vice President of Public Relations: Meital Lindenberg

SYMSSC President: Abigail Lerman
SYMSSC Vice President of Clubs: Shaina Levin
SYMSSC Vice President of Public Relations: Rafi Kapitanker

TAC President: Suzanna Rabinovitch
TAC Vice President of Speakers: Ayelet Topp
TAC Vice President of Public Relations: Hannah Karben
TAC Vice President of Chessed: Sela Boord

Senior Class President: Yael Laks
Junior Class President: Natalie Barbanel

According to the Beren Election Committee, no candidate running for “TAC Vice President of Shabbat, Senior Class Vice President, Junior Class Vice President, Sophomore Class President, and Sophomore Class Vice President “fulfilled either the criteria for eligibility or votes required set forth by the Beren Constitution.” The positions will be featured on the ballot for the Fall 2021 elections.

Editor’s Note: Material that was originally published in this article regarding the Wilf Campus Student Government election was repurposed for a separate article, published later in the day on April 30.

Voting Extended to Post-Pesach Students Following Student Court Ruling, Wilf Election Results Delayed

By YOSEF LEMEL

This article was originally published on April 30.

While polls closed on April 29 at 11 p.m., results for the Wilf Campus Student Government elections have not yet been released. According to Dovie Solomon (SSSB ’21), chair of the Wilf Canvassing Committee, the delay is due to a lawsuit that was filed in the Wilf Student Court regarding the election. “In order to maintain a fair process to all potential voters the results are being held,” he said.

The Commentator learned that Akiva Poppers (SSSB ’22), current president of the Student Organization of Yeshiva and a candidate in the race for president of the Sy Syms School of Business Student Council (SSSBSC), filed a suit in the Wilf Student Court against the Canvassing Committee on Election Day, arguing that students arriving in Yeshiva University’s Post-Pesach Program (PPP) should be considered undergraduate

students for the purposes of voting in student government elections. Poppers’ case was the seventh brought before the court during the 2020-21 academic year.

According to the suit, the Canvassing Committee previously decided that PPP stu-

students “and can vote in Wilf Elections for YSU President, YSU Vice President of Class Affairs, YSU Vice President of Clubs, SOY President, Vice President, PR Secretary, and all amendments, as mandated by the constitution.” Student government posi-

presidency; his prospects in the race for the SSSBSC presidency will therefore not be affected by this decision.

“I am pleased that the Court has reversed the Canvassing Committee’s discriminatory policy and encourage all Post Pesach students to exercise their civic duties and vote in the election,” said Poppers.

The court stated that the time and date of the voting period for PPP students will be determined by the Canvassing Committee. The Commentator learned that ballots were sent by Solomon to PPP students on April 30 at 2:31 p.m. The ballots will be open until Sunday, May 2 at 1 a.m. Solomon did not respond to The Commentator’s inquiry regarding how long after the election the results will be released.

The Wilf Student Constitution stipulates in Article X, Section 1 that “Within three days of Election Day, the Canvassing Committee shall disclose the data regarding numbers of voter turnout, and the number of votes cast per race, as well as per candidate on the ballot.”

“I am pleased that the Court has reversed the Canvassing Committee’s discriminatory policy and encourage all Post Pesach students to exercise their civic duties and vote in the election..”

SOY President Akiva Poppers (SSSB ’22)

dents are not eligible to vote in elections. Poppers, however, stated that he called the registrar’s office which “said that PPP students are undergraduate students.”

On April 30, Bryan Lavi (YC ’21), chief justice of the Wilf Student Court, announced that the court came to a unanimous decision on *Poppers v. Canvassing Committee*. The court ruled that PPP students are, for the purposes of voting, considered undergraduate

tions in the SSSBSC and the Yeshiva College Student Council were not included in the court’s list of positions that would be affected by this ruling.

Since ballots were not sent to PPP students on Election Day, the court ordered the Canvassing Committee to allow them “to exercise their constitutional voting rights” by sending them ballots. As stated above, Poppers is a candidate for the SSSBSC

In Reversal of Original Plan, Commencement to be Held In-Person With Virtual Option

By YOSEF LEMEL

This article was originally published online on April 22.

Yeshiva University’s 90th Annual Commencement Ceremony will be held in person in an outdoor venue in New York City on May 26, reversing an initial decision to hold an entirely virtual program. The celebration will be live streamed for those who cannot physically attend. President Ari Berman emailed the update to the student body on Thursday, April 22.

The event is scheduled to be held from 1 p.m. to approximately 3 p.m. Attendees will be required to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test taken before the ceremony, as per an FAQ released by the university. “Beverages and light snacks” will be available to attendees for a nominal fee.

Details regarding the venue, the number of participants allowed to attend, commencement speakers and other related matters have not yet been released. However,

according to Berman’s email, details are currently being finalized and “will be forthcoming in the next few days.”

“A ceremony that highlights our values and celebrates your achievements and resilience is best done in-person,” wrote Berman. “And in a year likened to a dimmer switch, we adjust according to the changes of our circumstances. We will once again be able to celebrate together with family and friends.”

The university’s original plan to hold commencement exercises on a fully virtual platform was due to the “public health and safety guidance of New York City and New York State, as well as guidance” from the university’s medical director, Dr. Robert Van Amorengen, according to Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Selma Botman.

Berman credited the shift to an in-person format to “recent changes in the directives from the Governor’s office,” which were released on April 12. The guidelines mandate



YOSEF LEMEL

Commencement exercises will be held in-person this year.

Continued on Page 10

Brookdale Resident Falls Five Floors in Trapped Elevator, Rescued by FDNY

By ELISHEVA KOHN

This article was originally published online on April 21.

An elevator in Brookdale Residence Hall on the Beren Campus fell five floors last Sunday, April 11 while Brookdale resident Daphna Ziffer (SCW '22) was trapped inside. It dropped floor by floor from the fifth floor to the basement, before rising back to the first floor, falling again and getting stuck in between the first floor and the basement.

Ziffer estimated that she was stuck in the elevator at around 5:30 p.m. for 30 to 45 minutes throughout the incident. She told The Commentator that she had “panicked” and felt “pure terror” while stuck inside, though she did not suffer any serious injuries. Ziffer does not plan on suing YU for the incident, and she noted that the university offered to cover any medical bills caused by the elevator incident.

That day, Ziffer was heading to the sixth floor of Brookdale when the elevator abruptly stopped on the fifth floor and proceeded to fall. When she first realized that the elevator was falling, Ziffer pressed the emergency button, but she said it was difficult for her to communicate with security because the alarm — which was triggered by activating the emergency button — was so loud. Ziffer recalls a second alarm going off, though it remains unclear what caused it.

Two security guards attempted to pry open the elevator doors once the elevator hit the basement the first time, but were unsuccessful. After being trapped in the malfunctioning elevator while it went back up to the first floor and fell again, Ziffer found herself situated “somewhere in between the first floor and the basement.” At that point, Ziffer reported, security called the FDNY, and they arrived a few minutes later. The FDNY then successfully freed her by reaching the stuck

elevator from the basement and instructing her to climb down.

Following the elevator incident, Ziffer’s parents reached out to Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel, who, according to Ziffer, called back within 24 hours to discuss the matter. Assistant Dean of Students Dr. Sara Asher also called Ziffer to inquire about her wellbeing. “They were both very very helpful,” Ziffer said. “Obviously, this was not a good situation to be in, but I think they handled it as positively as it could have been.”

“This was a scary experience,” remarked Ziffer, but she stressed that Nissel, Asher and security handled it in a “caring” way. The elevator in Brookdale has been operating smoothly since the incident.

This event follows a series of elevator-related issues on both campuses in the 2019-20 academic year. In May 2019, a Beren student experienced an elevator free-fall in Brookdale, resulting in a minor concussion. In November 2019, a Beren student free-fell in a malfunctioned elevator in Stanton Hall on the Beren Campus. The following month, The Commentator reported that YU had been issued dozens of building code violations — largely stemming from elevator issues on both campuses — over the previous three years. In January 2020, seven male students were briefly trapped in an elevator in Morgenstern Residence Hall on the Wilf Campus, which also led to an FDNY rescue. These incidents were widely reported and sparked calls for action by students.

Last June, in the Fall 2020 reopening handbook, the university claimed that they had been “doing significant work on the elevators over the past few months.” It is unclear what, if anything, took place to repair broken elevators and ensure student safety.

As of publication, Chief Facilities & Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum did not return a request to comment on the latest elevator incident.



A photo taken by the trapped student during the FDNY rescue

DAPHNE ZIFFER

COVID-19 Cases Remain Low as NYC Gradually Lifts Restrictions

By JARED SCHARF

Since students returned from Pesach break on April 6, there have been only three positive cases on Beren and Wilf campuses, according to the NYS COVID-19 Tracker.

Previously, the lowest number of COVID-19 cases per week was four, occurring in the two-week period of Jan. 7 - Jan. 20. Since students returned to campus in

late October, there have been a total of 154 positive cases and 18,863 tests administered. The peak of positive cases was 28 between Jan. 16 - Jan. 29.

On April 5, Vice Provost of Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel emailed all students that the Weisberg Commons — located on the ground floor of Belfer Hall — on Wilf Campus would become a vaccination site for the general public with appointments through NYC’s system. The site began operations on April

7. The email averred that “the University is only providing space and has no part in the operation of the site. So please bear in mind that access to appointments at this site will be subject to availability and eligibility criteria as outlined by the City of New York.”

As of publication, Nissel did not respond to The Commentator’s request for comment.

In recent weeks, however, students have been able to walk in to the vaccination site and receive from the extra vaccines. Many

mass text messages have been sent out in YU student WhatsApp groups regarding availability of extra vaccines. On April 19, Nissel emailed students at 1:20 p.m. that for the rest of the day and the following day, “there is sufficient supply for walk-ins at the YU vaccination site (Belfer Hall) for anyone 16 years and older. For today and tomorrow, you do not need an appointment.”

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IN-PERSON GRADUATION

Continued from Page 9

health protocols such as social distancing, mask wearing and filling out health screening questionnaires, “regardless of location or scale.”

Many seniors expressed excitement at the prospects of an in-person ceremony. “This year has been anything but normal, and I’m so excited to have an in person commencement and be able to celebrate with my fellow classmates!!” expressed Beren Sy Syms School of Business President Alex Brody (SSSB ‘21). “A HUGE thank you to Aliza Berenholz and her team for working nonstop to pull this off on such short notice!!”

Beren Senior Class Representative Leah Joshowitz (SCW ‘21) was similarly thankful to Berenholz-Peled, the chair of the university’s Committee on Ceremonial Occasions,

which is organizing the event. “I know this year has thrown a lot of curveballs so I am very appreciative for everything Aliza and the entire University Events team has done and continues to do to make an in-person graduation a reality!” said Joshowitz.

“A ceremony that highlights our values and celebrates your achievements and resilience is best done in-person.”

President Ari Berman

Benji Halpern (SSSB ‘21), the Wilf senior class representative, likewise stated, “Decisions like these show students that the administration actually listens and is willing

to work for and with students.”

Yeshiva University’s graduate schools — including the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, the Wurzweiler School of Social Work and the Katz School of Health and Science — still plan to hold their commencement

ceremonies in fully virtual formats.

Currently, several other New York-based universities are continuing with their plans to hold virtual commencement ceremonies,

including Columbia University, New York University, Hunter College and Baruch College.

Some students previously appealed to the university administration to consider holding an in-person ceremony. When students were first informed that commencement exercises would be held virtually, Yeshiva Student Union President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB ‘21) requested approval from the Office of Student Life for an in-person graduation ceremony at Votee Park in Teaneck, NJ. While his specific request was denied, an in-person ceremony is now being planned.

36 Hours of Giving Campaign Raises Over \$2 Million With 613 Donors, Surpassing Financial Goal With Fewer Expected Donations

By RIKKI KOLODNY

Yeshiva University's 36 Hours of Giving fundraising campaign — which began on April 21 at 8:00 a.m. and ended on April 22 at 8:00 p.m. — raised \$2,119,870 from 613 donors. The university's goal was to raise \$1 million, which would be matched to reach \$2 million by an anonymous donor, and 800 donations.

Donors had the option of directing their contributions to a number of different causes across the university's

undergraduate and graduate programs, including Student Scholarships, Student Experiences, Improved Facilities and Technologies, Cardozo School of Law, Covid-Related Health and Safety Costs and Faculty Development and Research.

416 donations totaling \$1,246,940 were directed to Student Scholarships, 61 donations totaling \$514,228.54 were directed to Student Experiences, and 22 donations totaling \$206,292 were directed to Improved Facilities and Technologies. Cardozo School of Law received \$142,700.18 from 89 donors, Covid-Related Health and Safety Costs received \$4,650 from 25 donors and Faculty

Development and Research received \$3,318 from 11 donors.

Included in a subcategory under Student Experiences was the Senior Class Gift, for which members of the Class of 2021 were encouraged to donate \$20.21 or make a five-year commitment totaling \$360. As a thank you to each senior who made a minimum donation of \$20.21, the campaign offered a special thank you gift designed specifically for alumni. This campaign received a total of \$1,519 from 11 donors, some of whom were not graduating seniors.

As per Adam Gerdts, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, the goal of the fundraiser was "to raise critical funding and engage our alumni, parents, friends, faculty, staff and students to strengthen YU for today and position us for future success." The campaign's main focus was to reach as many donors as possible. The percentage of alumni who give back to their school is a "critical factor" in the university's college ranking, Gerdts explained.

"Any donation regardless of the amount from a member of our alumni community is helpful to the institution," Gerdts added. "It's an indication of the community's trust and belief in the value of their own education; helping to bring that same level of educational opportunity to the next generation."

The 36 Hours of Giving fundraiser was centered around the theme "Deeply rooted, forward focused" and included a program with a number of featured speakers. The speakers included Director of Semikha at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, who spoke about Tzedakah, and Danielle Wozniak, Dean Wurzweiler School of Social Work, who spoke about the future and power of online learning in higher education. Additionally,

President Ari Berman moderated a discussion on antisemitism between Israel's former UN Ambassador Danny Danon and Hungary's Permanent UN Ambassador Katalin Annamaria Bogay.

Gerdts did not respond to The Commentator's inquiries as to how, if at all, the 36 Hours of Giving campaign differs from YU's traditional Giving Day.

The YU Giving Day initiative started in 2016 as a "24-hour blitz" to expand the university's donor base; the 2016 initiative raised over \$6 million. The second annual YU Giving Day, which took place on April 25 - April 26, 2018, raised \$4,538,697 from 3,004 donors, exceeding the original \$3 million goal from 3,000 donors. The main fundraising event was a telethon, which was run by student volunteers and university employees. In 2019, the annual YU Giving Day took place on Sept. 18-19. More than \$5.7 million was raised from 1156 donors, exceeding the fundraiser's \$5 million goal. YU focused this campaign solely on raising funds for student scholarships.

"Despite the challenges of the past year, Yeshiva University's fundraising success has been strong," Gerdts said. "Total Cash and Commitments to the University are ahead by 26% from last fiscal year, while Cash Contributions are up 19% from last year."

"We are incredibly grateful to our alumni, parents, students and friends who participated in the 36 Hours of Giving campaign," Berman told The Commentator. "Every gift serves as an affirmation of the impact Yeshiva University has on our community and strengthens our mission of educating our students, the leaders of tomorrow."



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

The message of the 36 Hours of Giving campaign was "deeply rooted, forward focused."

COVID-19 CASES LOW Continued from Page 10

On April 22, NYC officials announced that all NYC operating vaccination sites will begin offering walk-in appointments for all New Yorkers, including those who work or study there, ages 16+. Three days later, on April 25, Nissel emailed all YU students that "effective immediately, the Covid vaccination site on the Wilf campus can accept walk-ins for New York residents, including students attending school in New York, who are over the age of 16."

The site is open Sunday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is expected "to run through June."

Due to the decreasing number of cases in YU and in the United States, YU has been lifting restrictions as well. On April 12, Rabbi Joshua Weisberg, senior director of student life at YU, emailed Wilf and Beren undergraduates that students would be able to start eating in pods of up to six on Shabbat as opposed to the previous socially distant two per table.

Additionally, on April 22, President Ari Berman notified the undergraduate student body that "in light of the recent changes in the directives from the Governor's office, [the 2021] graduation will be held in person!" Details are still being finalized for an outdoor venue in NYC on May 26. In addition, there will be a livestream of the event for those who cannot attend in person.

"More details will be forthcoming in the next few days, but I wanted to share this exciting news with you personally for you to reserve the date," Berman wrote in the email.

On April 28, Berman announced that full in-person instruction and operation will return to Yeshiva University for Fall 2021. The university will require all returning students in graduate and undergraduate schools to be fully vaccinated by the opening of the fall semester. Berman said that

more information will be coming out in the coming weeks.

COVID-19 tests are still required twice a week on both Wilf and Beren campuses, and "at the present time, receiving the vaccine does NOT exempt you from our Covid Monitoring Program," according to

the biweekly COVID-19 testing reminder email from Nissel. Additionally, YU's Code of Behavior, which includes wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and filling out the daily health screen at yu.edu/covid19 is still in effect for vaccinated students.



Extra vaccines from the vaccination site were available without an appointment to all YU students.

YOSEF LEMEL

100th Commentator Editor-in-Chief Announced for Volume 87

By **SAMMY INTRATOR**

Sruli Fruchter (YC '22), current senior news editor for The Commentator, has been selected as the 100th editor-in-chief of The Commentator by outgoing Editor-In-Chief Yosef Lemel (YC '21). The transition will occur after this year's final print issue is distributed on the Wilf Campus, which will most likely occur on Tuesday, May 4 or Wednesday, May 5. As of the time of publication, there are no plans to immediately select a managing editor.

Fruchter, a rising senior, is a pre-law student studying International and Global Affairs. He began writing for The Commentator in his first year at YU in Fall 2019 and has written 47 articles since. He was promoted to junior news editor in April 2020, and soon after, in May 2020, was offered the senior news editor position. Fruchter is a Dean's Scholar and a fellow for the World Jewish Congress. Additionally,

Fruchter is a co-founder and one of the heads of the YU Stands with Uighurs club.

Lemel told Fruchter of his promotion to the newspaper's top position on March 25. Commenting on why he selected Fruchter, Lemel said, "Over the past two years, I have been impressed by Sruli's work ethic. Though he had little editorial experience at the time, I appointed him as the senior news editor in May because I thought he had what it took to make the news section great. Indeed, he

"Editor-in-Chief Yosef Lemel's leadership was also amazing to work under; he left large shoes for Sruli to fill, but Sruli has large feet."

Jared Scharf (YC '22)

did." He continued, "This year's news section, under Sruli's leadership, has regularly released high-quality and accurate articles on a host of issues. I am confident that Sruli

will continue maintaining a high level of professionalism and competence at the helm of Yeshiva's newspaper of record."

Jared Scharf (YC '22), incoming senior news editor and former co-editor with Fruchter, commented as well, saying: "Sruli and I have known each other since we were little. I was excited to work with him when I joined the team as a news editor, and am even more excited to work with him in his new capacity as Editor-in-Chief." Scharf added,

"Editor-in-Chief Yosef Lemel's leadership was also amazing to work under; he left large shoes for Sruli to fill, but Sruli has large feet."

Fruchter's parents were also excited about

the news. "We are so proud of Sruli. His dedication, commitment and love for YU is very strong," they expressed in a joint statement. "We know he will be an outstanding editor-in-chief and a welcome addition to the long, proud history of The Commentator."

Senior editors of the 2021-2022 board will include Jared Scharf (YC '22) as senior news editor, Daniel Melool (YC '22) as senior features editor, Naftali Shavelson (YC '22) as senior opinions editor and Max Ash (SSSB '22) as senior business editor.

"For next year, I am excited to continue propelling The Commentator's growth in serving the YU community," shared Fruchter. "We hope to broaden our coverage and staff — in all sections — to include our fellow students on the Beren Campus. The Commentator is seeking to further strengthen and enhance each of its sections in terms of quality, content and initiatives. I encourage all students, faculty, rebbeim and administrators to reach out to get involved."

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Creating Community During Covid — The Story of the Twenty-Somethings Minyan

By ADINA BRUCE

After living at my parents' house for six months, I, like many others my age, excitedly moved to Washington Heights this past August. As a young undergrad moving into her first apartment, there were many parts of living independently that I had to figure out, not least where to daven on Shabbat. Connected to that was finding a place that would feel like my community.

Washington Heights is blessed to be home to many minyanim, and in an attempt to find my place, I hopped around different shuls and minyanim, and yet I still did not feel like there was one minyan I could call my own. Therefore, I was very excited when, on Oct. 30, I received a text saying that some people were planning on having a musical *Kabbalat Shabbat* on our roof, but were looking for a minyan. With messages being passed around asking if men would be able to join, it was only two hours before Shabbat that the minyan was actually confirmed. With all the uncertainty of whether the minyan would actually happen, the final gathering, about 40 people, was a surprising success.

Inspired by the popularity of the impromptu minyan, the Twenty-Somethings Minyan (TSM) was born. Recent graduates Bella Adler (SCW '20), Ariella Etshalom (SCW '20), Miriam Schloss (SSSB '20), CJ Glicksman (YC '20) and Sophie Ostrow (SCW '20) make up the original visionaries and informal board who run TSM. The idea for the minyan came out of conversations held in shared car rides to Salanter Akiba Riverdale High School (SAR), where some of the founders work together.

The board members are familiar with

running religious programming for the YU community, whether as members on the board of the Beren Campus Torah Activities Council (TAC), being an RA or a Stanton Fellow. Living in Washington Heights newly graduated, compounded with the social struggles resulting from COVID-19, Etshalom expressed that the group saw “a need for young people to be able to socialize in some kind of communal way, and it seemed the best option to do that would be through Tefillah.”

Now, six months later, TSM has grown into a fully functional minyan. Sign-up forms are sent out every Wednesday night

dvar Torah, alternating between men and women each week; per TSM “shtick” rules, the *dvar Torah* must include a song lyric.

As of now, TSM only meets Friday night, but there has been other programming created in order to make TSM into more of a community. So far, TSM has run a *Tu B'Shvat* Oneg in a Bag, a mishloach manot drive and a chess event. TSM also participated in a community-wide Yom Hashoah and Yom Haatzmaut celebration run by the Y of Washington Heights and Inwood. Although programming is currently restricted due to COVID-19, Etshalom expressed that bigger events are being planned for TSM as life be-

she appreciates TSM because it “provides a uniquely warm atmosphere in the heights.” Elaborating further, she explained “As someone who is very community-oriented that graduated college virtually, it was quite isolating in the beginning of the year finding my place in Washington Heights, a new neighborhood for me. TSM, which is comprised of both old and new friends, helped with this transition exponentially.” TSM is open to all undergraduates, graduates, YU affiliated and not, and even non “twenty-somethings” attend.

While creating a new community is challenging at the best of times, making one in the midst of a global pandemic is even more so. The success of TSM, despite the challenges, is a testament to the power of what can happen when a group of individuals comes together for a common cause.

Reflecting on what she learned from this experience, Adler commented, “I learned that we can create a warm space even in a densely urban area. I learned that young professionals need community and that communities need people to step up. I learned that especially during times of transition, uncertainty, and world chaos, recent grads are looking for Jewish connection.” Going further, she concluded, “Now, perhaps more than ever, people are looking for meaning, they are looking for a “chevra”, and they are looking for spaces to find each other. What a blessing it is that together, we can create those spaces.”

Editor's Note: Anyone interested in joining TSM is encouraged to reach out to Ariella at ariellaetshalom@gmail.com.

The success of [The Twenty-Somethings Minyan], despite the challenges, is a testament to the power of what can happen when a group of individuals comes together for a common cause.

on the TSM Whatsapp group at exactly 7 p.m.; within two minutes the form is closed, though a waiting list is kept open. Moving from the aforementioned roof, the minyan is now held on the fifth floor of the Sherk Shul. On Thursday evenings, the board members set up the minyan, seating as many people as possible, with roommates sitting in pods while all others sit six feet apart. Attendants are notified of seating with a card of their name on a chair, in addition to a confirmation text that is sent out. Currently, the record for the most number of seats set up is 73.

Much of davening is musical, with someone davening *Mincha*, and someone else doing *Maariv* and *Kabbalat Shabbat*. Afterward, a community member will say a

gins to return to some normality. “We would love some shabbatonim and community meals, shiurim and plan on offering more programming, not just Tefillah, that build up our community,” she said.

As the name suggests, TSM aims to service the “twenty-something” demographic living in Washington Heights. Members include current Yeshiva University undergraduates such as Yaakov Weider (YC '23), who told *The Commentator* that he enjoys attending as “it’s so great to be at a minyan with amazing ruach but also to be able to see friends and make new friends which has definitely been harder in a Covid era.”

Other attendants include recent graduates such as Sara Schatz (SCW '20), who said

TWENTY
SOMETHINGS
MINYAN

From the YSU President's Desk: Why I Love YU

By ZACHARY GREENBERG

As my time at Yeshiva University nears a close, I wanted to reflect on my experiences and share some of the highs and lows of my time at YU. I believe I am the first two-term YSU President in history, having taken over in January 2020 when former YSU President Ariel Sacknovitz (SSSB '20) stepped down. I'm currently the only student council president who served as president during "normal" times before the pandemic, but more on that later.

My YU journey began Post-Pesach 2018. I came fresh off the Yachad Cruise Boat to Greece/Cyprus and nearly two years in Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh. From my first day, I had one goal: to join the YU Cross Country team. I found out the captain's number and texted him my running personal records and he was impressed. I had a private tryout with the captains and ran three miles in about 19-and-a-half minutes and became a member of the team — mission accomplished. I became very close to the guys on the Cross Country team and it has been my favorite part of YU.

Shortly after that experience, I became addicted to what is known as "Y-studs": all-day, dozens of emails talking about cool events on campus. I've always been a "do-first, think later kind of guy." One day, I noticed during student council elections for the spring that no one was running for YSU VP of Clubs. So, I figured why not try

to win as a write-in. That day I posted in a bunch of WhatsApp groups and bothered some friends to write me in as their preferred candidate. With only being on campus for around two weeks and not knowing most of the students, I ended up receiving 23 votes, above the minimum 20 required to win as a write-in. But Josh Aranoff (YC '19) got 24. That was a heartbreaker.

The following fall, I returned to YU for my first full semester. One of the most underrated parts of being a student-athlete is the training week before school. YU takes all of the fall sports teams from both Wilf and Beren down to Maryland at a sleepaway camp called "Camp Airy." That still is the best week of my time at YU and it was worth joining a fall team just for that. We would wake up at 6 a.m., do a run workout, eat an amazing breakfast of omelets, cereal, waffles, chocolate milk and more, then we would ice our legs and chill for a few hours, then a second run-workout, ice our legs and chill some more, and then watch movies together in the theatre room. It was amazing and had great co-ed vibes! It was like being a camper in a sleepaway camp all over again!

In October of that year, I decided to try again to run for student council and I signed up to run for YSU Sophomore Representative. I was up against three other candidates and some of my friends told me I wouldn't have a chance of winning and that I shouldn't try. That only motivated me to campaign harder. I put flyers up everywhere, texted my friends individually, and walked

up to students to ask them to vote for me. I wasn't going to risk losing by one vote again. This time I thankfully got 68 votes, beating the guy in second place by a margin of 48.

Throughout my time at YU, I've experienced a lot that YU has to offer. I participated in Torah Tours where I went to Memphis Tennessee. I went with YUPAC to lobby for Israel in Washington DC in November 2019. I was on the Yoms Committee my first year. In January 2020 I went on the Rensop High-Tech Israel Trip where several of my peers and I spent the week in Israel visiting incredible Israeli companies. I became a writer for The Commentator and the YU Observer. I was also a resident advisor for a semester. Yes, that was me and not the terrorist Zack Greenberg. I attended Minyan Men three times, including throwing the first-ever Wilf floor party Shabbaton on Beren by reserving all 10 minyan men spots. One of my favorite parts was being the Stage Lighting director for the YCDS play, "Duck Hunter Shoots Angel." It was an easy two-credit "A," and Yaakov Siev, the star of the play, had me in tears at each performance.

My point is, YU was unreal. It's so much fun and offers so many unique opportunities. Then my life got really interesting when Ariel Sacknovitz stepped down and I, as YSU VP of Clubs, became YSU president after fending off my first of many lawsuits. That was amazing when I officially became president. Everyone on campus was saluting me calling me, "Mr. President." Life couldn't be better. But then COVID hit and YU shutdown.

It's incredible how in one day COVID just showed up and life as we know it has never been the same. I still vividly remember my last day in the Heights. Everyone was asking me when I was going to use my presidential powers to shut down YU. You could feel the atmosphere that everyone was nervous in the Cafe. With one message the next day, YU was shut down for the week, then until Purim, then until Pesach and then until October.

Like many of you, I was confined to my room over COVID. I remember during the early stages of COVID, YU kept sending out emails about Zoom training and Zoom this and Zoom that. I remember thinking, "Wow Zoom sucks!" One of my advisors and role models since my days in Moshava, Avi Schwartz (YC '14), who worked in OSL, asked me, "Zack, what are you going to do as president now that YU is closed? How are you going to help the people of YU?" For a few weeks, I didn't know the answer. People kept asking me what I was up to and I always gave a funny remark. Several people kept telling me that I should start a podcast about what I'm up to in life. I kept brushing it off, but I was intrigued.

My epiphany came after a Commentator's Purim edition article made fun of me and my story as a terrorist and it kept quoting me saying "That's good shtick." I do tend to use that expression a lot. After reading that article a light bulb went off in my head. I decided I was going to start the world's first Zoom podcast to help bring the YU

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Always good shtick

YSU PRESIDENT

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community together and help show students that Zoom can be enjoyable and I was going to call it “Good Shtick! With Zack.” I quickly designed a flyer and sent it to OSL and told them about my plan. Each episode would have a different guest student and we would have fun discussions, debates and challenges. We would reflect on our current COVID situation, our time at YU and more.

Before the first episode on Monday, March 16, 2020, I remember being terrified that no one would show up and it would be a complete bust. People would just chaff me for even attempting such a crazy idea. A few minutes before the episode began, I was pacing back and forth in my room super nervous feeling like I was about to vomit. I got a call from my friend Aaron Wruble (SSSB ‘21) who said to me, “Hey Zack. I’m trying to get onto your show, but I can’t. It’s maxed out.” Before the episode even began the Zoom maxed out at 100 students. I couldn’t believe it. That was one of the best moments of my life.

The first episode was fun and I got a lot of positive feedback. In the next episode, I wanted to bring in a female guest and invited Ariella Etshalom (SCW ‘20). In advance of episode three I asked my friend Yael Feder (SSSB ‘20) to join and invite one of her female friends as well. She said she had this friend Ahuva Wakschlag (SSSB ‘20) and she would be interested in joining. I responded, “That’s a nuts last name. She’s gotta change it Zackshlag.” On Wednesday, March 18, Ariella and Ahuva, as a joke, decided to video call me to interrogate me about why I wanted them on my show. We ended up chatting

and joking around. Ariella thought Ahuva and I would make a cute couple so, after 10 minutes, she left the video chat leaving me alone with Ahuva. I’ll be honest, I thought Ahuva was very cute from the start and I decided to stay on and joke around with her. I figured I was probably never going to see her again anyways. We ended up talking for another 30 minutes and then texted the next few days. I asked her out that Sunday and she said yes! We did our episode of Good Shtick! that Monday and began Zoom dating for two months without meeting. She lived in Silver Spring, Maryland, and I lived in Bergenfield, New Jersey. Finally, on May 14, Ahuva came to Teaneck and stayed by her sibling, and we met in person at long last. Thankfully, Ahuva and I got engaged last November and are G-d willing getting married on June 13.

Even though I no longer host Good Shtick!, I feel as though it never really ended. I used to pride myself on knowing so many students’ names and being outgoing and friendly. I loved meeting new people and talking about anything from Star Wars, sports, movies, Torah, stocks and more. The past year has been challenging, for me even more so than last year. At least last year we were all in the same boat of 100% virtual. This year, most of us, myself included, are tired of virtual events after a long day of Zoom school and just want to be with others. I’ve been your student council president mostly remote; I’ve been to campus a dozen times or so. I don’t know many of the younger students and that stinks.

Thankfully, it has been a great year for

me and I’ve gotten to run many awesome programming both virtually and in-person. My favorite has been the Q&A sessions with various celebrities such as Hotdog eating Champion Joey Chestnut, NBA legend Amare Stoudemire, Youtube Comedian Ryan George, Stock Analyst Trey “Trades” Collins and Hollywood Director Saul Blinkoff. Shout out to the YSU VP of Clubs and my best friend Jared Benjamin (YC ‘21) for co-hosting those with me! Additionally, I’ve run a bunch of Digital Dov virtual trivia contests, concerts with John King and Simcha Leiner, and a virtual hypnotist show. In-person wise this year I’ve helped organize AMC movie nights, comedy show nights (shoutout to SJ Tannenbaum), bike trips, paintball, snow tubing, and hopefully more to come. It’s been nice, but it’s tough over Zoom and wearing masks to meet new people. Another big thing I pushed for as President was adding the Katz and Makor representatives to the student council. It has been especially a pleasure working with Makor Representative Akiva Sasson (Makor ‘23) in including the Makor students in more student programming.

With the COVID situation getting better and vaccines being rolled out, I hope you all can get to experience the same YU I had my first year and three-quarters. In normal times, YU has so much to offer and the experiences that I had are just a drop in the bucket. Every student has their story on what they love most about YU.

My advice to you is to try out programming, clubs or courses that interest *you*. Don’t just follow what your friends do. Take

initiative and try new things. That’s how I met my fiance, and we never would have met if I wasn’t bold enough to start my own Zoom talk show or if she wasn’t brave enough to join as a guest. My second piece of advice is to find your role models. That could be networking with YU alumni, your professors, your *rebbeim*, an older classmate or a guy on your floor. Pick and choose different aspects you like in their lives and apply them to yours. I’ve become very close with my *shiur rebbe*, professors who have helped me with figuring out my job situation, my Cross Country coach and previous captains, the housing team, Susan Bauer from my Rensop trip and the OSL team working with the student council. There are so many great people at YU for you to meet that can change your life. Also go to the Sky Cafe for lunch every day. There’s way better food there than the regular cafe.

With any position of responsibility and my *shticky* nature, I’m sure I’ve upset some of you before. I want to publicly apologize for any time I may have done something to upset you. Please feel free to text me so I can privately apologize to you. I tried my best to make YU a more awesome place, and I hope I have helped in making your experience better. To end off, as Lloyd Christmas said in my favorite comedy movie, *Dumb and Dumber*, “I hate goodbyes!” I hope this is not goodbye to any of you but more see you soon. Please keep and touch! *Au revoir* (until we meet again)!

Octopuses: More Like Us Than They Appear

By SHAINA MATVEEV

From the very beginning of human history, octopuses have been an object of fascination for mankind; this is no surprise. With their unique tentacles, uncanny flexibility and striking, color-changing capabilities, these members of the *Cephalopoda* class are truly captivating creatures. However, while these unusual physical attributes certainly make them unique, what truly sets them apart from their fellow invertebrates is their remarkable and surprisingly advanced minds. From demonstrating an exceptionally high level of intelligence, to utilizing complex systems of communication, to having extraordinarily well-developed memory storage and retrieval capabilities, the mind of the octopus is far more human-like than one would expect. Perhaps it is these similarities

to the human mind, in a physical body so unlike our own, that makes studying octopuses so compelling.

Among the numerous characteristics that make the mind of the octopus so remarkable, perhaps their single most extraordinary trait is their unusually high level of intelligence. Considered by many to be the most intelligent invertebrate, octopuses have been proven to be capable of solving complex mazes and tasks, opening child-proof pill bottles, using stones to secure the entrances to their dens and even using common marine objects as tools in ways that suggest advanced levels of planning and foresight, such as using coconut husks as portable shelters. These intelligent behaviors, together with their abnormally large brain-to-body ratio, have been used to support the view that octopuses are the most intelligent invertebrate,

comparable to human’s place as being the most intelligent vertebrate.

In addition to being exceptionally intelligent, octopuses are masters of communication. Through flickering and flashing colors across their skin, often in rhythmic bands and multidirectional displays, along with utilizing their skin texture and posturing, octopuses can communicate with fellow octopuses in an incredibly complex and nuanced way. In addition to being exceptional at communicating with others of their own kind, they are also very skilled at communicating with humans. For example, during experimentation, they have been known on a couple of accounts to toss subpar food through the outflow pipe of their tanks as a means of showing their researchers that they dislike specific foods, or sometimes even shooting jets of water at people, in an effort to communicate their dislike for them or to simply be playful. They are even capable of distinguishing between individual humans in order to communicate with them, a very rare ability among invertebrates and even among most vertebrates, as most animals cannot distinguish among individuals of a species that isn’t their own. Because octopuses are fairly asocial creatures, their uncanny ability to communicate with humans is perplexing and yet another attribute that makes studying them so fascinating.

Not only are octopuses exceptional communicators and incredibly intelligent, they also have remarkably advanced systems for memory storage and retrieval for an animal of their kind. Dr. Benny Hochner, a leading researcher of octopus cognition and memory, examined the mechanism for memory in octopuses and found it to be strikingly similar to the one in vertebrates, with their mechanism utilizing long-term potentiation of glutamatergic synaptic field potentials, quite similar to vertebrates like

us. In addition, they even have a form of both short-term and long-term memory, much like we do. Despite having evolved as intelligent creatures on a separate evolutionary path from vertebrates, including humans, the similarities between their memories and ours is quite mystifying.

Perhaps it is seeing a glimmer of ourselves, in a body that couldn’t be more different and foreign than our own, that draws us in and compels us to understand this captivating creature.

From being the most intelligent invertebrate, much like humans are the most intelligent vertebrate, to having incredibly complex systems of communication, which include the ability to communicate with people, to even sharing a similar mechanism for memory as humans, octopuses are far more like us than they appear. Perhaps it is seeing a glimmer of ourselves, in a body that couldn’t be more different and foreign than our own, that draws us in and compels us to understand this captivating creature. Through the continued study of octopuses, driven by this desire to understand their mysteriously human-like minds, humans continue to not only learn more about the octopus itself, but surprisingly, also about ourselves, as well.



Octopuses are more like us than we might think.

PIXABAY

A Brief History of the Last 36 Years of YU Macs Basketball

By ALEXANDER WILDES

In 1985, my father, as the sports editor for The Commentator, wrote an article detailing the first 50 years of Yeshiva University basketball. In order to continue the Wildes legacy, I decided to write about the years since then. This is a brief summary of the last 36 years of Yeshiva Maccabees basketball.

The 1985-86 season was the Maccabees' first year with a home gym as the building of the Max Stern Athletic Center had been completed. Led by backcourt mates Joey Eaves and Ronnie Schwartz along with brothers Lior and Ayal Hod, the Macs went 14-9. Star guard Joey Eaves wrapped up his YU career with 1,324 points. The next season, however, the Macs stepped backward, finishing the 1986-87 season with a record of 10-13. Yeshiva's Ayal Hod stepped up, averaging 19.9 points per game (PPG) and 9.5 rebounds per game (RPG) on an efficient 66% shooting, with older brother Lior averaging 18.9 PPG and 7 RPG on 45% shooting from beyond the arc.

Yeshiva bounced back in the 1987-88 season, tying the school record in wins en route to a 16-9 year. In his final season for YU, Lior Hod averaged 19.7 PPG and 10.2 RPG, culminating in being named the Independent Athletic Conference (IAC) MVP, and finished as the all-time leading scorer in YU's history with 1541 points. His younger brother Ayal had a fantastic season in his own right, putting up 19.7 points and 11.5 rebounds a game, and Yudi Teichman averaged 15 points and 10.7 rebounds per outing. With the loss of Lior Hod, the Macs regressed to 12-11 in 1988-89. Seniors Ayal Hod and Yudi Teichman led the pack, with the former averaging 22.3 points per game, (wrapping up his career with 1807 points, over 260 more than his brother Lior), while also grabbing 13.9 RPG, and with the latter averaging 18 points and 12.6 rebounds per game.

The 1989-90 Macs were led by junior Eric Davis and his 22.5 PPG, going 12-10 in a transition year for the team. The following season, the team's record improved to 15-10, with Davis again scoring over 22 points per game, finishing his career with 1008 points. Senior Jon Rosner averaged 16 points and 13 rebounds, while Israeli newcomer Miko Danan averaged 15 points per game.

The 1991-92 season saw former Yeshiva

League MVP Daniel Aaron join the squad, scoring 20.4 points per game in the 11 games he played. Miko Danan's 434 points paced the way for Yeshiva, whose 13-10 record marked their fifth-straight winning season. Sadly, this streak was broken the next season. In the 1992-93 season, the Yeshiva Maccabees went 12-12. Aaron and Danan led the way for the Macs, averaging 19.6 and 14.6 points per game, respectively. Aaron also grabbed a team-high 8.6 rebounds an outing.

The Macs returned to their winning ways in 1993-94, as the defense-oriented Maccabees went 12-10 on the season. Both Aaron (18.9 PPG) and Danan (12.6 PPG) scored their 1000th career points during the season. Following the departures of Aaron and Danan, Yeshiva somehow improved on their record from the previous year, going 13-10 in the 1994-95 season, while also

scoring charge was led by Yossy Gev and his 21 points per game average.

The Macs regressed to 13-8 in 2000-2001, though Gev was his dominant self, leading the conference in scoring with 20.8 PPG and scoring his 1000th career point in the process. Gev's scoring did not stop here, though, as towards the end of the 2001-02 season, he passed Ayal Hod for the all-time scoring record at Yeshiva, leading the Macs to their 17th-straight season with a record of .500 or better, as they finished with a record of 14-12. Jack Yulzary had himself an all-around season, averaging over 5 assists and 5 steals per game.

Sadly, this streak ended the following season, with the Macs only able to muster an 8-17 record without Gev. Star Eli Hami wrapped up his fantastic three-year Macs career being awarded the Skyline Conference's

Hoffman (13.1 points), both of whom scored their 1000th career points during the season. Also stepping up were Benjy Ritholtz (13.5 points) and Shlomo Weissberg (10.4 points, 9.3 rebounds). The ensuing season, Coach Jonathan Halpert's last, the team faltered to a 7-18 record. Newcomer Yisrael Feld paced the team with 16 PPG, with Ritholtz (14.5 PPG) and Weissberg (9.4 PPG, 9.3 RPG) producing solid numbers as well.

Former Mac Elliot Steinmetz took over the coaching reins in the 2014-15 season, ushering in a new era for Macs basketball — one of Jewish Day School recruiting and free-flowing offense. Senior Benjy Ritholtz (17.7 points) and junior Shelby Rosenberg (15.8 points, 8.1 rebounds) led Yeshiva to a 14-11 record, their first winning season since 2007. Due to the departure of the 1000-point scoring Ritholtz, Rosenberg's scoring output increased to 18.4 PPG in the 2015-16 season (hitting 1000 career points in the process), helping the Macs secure a 15-12 record. Building off of their newfound success, the 2016-17 Maccabees improved slightly to 15-10. Second-year player Judah Cohen led the team, averaging 14.9 points, while freshman Simcha Halpert (13 PPG, 4.8 RPG) and senior Michael Berg (11.4 PPG, 6.9 RPG, 5 APG) were major contributors as well.

The 2017-18 season changed the course of Yeshiva history forever. In the first half of the season, the Macs went 6-8, but with the arrival of Gabe Leifer (SSSB '21) from Israel in January, the team turned around completely, going 12-3 the rest of the way (leading to a program-record 18 wins). The team advanced to their first Skyline Conference championship (and won for the first time) and qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the first time in school history. Leading the charge were sophomores Simcha Halpert (YU-record 599 points, for 20.7 PPG), Bar Alluf (17.9 PPG), and Gabe Leifer (17.4 PPG, 10.9 RPG).

With 8 out of the top 9 minute-earners returning the following season, along with the highly anticipated arrival of McDonald's All-American nominee and D1 prospect Ryan Turell (SSSB '22), the Maccabees' future was looking bright. Led by the powerful trio of Turell (20.1 PPG, 5 RPG), Halpert (18.4 PPG, breaking the 1000 point plateau), and Leifer (18.1 PPG, 12 RPG, 5.4 APG, Skyline MVP), Yeshiva set their school record for most wins in a season in the second straight year, winning 19 while only losing 8. While Yeshiva made it to a second-straight Skyline Conference championship, their loss in the championship was a disappointing blow to the NCAA Tournament aspirations of the team.

After the bitter end to the previous season the Macs, armed now with high-flying freshman Ofek Reef (SSSB '23), were ready to win the conference once again. After losing the first game of the season to Occidental College, the Macs reeled off 29 straight wins, including the Skyline Conference championship and two NCAA Tournament wins (the first two in school history). Alas, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tournament was canceled in the middle, robbing the Macs of a chance to continue to make YU history. The Macs ended the season with a record of 29-1, and without the opportunity to advance past the Sweet 16. Turell had the best individual season in school history, scoring 646 points (for a 23.9 average) on 63% shooting and 46% from beyond the arc, culminating in being awarded the Skyline Conference MVP and being awarded a spot on D3Hoops.com's All-America First-Team. Gabe Leifer put up 16 points, 13.7 rebounds, and 6.6 assists per

Former Mac Elliot Steinmetz took over the coaching reins in the 2014-15 season, ushering in a new era for Macs basketball — one of Jewish Day School recruiting and free-flowing offense.

advancing to the second round of the IAC tournament. Barry Aranoff was the IAC Rookie Of the Year, leading all of Division III in steals per game (SPG) with 5.5.

In 1995-96 Yeshiva claimed a 13-12 record, their third consecutive winning season, with seniors Alan Levy leading the team in scoring and Barry Aranoff leading the defense, swiping 4.6 SPG. The ensuing season saw the Macs led by a new face: junior big man Joel Jacobson. Jacobson led the Macs in points (315, for a 15.8 PPG average), and rebounds (9.6 RPG), leading the team to a 15-6 record. In the 1997-98 season, Jacobson's last, he once again paced the Macs in points (20.9) and rebounds (10.7), finishing his career with 1330 points, and leading the Macs to a 15-8 record.

While some expected the team to suffer without the presence of Jacobson, in the 1998-99 season the Macs sported a 16-7 record. First-year Israeli player Yossy Gev was the scoring leader for Yeshiva, scoring 447 points in 23 games for a 19.4 point per game average. In the subsequent season, the Macs again won 16 games, this time losing 8. For the second straight year, the team's

MVP. Hami led the conference in scoring (and set the YU single-season scoring record) with 548 points, for a 21.9 PPG average, and averaged 5 rebounds and 3 steals per game. The departure of Hami gave way to new stars for the Macs, as the 2003-04 Macs improved to 11-14 with five players — Benji Golbert, Harel Vatavu, Yitz Ribald, Alex Lapidus, and Jack Yulzary — all averaging over 8 points per game.

The succeeding season saw the record flipped, as Yeshiva went 14-11 in 2004-05, with Roy Goldstein leading the Skyline Conference in scoring with 21.5 (earning a spot on the All-Conference First-Team). The 2005-2006 season saw familiar faces become leaders, as third-year players Itzy Ribald (14.4 PPG) and Harel Vatavu (12.5 PPG, 5.4 RPG) lead a balanced Yeshiva team to a 13-12 record. In the following season, the fourth and final years for Vatavu and Ribald, the Macs went 15-11 as both seniors crossed the 1000-point plateau.

After three straight winning seasons, the Macs regressed to 11-16 in the 2007-08 season. The Macs, led by Skyline Rookie Of the Year (and Skyline Conference First-Team honoree) Zack Gordon's 20.2 points and 7.5 rebounds a night, advanced to their second-ever Skyline Conference semifinals. With Gordon's departure the following year to D1 UPenn, Yeshiva relied on D2 Barry University transfer and Buenos Aires native Martin Leibovich, who in turn averaged 18.1 PPG and 6.8 RPG. However, the team as a whole struggled, managing to go only 7-17 in the 2008-09 season. The team improved the subsequent season to 12-14, with Leibovich leading the team again in points and rebounds, with 15.8 and 7.4, respectively.

The Macs were without Leibovich in the 2010-11 season, dropping to 7-18 without his presence. Dovie Hoffman stepped up for Yeshiva, averaging 15.4 points, 7.1 rebounds, and about a steal and a block a game. Gil Bash chipped in with 13 PPG and Omer Haim dishing out 6.3 assists per game (APG). The next season was the worst season in 30 years for Yeshiva, as they were only able to muster a 5-20 record in 2011-12. Once again, Hoffman, Bash and Haim led the offense, with Hoffman averaging 14.7 points and 7.1 rebounds, Bash putting up 10.5 points and Haim averaging 6.2 assists.

The 2012-2013 season saw the Macs improve to 11-16, a big jump from the previous season. The team was led by seniors Bash (15 points, 5.7 assists) and



The Macs are an integral part of YU's history.

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We Asked, Y(O)U Answered

One Last Hoorah

By DEBORAH COOPERSMITH

With the year coming to a close, another group of YU students are moving on. The Commentator reached out to graduating seniors to hear about their future plans, how prepared they feel, something they wish they knew when they first came to YU, what they're going to miss the most and who they would like to thank. The responses of six students are provided below.

“Stern was definitely challenging at times, but looking back I don't regret a thing.”

Tamara Kahn (SCW '21)

Tamara Kahn (SCW '21)

Major: Biology

Future Plans: Columbia Dental School

“I wish I knew to not feel discouraged by certain scores on exams. For graduate school applications, it is important to apply with the best possible grades, but they also recognize that their applicants are human and do not expect them to be perfect. Besides, there are plenty of other sections to the application and one test grade will probably not have a major impact. Additionally, I wish I knew about running along the East River sooner because that was an amazing part of living in Midtown and attending Stern.

“What I will miss the most about YU are the opportunities I had to be a student leader and be involved in so many organizations that interested me, while never having to compromise my Judaism. I was really able to divide my time between academics and extracurricular activities, and they were great ways to make friends and have an outlet from school work, while making a difference on campus and even the greater YU community.

“I would like to thank Dr. Babich, chair of the Biology Department and the Genetics professor at Stern, for mentoring me and knowing what was best for me, and of course, always offering me Dum-Dum lollipops in his office or KitKats during exams.

“I am really happy with my decision to attend YU. I tried to make the most of my experience and get involved on campus, and I think that choice really impacted my day-to-day life at Stern and gave me other areas to invest my time and effort besides academics. I also appreciated my courses and professors, and the fact that we had a Microbiology Chanukah party was really memorable. Stern was definitely challenging at times, but looking back I don't regret a thing.”

Benjamin Goykadosh (YC '21)

Major: Physics

Future Plans: YU Master's Program

“Many of my courses emphasized how ideas worked and allowed/encouraged me to explore them further in projects and research. I believe my classes taught me how to think and gave me an incredible foundation for my future.

“This might be very specific to physics but talk to your professors. There is only so much they can teach during class and only so much you can learn. In class, you often learn the basics and some advanced ideas. Asking professors more advanced questions,



The Commentator reached out to graduating seniors.

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

even after class for a few minutes, were some of the most informative parts of my courses.

“In terms of people I am thankful for, the obvious answer is my friends. Yet, I also recognize the importance my professors had during my time in YU. I truly owe so much to them. I gained so much from them in class, but even more so in my relationships with them. I learned a lot by asking questions and then taking the time to answer them. Their passion for the subject helped inspire my own. I really enjoyed hearing them passionately speak about how Physics is interesting and applicable in life.

“I think the most important part is to always be curious. In YU this is especially easy. We were able to take interesting courses in so many different subjects. I hope I am able to continue learning and retain the curiosity that grew in my time in YU.”

Shifra Lindenberg (SSSB '21)

Major: Marketing

Future Plans: Job

“I plan to hopefully find a job at the end of the summer, maybe something in the fashion industry. Then I plan to go to graduate school.

“If there is anything I've learned it's that 'man plans and God laughs.' While I don't have my entire life planned, I have just enough planned to get me through one day at a time.

“I am going to miss the community of student leaders. I like being a maker and a shaker and I like to be around people who are like that as well.

“I'd like to thank my professor, Adam. He is the reason why I've become passionate about fashion.

“You are not as small and insignificant as you think. If one student is capable of shaking the student life on campus, just imagine the influence an organized student body is capable of..”

Shifra Lindenberg (SSSB '21)

“I wish I knew from day one how much trouble a student can stir up. You are not as small and insignificant as you think. If one student is capable of shaking the student life on campus, just imagine the influence an organized student body is capable of when they're not going at each other's throats because of election drama. Change is possible if you're willing to go through great lengths to enact it. You aren't just another Stern girl or just another YP/IBC/JSS/etc student on campus (see I didn't say YU and Stern). You're a whole entity and you can be a powerful force if you're willing to put in the work.

“Remember, all the confessions are submitted anonymously.”

Adina Passy (SCW '21)

Major: Biology

Future Plans: University of Texas Health School of Public Health

“I will be attending University of Texas Health School of Public Health to get a master's in public health. It is an online program that provides a foundation in all areas of public health, but will have a specific focus on epidemiology. I hope to use my MPH to be a better physician when I later complete medical school. I will also be a Graduate Assistant on the Beren Campus.

“I believe that YU has given me the knowledge I need to complete my path. I also believe that YU has given me access to connections from all over my future fields so that when the time comes I know there is a large network to tap into.

“I would like to thank Dr. Terry Dilorenzo. She went above and beyond the role of a mentor and helped me find my confidence in myself as a scholar. I would also like to thank Becky Ciment and the entire UHRL staff. Y'all have really given me the family I needed on campus and helped make my experience at YU so enjoyable.

“To FTOCs (First Timers on Campus) soak this time of your life up and really take advantage of being in NY. I didn't start enjoying NYC until I was in my second year and then it was taken away because of the

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Highlighting Diversity at YU: SCW's Mechina Panel

By SHLOMIT EBBIN

Nine Stern College for Women (SCW) students, from places including Kansas, Moscow, Lithuania, Rochester, South Africa, Panama, Uruguay, Illinois and Paris, sat on the third annual Mechina panel on Friday night, April 16. These students from all around the world presented their stories of coming to Yeshiva University and of their religious growth. Though told with different accents and coming from different backgrounds, each of the students proclaimed a deep appreciation for SCW and the Jewish community found at YU.

The panel took place in the Koch Auditorium after Friday night dinner and was moderated by Blaire Ellenberg (SCW '21), a Mechina student from Kansas City. The students on the panel began by introducing themselves. Each said where they were from and described the Jewish community where they live. Many of the students on the panel explained that they come from homes that ranged from traditional to secular, and several said they grew up with a strong Jewish identity.

The Mechina Pathways Program was founded 17 years ago by current SCW Associate Dean of Torah Studies Shoshana Schechter, who serves as the director of the program. The program serves to integrate students who did not receive a formal Jewish education prior to coming to Stern. Students take part in the program for two years during which they take introductory courses such as two Bible courses taught by Schechter, Introduction to Judaism taught by Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff and Hebrew language classes for three semesters. After two years, students enroll in regular Jewish Studies courses. The program also includes a *beit midrash chavruta* program, as well as several shabbatonim.

On the panel, the Mechina students were asked to name their favorite things about Stern. Many of the panelists responded with not having to compromise Jewish values and practices, as well as always having

available kosher food. Leah Schewitz (SSSB '23), a student from East London, South Africa said, "when I finally got to see what the Jewish bubble is like, I got to appreciate it on a different level because I know what it's like to stand alone. At Stern you realize how there's nothing more beautiful than a Jewish community and being surrounded by fellow Jews."

"When I finally got to see what the Jewish bubble is like, I got to appreciate it on a different level because I know what it's like to stand alone."

Leah Schewitz (SSSB '23)

Other questions asked on the panel included if there is antisemitism where they live, how they get kosher food and how their families reacted to their decision to come to Stern.

"I decided to come to Stern because I wanted to be in a small college where I would be able to grow both academically and spiritually," said Alex Tolmasov (SCW '21), one of the panelists who originates from Moscow, Russia. "I wanted to be part of the panel because it is an amazing opportunity to give a voice to people that are not part of the majority in Stern."

The panelists ended off by sharing with the audience what they want people to know about the Mechina program. Ellenberg said that it's important for others to know that many of the students in the Mechina program had to jump over hurdles to be able to come to Stern and she encouraged everyone to get to know the Mechina students and learn more about them.

Schechter continued that sentiment in a later interview with The Commentator. "We take Shabbos for granted," she said. "We take learning for granted. You see these students who are not only making proactive decisions but many of them are also really sacrificing and demonstrating real *mesirat nefesh* [self-sacrifice] to be there because

often they don't have the support of their family and friends."

After the panel, Office of Student Life Program Manager Marjorie Rasinovksy-Albert — a former Mechina student — shared her story of coming to SCW from Brazil.

"Being Jewish and coming from different places is not always the easiest thing and it's always very different," said Ellenberg. "I find

it fascinating, personally, hearing what it's like to be Jewish in Venezuela, in Panama, and learning about what their cultures are, how they've come to New York, what they've brought along with them and what they have learned while they're here. I think that this panel is one of the best programs offered on Shabbat every year and should be continued."

When asked how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Mechina program, Schechter shared that usually she hosts shabbatonim for her students at her house, but she wasn't able to do that this year. However, she expressed how amazed she is at how the program was able to thrive and the students were able to connect to each other despite many of them being off campus and not being able to get together for a Shabbaton.

"I was afraid that it was going to affect it in a big way because so much of Mechina is the connection that we forge with each other. Mechina is really about creating a community within a community because most Mechina students come to Stern without knowing anyone," shared Schechter. "What's amazing to me is the connection we've been able to achieve through learning Torah together even though it started out virtually and even though now half the class is still virtual and half the class is in person."

Many of the students in the Mechina program expressed their gratitude for the program. "The Mechina Program run by Dean Schechter is what made so many students coming from 'the outside' feel so welcome at Yeshiva University," said Jocelyn Cohen (SSSB '23), a student in the Mechina program. "Her classes are a chance to bond and learn Torah. There is absolutely no judgement. My Mechina class is my favorite part of the day. The students and faculty become a family. It is a great program to be a part of."

Schechter shared why she felt it was important to have this type of panel. "I wanted students from the outside, students who are coming from more typical backgrounds, to appreciate the diversity that we have at Stern and to recognize that there's such a value in this," Schechter said. "I think it's important for Stern students, who tend to be homogeneous, to open their eyes and hearts and they'll realize that these are students that are such a source of inspiration. And these students will not only not detract from their religious growth, but actually really enhance it when you get to know them."

"I have people coming up to me still saying 'thank you so much for doing this panel, it was very inspiring and insightful,'" said Ellenberg. She believes that it's important for students not in the Mechina program to learn more about it. "Just to hear from other students' perspective what their life is like at Stern is very eye opening and really is very important to broaden horizons for all students," she expressed.

"The girls in this community come from various countries, have different Jewish educational backgrounds, and a wide range of Torah observance," said Lexi Ruiz (SCW '23), a student in the Mechina program. "Despite these differences we are brought together by our love for Hashem, our eagerness to learn, and our desire to connect to Klal Yisrael."

SENIORS

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pandemic. Definitely take your studies seriously, but you will regret not having at least a little fun in college. Also, don't feel the need to stick to the same person you were in high school/seminary just because you have friends from those places in college with you. College is a chance to reinvent yourself, so do not let your friends from home keep you from becoming who you want to be in college."

Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21)
Major: BIMA

Future Plans: Business Analyst at Eillkay

"I don't think anyone is ever fully prepared for the future, but I think I did the

most I could to be prepared. Yet, the two things I wish I knew: 1) Buy Bitcoin 2) We grow up thinking that if you do well in school and get good grades then you'll be successful. That's not true in college. You need to do much more than that by networking, working on your resume, and practicing interviews. At least in business that's how it is.

"What I'm going to miss the most is being in an environment with so many friends. There are so many great students here who I've become close with.

"I'd like to thank many people who have been there for me in YU. Here are a few: Rabbi Weisberg, Rabbi Hartz, Rabbi Koenigsberg, Rabbi Feldman, Professor

Spear, Professor Rosenthal, Coach Jose Miranda, Coach Miy, Sharon Mella-Reyes, Mechal Haas, Jonathan Schwab, Avi Schwartz ... I could go on all day.

"I would tell new students to make sure to have fun and enjoy your time in College. It goes by quick and YU has so much to offer. If something looks interesting, give it a shot. Also, join the Cross Country team! Best chevra."

Ilan Marouani (SSSB '21)
Major: Management

Future Plans: Law School

"Law School is a new phase of my life and I realize that I can prepare as much as I want, but until I'm in it I will not know how

ready I am.

"I wish I knew which classes and professors were the best ones to take. I am going to miss the Athletics in YU.

"I would like to thank every single person who has helped me to come to this school, enjoy every class and sports event, enable me to work on campus and gave me the opportunity to achieve a few milestones in my life.

"For those who are just joining the YU community, enjoy every single thing you can. Go to an event that looks interesting, a sport that you enjoy or even just a fun shabbaton. Once you leave college you won't have that many opportunities to do all of this again."

MACS BASKETBALL

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game, being awarded a spot on D3Hoops.com's All-America Fourth-Team. Both Turell and Leifer crossed the 1000-point mark during the season. Simcha Halpert finished the season with a 16.7 point per game average, finishing his career second on the all-time scoring list with 1845 points (26 points shy of the all-time mark).

After the premature ending to the previous season, the Macs came back with a renewed hunger, desperate to climb to

the heights achieved the season before. Unfortunately, with the pandemic still in force, an NCAA Tournament was not to happen. Yeshiva attempted to schedule as many games as they could during the shortened season, yet with COVID-19 outbreaks and other logistical issues, the Macs would have their season ended without warning for the second straight time, playing only seven games, though they would win them all. This marked the first time in YU history

that the team would go undefeated.

By the end of the season, the Maccabees' win streak reached 36 straight games, tying them for the second-most straight wins in D3 history. In those seven games, Turell averaged a mind-numbing 26 points and 8.3 rebounds, Eitan Halpert (SSSB '21) averaged 18.1 points per game, and in what may have been Gabe Leifer's last season, he averaged 13.1 points, 10.4 rebounds and 6.9 assists per outing. Turell, for the second-straight year,

was nominated on D3Hoops.com's All-America First-Team, while Leifer was voted as D3Hoops.com All-America Second-Team.

While the past couple of seasons ended abruptly, with Ryan Turell and Ofek Reef leading the charge, along with D1 grad transfer Ethan Lasko's presence, expect the Macs to continue their recent stretch of dominance.

From the Syms President's Desk: 8 Things You Won't Learn In College (But Are Absolutely Essential)

By ADAM BARON

Disclaimer: I am 22 and have barely started my career as an adult. This is just a list of advice I have received over the last few years, and I am simply passing on the information to others in my own words.

1. Start Saving Now: The Power of the Roth IRA

Albert Einstein has taught us that the power of compounding interest is the eighth wonder of the world. While many of us don't have much income to be saving up while in college, any penny you can spare can have a *massive* impact and potentially change your life. If you have any disposable income at all, go to your local bank and open a Roth IRA savings account. Every year, you can put up to \$6,000 into an account — there is no minimum, so no pressure — that you can invest yourself or have someone manage it for you. You would keep this money in your account and add whenever you can. This account will ultimately continue to grow as you head towards your retirement, and when you hit the ripe age of 59.5, you can take out all of your money *and not pay a cent of taxes*. This works because the money you invest has already been taxed, so when you are in a lower bracket today, you will pay a much lower percentage now, and you can let the money multiply tax-free for the next 30 years!

Another point: While you can't take out your capital gains earnings until age 59.5, you *can* retrieve whatever you contribute. For example, if you put \$6,000 into your account in 2020 and make \$400 in profit, you can take out the \$6,000 whenever you want, so long as you don't touch the \$400 of earnings!

Note: The only reason to not initially invest into your Roth IRA is if your employer offers to match a percentage of your 401k contribution. In that case, you should do that before contributing to a Roth IRA. The employer's matching is essentially free money, so only after you max out the employer matching should you start putting your post-tax savings into a Roth IRA.

2. Start Using Your OWN Credit Card:

If you are using a debit card or still have a credit card tied to a parent's account, you may be shooting yourself in the foot. While there may not be anything "wrong" with not using your own credit card, you *are* missing out on building up your credit score. What exactly is a credit score? Glad you asked. Your credit score is a number that is graded between 200-800 that shows creditors how good you are at paying off money that you owe. This essentially shows them how trustworthy you are; a higher score will help you out later in life.

If you want to lease a car, the dealer will ask to see a credit score. If you want to buy your first house, the bank will need a credit score report to see how much they can trust you and how risky it would be for them to give you a great mortgage rate. This means that a higher score will be less risky for them, and they will be able to give you better terms on a loan, which can save you tens of thousands of dollars!

So, why start with your own credit card? Credit cards are one of the easiest ways to start building your credit, just make sure you can pay off whatever you purchase in a timely manner. Over the years, if you are responsible, you should see your credit score rise, which will help you in the long run.

Note: The issue with credit cards arises when you can't pay back what you owe, and you start to accrue debts that you pay interest on. Not only will this kill your credit score, but it will break your wallet as well. If you either won't be able to pay back what you owe or don't trust yourself to spend responsibly, maybe stick to a debit card until you feel ready to move to a credit card.

Another note: I started with the Bank of America Student credit card and have had nothing but positive experiences, as well as some cool perks (3% cashback on dining, 2% back on gas and 1% on everything else).

3. How Much Should My Rent Be?

This one is not as straightforward, but I will tell you what I know. Usually, the rule is that 1/3 of your salary should be going toward rent. If you are making 60k out of school, you should be spending no more than 20k per year on your rent (\$1,666 a month). However, this is not always possible for two reasons.

1. Not all of us are making enough money to do that.

2. Some of us live in extremely expensive cities, such as Manhattan, San Francisco and Boston.

So, what are the alternatives? First, when in doubt, find a roommate. A one-bedroom apartment may cost \$1,500, while a two-bedroom place might be \$2,200. This would mean that instead of paying \$1,500 a month per person, you can save almost \$5,000 per year and split costs of an apartment with a friend. No, this is not a brilliant answer, but there are some other tricks as well. You can find apartments offering a couple of months of free rent (especially during COVID-19) or find an apartment that someone is trying to sublease at a discounted rate. If you need to spend more than 1/3 of your base salary on rent, it isn't the *worst* thing in the world, but do your best to keep the number down so you can save up!

4. I Took Accounting, but How Do I Actually Pay Taxes?

If your taxes are as simple as mine, this question is not a big deal at all. This year, I had some income from an internship and made a few bucks messing around on Robinhood. I used TurboTax as a guide and the entire process was not just free, but also extremely simple and quick.

That being said, if somehow you have a more complicated tax structure — some fancy investments or carry in a fund — then you may want to think about hiring a CPA. For the 99.99% of us that don't have anything wild going on in our accounts, using the basic, free TurboTax website will allow us to do our taxes without too much hassle.

Note: I am very, very much not an accountant, so take what I have to say in this section with a grain of salt. For all actual accounting majors or CPAs, feel free to send me some more information!

5. Budgeting and Saving: It's Nerdy, but It Helps

It could just be my OCD, but I like to keep everything cleanly mapped out. If I am planning an exciting vacation, you had better believe I will have a full excel spreadsheet with all of my estimated expenses ready to

go. This also applies to my regular expenses. If you are always budgeting and planning, it becomes much easier to predict expenses. This means listing your rent, utilities, phone bill, wifi, groceries, transportation and a set budget for optional expenditures, like dining in restaurants and shopping. Make sure that you are spending a realistic and appropriate amount relative to your income.

Most wealth management advisors will tell young people to try to save 10% of their income every month. This number should grow to closer to 20% as you progress in your career and begin to earn more. Saving this money in a Roth IRA — see above — is a great way to make the most out of your savings. Additionally, for those of you who work on Wall Street, many say that you should use your base salary for living expenses and save that big bonus for a rainy day.

6. Efficient Networking: Don't Be Afraid to Reach Out

I am not claiming to be a master at networking, but I have learned a thing or two about networking strategies over the last couple of years. When you start getting ready for the job search, you should have a set method for reaching out. First, start with reaching out to any family or friends who are in the field of your preference. These are the people who are usually the most helpful and usually are willing to help to any extent that they can. Next, you can reach out to school alumni or "friends of friends" or people with a similar background. After reaching out to anyone in those categories, only then does it make sense to start cold calling or emailing people that you do not know. *Do not be afraid to reach out!* The *worst* thing that can happen is getting a response that they are not interested, too busy or no response at all. The *best*-case scenario is you end up making a great connection and they take you on as a mentee, give you great advice and help connect you to more people. The risk vs. reward when it comes to networking is an amazing tradeoff, so don't be afraid to get your hands dirty.

Another important point, when it comes to networking, you should be as efficient as possible; there should be a method to the madness. Make an Excel spreadsheet with the name of every person you talk to. You should include a name, an email address/phone number, a quick summary of the discussion as well as the date you spoke and the date you sent a follow-up "thank you" email.

Tips and Tricks for Networking:

1. Read a message three times before sending, and if possible, have a friend look it over before hitting send. You would be amazed to know how often people catch spelling errors or punctuation mistakes.
2. Don't put someone's email address into the email until the message is ready. This helps avoid an accidental send-off in the middle of transcription.
3. *Make sure you are sending the correct name to the right person!* Yes, this actually happens pretty often when firing off 20 copies of the same email to 20 different people.
4. Become a pro at sending out calendar invitations; it will make it look like you know what you are doing.
5. Always have three to four questions ready to go, but only ask them if it comes up naturally in conversation. If they ask "do you have any questions for me?" the answer should always be yes!



SY SYMS PRESIDENT
Continued from Page 19

6. Never burn bridges. Even if you absolutely bombed an interview, write a nice email thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. You have no idea when that person or company will pop up into your life again.

7. The Perfect Email: Short and to the Point

Let's keep this section short and to the point:

In the business world, emails should be addressed to a first name; call him/her by their first name and not Mr./Ms. BigBank. This applies 99% of the time, except for emailing a CEO or someone incredibly formal. Also, don't use "Dear X" or "Hey x"; finding the middle ground is your best bet.

Example of an appropriate email introduction :

Hi Karen,

I hope you had a nice weekend. We spoke last week regarding...

A few pointers:

1. Keep it short and simple. If you have to scroll down on an iPhone screen to read the email, it's too long. Don't say, "I just wanted to know if 'xyz,'" just ask the question!
2. See how I ended the last sentence with an exclamation point? Don't do that in emails. We millennials/Gen Z get made fun of for overusing "!" in emails. You can use an exclamation point if you feel it is necessary, but *please* refrain from using them multiple times in an email.
3. If you are sending a resume to a recruiter, the proper terminology would be, "I have attached my resume below for your reference/convenience".
4. Your emails reflect who you are as a person, so use spell check, reread them before sending, and please, for the love of G-d, don't use "texting language." You are NOT an MD and you *do not* have the right to "pls fix, thx" anyone in the office.

8. Professional Etiquette: It's Not Just for Professionals

Just some good "grown-up" rules I have heard:

1. When you first start in the office you should take it easy with bright colors, flashy belts or obnoxious shoes. Those can be reserved for the dates, but in the office try to keep it simple and conservative. No need to stand out like a sore thumb.
2. Try not to wear your AirPods in the elevator. If the CEO of the company walks in, this will be your one shot to say "hi" and introduce yourself... don't blow it by coming off as unfriendly.
3. When going out for dinner with the team, you can get a drink, but if you want to be respected by the more senior folk, do *not* be the one who gets too drunk. Save that for the bar when you are *not* with your MD or clients.
4. You are better off being a "loveable fool" than a "competent jerk." What the heck does that mean? It means that

even if you are brilliant, and the hardest worker, you still should be known as the person everyone wants to hang out with. If you don't believe me, read this Harvard Business Review article. Essentially, just be humble and good things will follow.

This article was originally going to be a typical end-of-the-year essay, but I really hope that the lessons I tried to impart are more valuable than reading me ramble about my time as a student leader. I truly had an amazing time at Yeshiva University, and I hope that I can help many future students when it comes to networking and professional life. As always, feel free to reach out with any questions, comments, or concerns. I am by no means an expert, but I am always happy to give an opinion and do my best to help.

Wishing everyone good luck on finals, and enjoy the break!

Adam Baron

President of Sy Syms School of Business Student Council

Animals and Activism: A Spotlight on the Zoology Club

By SHAINA MATVEEV

For students interested in zoology and conservation, there has never been a space on campus to explore those interests — until this past semester. While Yeshiva University has long had exceptional courses and clubs

focused on the life sciences, these opportunities have always been geared towards the study of the human body, with opportunities for those interested in the study of animals being scarce. Seeking to fill this void, Yitzchak Tollinsky (YC, '24) founded the Zoology Club, a club entirely focused on the

study of the animal world and its conservation, and in the mere three months since its founding, the club has already gained over 100 members, an impressive feat. From providing its members with informative lectures by exceptional speakers to giving them opportunities to go on exciting, educational trips to offering them a space to share and discuss their interests with fellow, like-minded students, the Zoology Club has done far more than simply fill a void.

At the start of the Spring 2021 semester, on March 17, the Zoology Club held its first event, the Zoology Club Meet and Greet. Joined by Zvi Teitelbaum, a lab professor at Yeshiva University whose specialty is zoology, members of the club had the opportunity to better get to know one another, while learning more about the role of the Zoology Club on campus. One club member who attended this event, described it as being "something different and exciting" and was "very much looking forward to what this club has planned for the future." From the start, the Zoology Club drew in its members through exciting events.

Following the Zoology Club's Meet and Greet event, the club hosted Dr. Jeremy Goodman, director of the Roger Williams Park Zoo and former director of the Turtleback Zoo, on April 21, to discuss how students can make a real difference in helping save our planet. From topics such as how to advocate for our environment, to how to make eco-friendly consumer choices, to even explaining the benefits of growing pollinator gardens, Dr. Goodman provided students with realistic, practical ways to make significant differences in helping save our environment from its current state of steady destruction.

At the Zoology Club's most recent event, held on Sunday, April 25, the members of the club were brought on a guided tour of the Bronx Zoo with Zvi Teitelbaum, who had previously volunteered at the zoo, to learn about the many endangered species kept here. Starting at the exhibit of the rare Komodo Dragon, the group of 35 students who joined the Zoology Club on this trip made their way through the zoo, having the opportunity to see the many endemic species of Madagascar, as well as the Malayan Tigers, the Père David's Deer, the African Lions and many more endangered, vulnerable and extinct-in-the-wild species. On this outing, students not only learned about these endangered species but also witnessed these

incredible animals firsthand.

The Zoology Club has also expanded its reach far beyond the members of the club, increasing environmental awareness across the Yeshiva University student body at large. Starting in early March, the club posted dozens of posters around campus on trash cans, persuading students to recycle plastic bottles instead of tossing them in the trash. In addition to increasing recycling on campus, the 13 members of the Zoology Club's board have many more impressive and creative plans for upcoming ways to even further impact the student body, including plans to distribute reusable bags and the prospect of creating campus pollinator gardens. Tollinsky explained to The Commentator that through these efforts he hopes to "bring a feeling of respect for the animal world and conservation into the forefront of the Yeshiva University conversation."

The Zoology Club was founded with a mission to provide students with a space in which they can delve into their interests in zoology and conservation and broaden their knowledge on these subjects.

The Zoology Club was founded with a mission to provide students with a space in which they can delve into their interests in zoology and conservation and broaden their knowledge on these subjects. From the informative Meet and Greet event, to the empowering lecture by Dr. Jeremy Goodman, to the educational Bronx Zoo trip, as well as to the club's active WhatsApp group chat with daily posts and ambitious efforts to spread environmental awareness around campus, the club has gone above and beyond in fulfilling its mission. In just one semester, the Zoology Club has already made a tremendous impact on campus; we can most certainly look forward to many more semesters like this one to come.

Shaina Matveev is a member of the Zoology Club's board.



BAILA LANDA

Members of the Zoology Club were treated to a tour of the Bronx Zoo.

Demystifying Academic Talmud: Insights from Rabbi Dr. Ari Bergmann's Courses

By YEHUDA DOV REISS

Hidden away in the vaguely named “Jewish Studies” section of MyYU is the listing for Rabbi Dr. Ari Bergmann’s course “The Formation of the Talmud.” This is a much more apt title than the “Rereading Talmud: Legal Sugyot” class, which I stumbled upon my first semester on campus, and ever since I began taking that class, I knew I had to share this secret with the rest of the student body.

Many have an instinctual aversion to anything with the word “academic” in it, and perhaps to the idea of academic Talmud in particular. This is not without reason; there are certainly academic Talmudists whose views are far from those of Orthodoxy, and there are certainly ways of doing academic Talmud which may be seen as speculative or dry.

But Rabbi Bergmann is neither un-Orthodox nor boring. On the contrary, he is renowned for the engaging *shiurim* he gives in his shul in Lawrence as well as in many other communities and venues, with a fiery passion, high erudition, and unmatched warmth towards all. An alumnus of Ner Yisrael and Chevron Yeshiva, a Ph.D. from Columbia and the CFO of a prestigious hedge fund, Rabbi Bergmann is uniquely positioned to offer this interdisciplinary and multidimensional class to a knowledgeable, Orthodox audience.

As Rabbi Bergmann explains, academic Talmudic methods help to supplement traditional learning approaches to offer a richer and clearer analysis of the Gemara, answering questions that one might have difficulty answering without its help. What are these methods? Checking *girsat*, that is, comparing different manuscripts of the Talmud to find the best version of the text, is one of them, and can be an important one; however, Rabbi Bergmann doesn’t focus on that specifically, which he will be the first to admit can be dry and boring. Rather,

he focuses on a completely different field of academic Talmud, that which primarily seeks to analyze the different parts of a *sugya* and their development in order to understand how the Gemara came to the conclusions that it did.

This requires, first and foremost, a clear understanding of how the Talmud was formed. To summarize the conclusions of his course (spoilers ahead), which is based on a variety of Talmudic sources with the aid of such pertinent works as the *Iggeret* of Rav Sherira Gaon and *Dorot HaRishonim*, the Talmud, like the Mishna and Braitot which preceded it, was (partly) an oral, standardized text that was taught and put to memory in the Yeshivot of Bavel until it was written down at some point in the Geonic period. This included the Amoraic statements — *meimrot* — and discussions. Yet there is also another large part of the Talmud, identified by its unique components: it’s written in Aramaic as opposed to Hebrew, it’s anonymous (meaning that it is just the “Gemara” speaking as opposed to a Tanna or Amora), and it can be discerned as organizing various sugyot, arranging Braitas, Mishnahs and Meimras in a logical stream with transitional phrases and additional notes, expansions and discussions of its own.

This element of the Gemara is referred to by some commentators as the *Stam HaTalmud*, and Rabbi Bergmann argues that it was never standardized in the way the Braitas and Meimras were. Rather, the *Stam* was a fluid text, with the students of the Babylonian yeshivot constantly adding to it and changing it and with different versions proliferating, all as the standardized text was simultaneously being developed. While the Talmud went through various stages where more and more of it became standardized — such as Ravina and Rav Ashi’s *chatimat haTalmud* — Rabbi Bergmann argues that the *Stam* continued to evolve. It was only once the Talmud was written down in the Geonic period that it was completely

sealed off, though early commentaries, like Rabbeinu Chananel, continued in the style of relating the back-and-forth of the Talmud with their own thoughts and interpretations reflected in the “Stam.”

Rabbi Bergmann’s course is just two credits, and is highly worthwhile for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of Talmud or in engaging with one of YU’s most fascinating and inspiring Torah UMadda personalities.

Understanding the formation of the Talmud is important for many reasons. For starters, appreciating it as an evolving, oral text with a tradition of interpretation helps one appreciate how the Talmud may often deviate from the simple meaning of the Mishna’s words. For while as a written text these readings may seem implausible, as a fragment of an oral tradition, it makes sense that something might be lost in transmission, and it is reasonable to use logical clues and other sources to help arrive at the most accurate interpretation. Of course, the student of Talmud will be sensitive to the fact that these interpretations are not taken lightly — they must be highly substantiated and are often subject to debate.

Furthermore, according to Rabbi Bergmann, understanding the development of the Talmud is crucial for appreciating why it is *halakhically* binding. While there are several approaches as to why later generations can’t argue with the Talmud, Rabbi Bergmann understands Rambam to be of the position that it is because of the massiveness of the Talmud project. The fact that all of

the rabbis of the time got together on such a scale, over several generations, debating, tweaking, and developing it together, means that it would be practically impossible to muster a greater level of authority to revise it.

Besides this point, in analyzing the Talmud itself, the student will gain much by identifying the various sections of the Talmud, from Mishnahs and Braitas to Meimras to *sugyot* to *Stam*. This will enable the student to appreciate how the Talmud got from point A to point B, as well as to better analyze discrepancies between different versions of the *sugya* as it appears in different places throughout *shas* and other places.

Through these methods, one might perceive that not every discrepancy or contradiction among different *sugyot* needs to be resolved; rather, different parallel *sugyot* may reflect different Stammatic traditions.

I was hoping to include an overview of the rich methods for analyzing *Aggadta*, or the competing Aggadic interpretive traditions through history, that Rabbi Bergmann taught in his “Rereading Narratives of the Talmud” course, but time and space does not permit me at this time. All I can offer is a plug for my forthcoming article on Rabbi Elazar Ben Pidas in the upcoming edition of *Kol HaMevaser*, which is adapted from my term paper from Rabbi Dr. Bergmann’s course and includes some of these methods in its analysis.

The course is just two credits and is highly worthwhile for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of Talmud or in engaging with one of YU’s most fascinating and inspiring Torah Umadda personalities. While my article offers a superficial overview of some of the main points of the class, for those that are interested in hearing more — or are skeptical and want to understand the basis for these claims — this class is a rare and unique opportunity. I highly recommend taking it.



Yemenite Jews studying Talmud

The Death of Privacy

By Zaelig Averch

While there is certainly a high level of value placed on academic integrity in our university, the question still exists: is it worth an extreme invasion of privacy? With finals quickly approaching, the anxiety that students have come to dread from this time of year has come unbidden as it has every other year. In light of all that has changed this semester, however, it hardly seems strange that that stress is also somehow different, tinged with an air of distrust unknown to our past. With remote learning has come the threat of remote proctoring, an evil that we have all encountered at one time or another.

Last semester, YU chose Top Hat for their remote online proctoring service. Proctorio, the Top Hat exam proctoring Chrome extension, is a reputedly toxic program with more one-star reviews than seems possible. To verify the slew of negative press, I took to their website to learn more and was shocked to discover what an incredible breach of security students have been confronted with.

Academic integrity doesn't have to be a battle between students and faculty as it seems to have been last semester.

All of the following information is logged by Proctorio and is stored live for six months and as physical backups across the U.S. for one year. It records your physical location, identity, mouse movements, webcam footage, eye, head, and mouth movement, your entire screen, every browser tab and all windows you have open, any website you visit, any other applications you have running, your entire clipboard and all of your keystrokes.

Of all the data being collected, keystroke logging, background application monitoring, and the record of the clipboard being taken are the most invasive. Do you keep a notes document with your passwords, credit card numbers or social security number? Have you ever copied and pasted any of it? All of that information is accessible to this

program.

One of the most dangerous things about this software is that Proctorio runs even when Top Hat is not actively being used. According to the Top Hat website, "the extension has to be configured to run on all sites in order to take a remotely proctored test in Top Hat." This fact, coupled with the logging of your keystrokes, yields an immense invasion of privacy. Imagine you finished your exam and went to make an online purchase, forgetting that Proctorio is still running. You have just unwittingly provided the Top Hat cloud storage system your credit card information, as well as the exact text of your search and the names of the sites you visited.

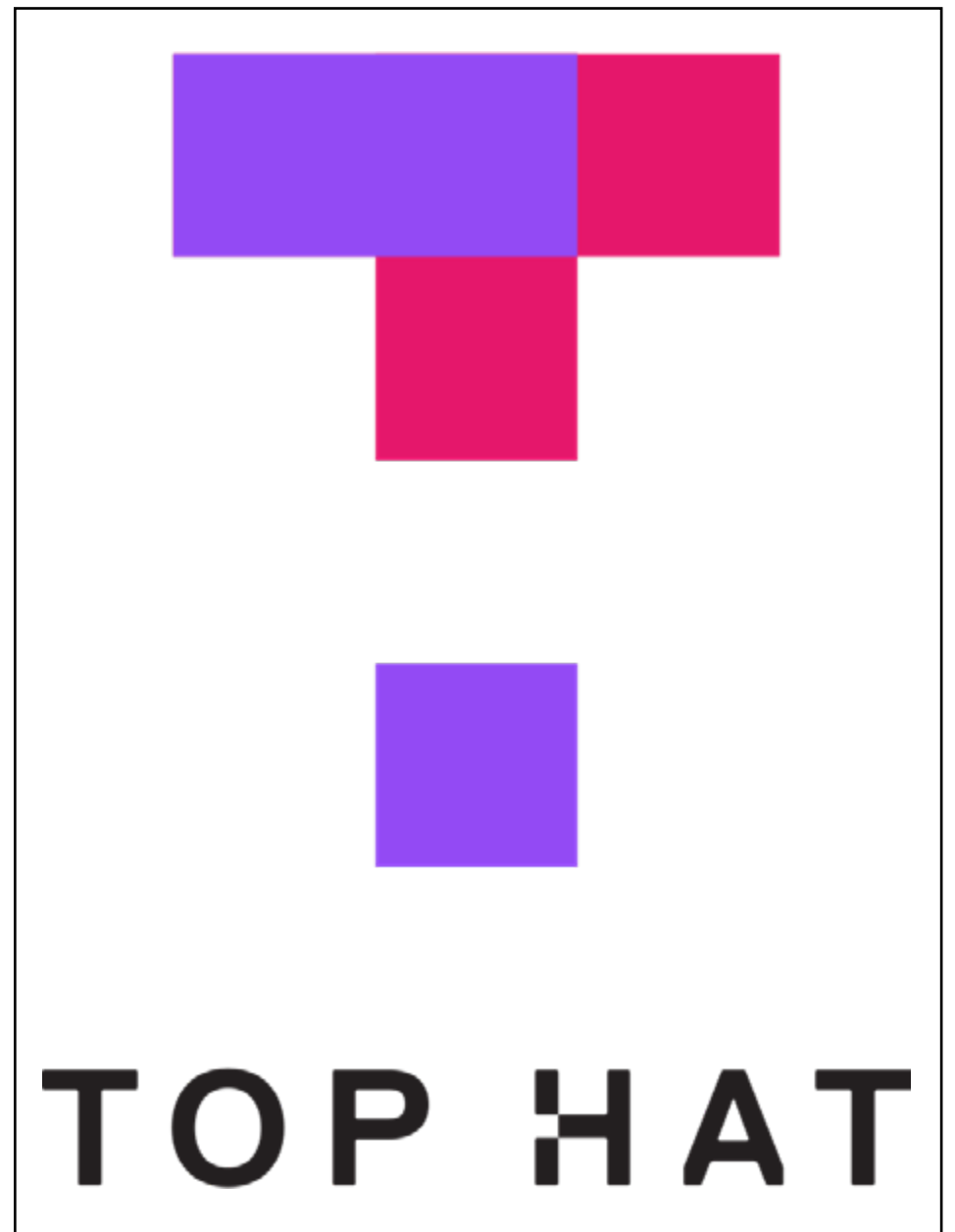
As we learned with the recent YU database identity theft scandal, even heavily encrypted data can be stolen. Even if the data being collected by Top Hat is truly inaccessible, there are other issues as well. The software itself is taxing on your computer, causing those with older machines to be at a test-taking disadvantage to those with newer devices. Top Hat also creates a toxic environment to take a test in. The constant implication that a distracted glance out the window is "suspicious" is an unwarranted addition to the already oppressive anxiety that we all feel during finals. Maybe you, like me, talk quietly to yourself while taking a test, or have difficulty keeping your hands on your keyboard for an hour straight. The algorithm is not human, there is no explaining your actions, and that thought is justifiably upsetting.

It is important to note that these programs do in fact adhere to a handful of privacy policies that make it more difficult, but not impossible, for your data to be accessed by third parties. I don't wish to characterize the YU administration as completely ignorant, when in fact, there are definitely worse options out there and many other universities are also using Top Hat or services like it. That being said, the issue of personal security is absolutely not limited to the possibility that the data that is being collected on students could be intercepted and misused. The feeling of disquiet that we all feel after reading the above information does not originate in a fear that our information will be sold and distributed. That feeling is caused by the fact that the collection is happening at all, and even more importantly, that we were not asked for our opinion on the matter before it was implemented. It is

akin to the feeling of horror everybody would feel if, while taking the subway to Midtown, a stranger took a picture of you. No matter what they do with that picture, the violation of privacy comes from the collection, not the misuse, of personal data.

As finals are once again rounding the corner, I urge YU and any other university using Top Hat to work with the student body to find a better solution. Academic integrity doesn't have to be a battle between students

and faculty as it seems to have been last semester. This coming finals season, many professors have already chosen alternative ways to test mastery of the material, including written assignments, projects and presentations. Hopefully next semester our on-campus experience will return to normal, but even after that, data privacy should not be taken lightly - just ask those who had their identity stolen in the YU leak this semester.



The Top Hat logo

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Motorcycle Races in the Heights: A Danger Not to be Ignored

By Ephraim Crystal

When I first witnessed a drag race down Amsterdam Ave. late one Friday night a few months ago, I must confess that I enjoyed it. With dozens of loud, unmuffled cars taking up both sides of the street, violently swerving around each other, and harshly screeching around corners, it was quite a sight to behold. However, having now seen — and heard — multiple motorbike races, which have been growing in frequency as the weather gets warmer, I have come to see that street racing, though sometimes entertaining, is almost always a public nuisance and even a danger to the community.

On a practical level, the noise generated by motorcycle gangs multiple times per day can be extremely distracting. This has disturbed my *davening*, Zoom classes and sleep. Other students share this sentiment. For example, Ezra Emerson (SSSB '23) expressed to me that he recently tuned into his Zoom class from outside and tried

to contribute to the class discussion, but his professor, as a result of the motorcycles roaring down Amsterdam, couldn't hear him and even muted him.

Hopefully, in the near future, this issue will be resolved and Amsterdam Ave. will be a safer street for law-abiding drivers and pedestrians alike.

But more significantly, these motorcyclists present an incredible danger to the Washington Heights neighborhood that must not be ignored. They often drive much faster than the speed limit and ignore red lights on a near consistent basis. On more than one occasion, I have seen motorcyclists swerve around pedestrians that were trying to cross the street. Frustrated drivers trying to turn onto Amsterdam are forced to wait

for their own safety even though they have the right of way. This is an accident waiting to happen. As Baruch Lerman (YC '23) noted, "there are small children walking around the campus area at almost all times. How long is it until one of these less skilled motorcyclists accidentally runs into one?"

While there is no straightforward solution to this problem, there are some obvious steps that can be taken. I propose that the NYPD — which surely knows about this issue by now, as the motorcyclists intentionally draw attention to themselves — should increase patrols around Amsterdam Ave. in the afternoon and early night hours. Additionally, traffic cameras can be installed in order to efficiently identify and apprehend the perpetrators.

It is important to note that neither this issue nor these suggestions are new. Last year, a letter signed by multiple people including Rabbi Dr. Berman, president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Josh Kahn, head of school of the Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA), and several local store owners,

was sent to the New York City Department of Transportation with similar proposals, including the creation of speed humps and enforcement of existing regulations that limit traffic to busses and local deliveries at certain hours, similar to the new regulations introduced for 181st Street on April 26 this year. The letter seems to have been ignored, as these changes have yet to be implemented. The situation thus remains unsafe and needs to be addressed.

I do not envy the role of the police; I don't claim to know what an officer should do when faced with a pack of reckless motorists numbering in the tens. However, I do believe these simple steps can help.

Hopefully, in the near future, this issue will be resolved and Amsterdam Ave. will be a safer street for law-abiding drivers and pedestrians alike. But for now, I'd recommend making sure to look both ways before crossing the street — even when you have the right of way.

On Expectations, Writer's Anxiety, and 7up/7down

By ZAHAVA FERTIG

I began planning to write this article in September 2020, right before we published the third issue of *The Commentator*. Now, in April of 2021, after completing my 7 up/7down column for the 12th and final issue of *The Commentator*, Volume 86, I have taken a pile of word vomit and concocted quite a stellar reflective piece (if I may say so myself).

I'm not an editor, and my official title on the masthead is "Staff Writer," so who am I, and why am I writing an opinions reflection piece in *The Commentator*?

Well that's an excellent question. And I don't have an answer for you. However, one day I received a text from the former columnist, who happened to know me quite well, in which she asked if I wanted to write the column for the 2020-21 year. After getting over the initial shock and confusion, I said, "why not?"

When I first accepted the position of writing 7 up/7 down, I was presented with two decisions to make. At the time they did not seem to be such a big deal, however, now, looking back, I realize that they have shaped what I've written and how I viewed my column throughout the year.

The first question I was asked was whether or not I wanted to have my name attached to the column or to write anonymously as had been done in the younger years of the column.

After thinking about it for a minute, I chose to have my name printed.

Writing anonymously can be a dangerous thing. It removes all sense of responsibility for the words printed on paper. Perhaps that is why *The Commentator* very rarely prints an article or comment by an anonymous individual. True journalism is about getting to the truth of the matter, getting down to the facts on the ground and bringing attention to something that your readers should care about. Writing anonymously, however, leaves less room for feedback or dialogue with the readers.

Having my name printed means that I have taken ownership of the words I wrote, of the people of whom I have poked fun of and at the institution that I've called out. In all honesty, having my name attached to the column gives me a confidence boost because people know that I wrote something that they enjoyed.

The second question took me a bit longer to answer. The question was, would I want 7 up/7 down to be published on its own page online like all the other articles would

be or just have it in the PDF. Also, while *The Commentator* has printed eight physical issues this year, it was unclear at the time if that would happen during Fall 2020 due to COVID-19.

I determined that I would only wish to be on the PDF and not on its own website link. This decision was twofold. First, I wanted to give myself more freedom to write while knowing that only those who knew and cared to look would find it. Second, it was important for me to remember that I was just a student writing a column consisting of 14 lines in a school newspaper. It really wasn't such a big deal, and it was important to me to remind myself this exact point. My proof came a few weeks ago when I wrote an opinions piece about why graduation should be in person and I got more feedback on it than an entire year's worth of 7up/7down, but I digress.

The insecurity of failing to be funny can be overwhelming, especially when you don't know how your reader will feel.

I often oscillated between feeling like everyone knew who I was and knew what I was writing about and then realizing that besides for the fact that that wasn't the case, it wouldn't even matter if students at YU were reading it or not.

It can be daunting to write "a humor column" in a publication that will be published, printed and available on the internet for the rest of eternity. The insecurity of failing to be funny can be overwhelming, especially when you don't know how your reader will feel.

Will they laugh with me or at me? Do

they understand what I was trying to say? Could they have appreciated the line better if I wrote it differently? And I can't believe I let that get printed without the comma! Now nobody will understand what I was trying to say! Why do I even try?

But how does one combat all of these feelings and fears of not being good enough?

It's at times like these when I remember what I'm doing and what I'm not doing. It's one thing to be a funny person, to create entertaining and original content. Getting the words right, the inflection and the flow of the sentences, the references and of course the order and placement of each individual line, those are all secondary.

When writing this column or anything that will be published, it becomes extremely easy to forget what the goal is. Why am I writing this? Who am I writing this for? What do I want the people who are reading this to feel?

And the biggest question to ask yourself: If no one reads this, will I still be proud of what I wrote?

My goal is to take a critical look at Yeshiva University, student sentiment, human interactions or current events and change the way that people think about them. I do go for the laugh when I'm writing, as anyone who is writing a "humor column" would, but it's more than that. My goal is to get the readers to find patterns and connections between seemingly unrelated things. It is to find the humor in serious matters and draw attention to the ridiculousness of the minutiae we experience on the daily. Humor is a defense mechanism, a weapon or a tool depending on how it's used.

But at the same time, for me, 7 up/7down was about being a relatable human being who tries to find humor in the events around me. In a Zoom Q&A session, Morning Brew, a daily business newsletter's writer, Toby Howell gave a piece of valuable advice as

someone who has to figure out how to weave humor and entertainment into serious and oftentimes very unfunny current events, all while writing for a massively diverse audience.

The advice he gave was to just think of a handful of people who you know will definitely be reading what you wrote, no matter what it says: your mom, a few friends, and that's it. When you write, write just for them. If they enjoy what you wrote, then there is a huge chance that the majority of those who are reading it will enjoy it, too. And, if there are people that don't appreciate it, then that's on them.

This advice was simple yet incredibly eye opening for me. Not everything is going to be a win. Not everyone will fully understand the layers behind most lines (perhaps that's a good thing), and it's entirely unrealistic to think that that would be the case. But if I keep in mind that I am just writing it for that intimate group of people who already believe in me and care, then it doesn't really matter what everyone else thinks. If they don't like it, I feel a little sad for them, and if they do like it, then that's just bonus points. And at the end of the day, 7 up/7 down is simply just 14 lines.

A common phenomenon that occurs at YU is that someone will approach a *Commentator* editor and pitch a brilliant idea for an article, but when asked if they want to write it they say "maybe" and then we'll never hear from them again.

Writing a paper, an article or even an email is not easy. My last piece of advice, which is really for myself but I figured that others could use it as well, is this: The only thing stopping you from writing is yourself. Sometimes you just need to open up a word document and stare at that blank screen in front of you. The words are in your head. You just have to pause in the terrifying silence and listen to your thoughts. You don't need to sound intelligent or witty in your first draft. Often, we are our biggest critics, constantly editing and revising because we don't think it sounds good or looks good or feels good. It's at moments like these when you need to remind yourself, the words are there, I'm just getting them out of my head and onto the paper.

I can assure you that the editors of the paper will guide you through the editing process and help you find the right words you want to say.

The goal is not to write perfectly, the goal is to get the words to say what you want them to and then the words will speak for themselves.



7up/7down

THE COMMENTATOR

Jewish Studies — A Talmid's Testimonial

By ZECHARIAH ROSENTHAL

I'd like to tell you a story, dear reader. It's a story of sincerity, a perhaps naïve optimism and my personal religious growth at Yeshiva University.

A deeply cynical author once wrote that a cynic "knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing." Errors and criticisms are unfortunately always easier and, in a sense, safer, to point out than something's intrinsic importance. The *Commentator's* recent editorial, which was assented to unanimously by their editorial board, forcefully and cogently criticized the administration's recent decisions regarding the restructuring of YU's Jewish Studies.

I was surprised to find in the piece, however, not a single direct argument for the

value of these classes. Instead, the editorial simply assumed their worth and just focused on policy critiques and historical comparisons, which, granted, certainly have their place in this discussion.

There are profound religious opportunities in YU's Jewish Studies that I sincerely believe many more students should capitalize on.

In this article, I come to offer something different. It is more vulnerable and personal, but I think that it actually bears immense relevance to any discussion about the role

of Jewish Studies courses in a YU student's religious and academic education, namely, my individual, and admittedly anecdotal, experience. My story, optimistically, should mirror those of many of my fellow students. I believe it, in fact, does. So, here are some specific, concrete examples of how YU's Jewish Studies classes have been deeply valuable to my own religious development.

Biblical Hebrew (Rabbi Jeremy Wieder)

Before this class, *Tanach* was a sealed book to me. Graduating at the age of 17, the New York yeshiva day school system left me unable to *precisely* read and translate a moderately difficult *pasuk*. I'm not here to comment on curricular or communal failures — I'm simply stating my own situation. My

Hebrew certainly developed a lot over my time in Israel: I studied at Har Etzion (Gush), a *hesder* yeshiva. Still, I never reached a state of comfortability with, let alone mastery over, the intricate language of *Tanach*.

This class changed everything for me. It was taught by Rabbi Wieder, who in addition to being a RIETS *rosh yeshiva*, is also an expert linguist and grammarian. He spent two semesters building our foundational Hebrew language skills, our grammatical sensitivities, and our toolbox of textual approaches.

I exited that class with a different relationship to *Torah she-b'chtav*. I felt like I could study any *pasuk*, in a precise, sophisticated, and ultimately more meaningful manner. I could raise grammatical questions, notice textual ambiguities and converse with

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Does the GA Care About the Wilf Constitution?

By DAVID TANNER

On April 25, four days before the Spring 2021 Elections are scheduled and students are to vote on proposed amendments to the Wilf Constitution, the Student Court declined to hear my suit against the General Assembly (GA). I sued the GA on Friday, April 23, because they illegitimately approved three amendments that the eight-member Amendments Committee (AC), which I chair, did not approve. This circumvention of the constitutional process is partially why I think all students should vote against them.

The Wilf Constitution clearly states that the role of the AC is both to propose amendments of their own as well as “deal with” student proposals (Article XIII 1[1]). The AC received a number of student proposals this semester, which we studied carefully. We ended up approving many of them which were referred to the GA, where they were approved and will appear on the ballot alongside our own proposals. However, we denied approval to a number of amendments (numbers 7-9) because, after careful consideration, we determined that they were not in the best interests of the student body. The text of these amendments follows:

1) Leave of Absence Permission

Add to Article VIII Section 5(1), XII

The General Assembly must authorize by majority vote for any official to take a leave of absence.

The General Assembly by 3/5 majority vote may file to the Office of Student Life to dissolve any WCSG club.

2) No holding two positions simultaneously

Change Article VIII Section 3(2)

No student may hold more than one position in YSU, YCSC, SYMSSC, SOY, or the SLC simultaneously.

3) Minimum student body vote needed to pass future Amendments

Add to Article XIII Section 1(6)

At least two-fifths of the student body must cast ballots, including blanks, in the General Student Body Amendment Vote for an amendment to be ratified.

The first of these amendments contains two unrelated clauses. The first clause requires the GA to approve any temporary leave taken by a student government official (see Article III Section 2[3]). We actually considered this amendment last semester, and rejected it because, by its very nature, taking a temporary leave is an extremely personal matter. Our student government leaders are extremely dedicated, and we did not feel that it would be appropriate to require them to reveal their (perhaps quite personal) reasons for taking leave. The second clause of this amendment gives the GA the ability to dissolve clubs at will. Recall that all clubs must be approved by the GA in the first place, in a process involving the collection of signatures and the finding of a faculty advisor. The AC did not think it necessary to grant the GA additional power to arbitrarily dissolve any club at any time during the academic school year.

The second proposed amendment is remarkably similar to an amendment the AC did approve; in fact, it takes a close reading to notice the difference. The AC's amendment (which was actually approved by the GA), reads “No student may hold more than one elected position in one of YSU, YCSC, SYMSSC, or SOY simultaneously.” The difference is that the AC's amendment only prohibits a student from holding two positions within any one of the student groups listed, while the GA's version prohibits a student from holding any two positions, be

they in the same or in different councils. In all honesty, there are reasons to support either version of the amendment — too much power consolidated in the hands of a few student leaders is assuredly a bad idea — but the question students will need to decide on April 29 as they vote for one of the two amendments is how strict this requirement should be. Both amendments would prohibit the same person from being, for example, SOY president and SOY BMP representative, but should the BMP representative also not be allowed to hold a YCSC position?

Hopefully, in the near future, this issue will be resolved and Amsterdam Ave. will be a safer street for law-abiding drivers and pedestrians alike.

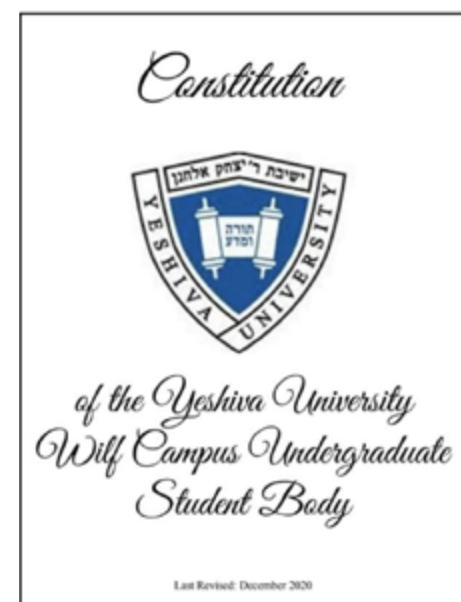
The third amendment approved by the GA was by far the most concerning to me and to the other members of the AC. Right now, in order for an amendment to be ratified, it needs 3/5ths (60%) of all yes/no votes to be “yes.” This amendment would also require 2/5ths (40%) of *all students* to vote in the election. What this means is that if there is low voter turnout (common in the Fall Election), no amendments can be passed. In fact, as The Commentator reported, last fall *only 18% of all students* voted. Had this proposed amendment been a part of the Constitution last fall, all 13 of the amendments (which all received significantly more than 60% approval) would have failed to have been ratified, and all the hard work the AC put in all semester long would have been for nothing.

The GA voted to approve these amendments even though the AC denied their approval. I petitioned the Student Court to intervene, but they refused to take the case. In the email declining to hear the case,

however, the Court added: “The court believes the election shall proceed with all amendments approved and voted on by the GA, on election day.” Essentially, the Court ruled in favor of the GA by refusing to hear the case and take action to preserve the constitutionally-mandated amendments process. This sets a dangerous precedent, in that it shows the willingness of the GA to ignore the Constitution, abetted by the Court's refusal to act.

What does this mean for you? If you are eligible to vote in the upcoming elections, carefully consider your vote on each and every amendment. Consider the long-lasting effects of each GA amendment. And think twice before legitimizing GA amendments that were voted on without the prior approval of the AC, in blatant disregard for the Wilf Constitution.

David Tanner is the chair of the Wilf Campus Amendments Committee.



The cover of the Wilf Campus Student Constitution

WILF CAMPUS STUDENT GOVERNMENT

JEWISH STUDIES
Continued from Page 23

the great commentators of our tradition who, to put it bluntly, had a *far* greater sensitivity to the Divine Word than I ever could have understood prior.

Biblical poetry, especially that of *Tehillim*, had never spoken to me. The “sweet singer of Israel’s” poems were always framed in a clear hierarchy: which do I skip if I come late to shul?

Our class spent dozens of hours combing meticulously through the chapters of *p’sukei d’zimrah*, word by word, verse by verse. For my efforts, my *davening* became richer, much more contemplative, and, in short, the songs finally *sung* for me.

Medieval Jewish History (Dr. Chaviva Levin)

This whirlwind tour of Jewish history from 500 - 1500 CE through Babylon, Israel, Spain, France, Ashkenaz, and Egypt blew me away. Although not as overtly “religious” as a *Tanach* class, I found that Dr. Levin’s course deeply enriched my Jewish identity and perspective. Specifically, this class encouraged reflection on my life as an Orthodox Jew in 2021 with its (presumably) uniquely modern challenges, and yet also as a part of a Torah tradition, stretching for millenia, to which “there is nothing new under the sun.”

A few features of the course especially stood out to me. First, we focused on primary sources (partially) drawn from writings and

responsa of *geonim* and *rishonim*. Second, we balanced the discussion of broader historical trends with specific deep dives into the personalities of momentous figures of these times, such as Saadya Gaon, Rambam and Yehuda HaLevi. And last, Dr. Levin made a conscious effort to emphasize the communities and eras in which Jews actually flourished, subverting the pessimistic historical view of the exilic Jew as eternally persecuted. This class gave me a richer context and a sharper sense of proportion for framing our own community’s triumphs and trials.

Malbim and Modernity (Rabbi Dov Lerner)

Before this class, I saw Malbim as just another verbose, highly technical and extremely thorough commentator. I left this class with a profound appreciation for how a deeply traditional thinker can find new answers to modern questions from the ancient words of Tanach.

Through a masterful summary of Enlightenment intellectual thought and its critical challenges to Orthodox Jewry, Rabbi Lerner set the stage. That era’s Jewish thinkers’ writings, especially Malbim’s, became much clearer once I understood what dire problems they were trying to solve. This intellectual contextualization, however, did not cheapen or reduce their thought to mere

reactions. Rather, it reflected the extent of a true leader’s incredible sensitivity to their community’s religious needs, and their extreme, creative efforts to serve them.

Honestly, this class got me totally hooked on Malbim. I admit it. I suspect I may even end up writing my Honor’s thesis on Malbim’s commentary to Shir ha-Shirim: he has profound, and incredibly relevant insights into Judaism’s “holiest of holies.” I have found it moving how Malbim explains not just what it means to love God, but also how to even authentically *speak* about loving God.

Conclusions

How did we get here? A quick recap: YU announced a major restructuring of much of its Jewish Studies. Then, the Commentator wrote an editorial entitled, “President Berman, What Happened to Being the ‘World’s Premier Jewish Educational Institution?’”, criticizing the administration for this decision. Now, I wrote this article illustrating how valuable my Jewish studies classes have been to me, on both a personal and religious level. Why am I sharing this all with you?

Listen — every Jewish organization must work constantly to solve the age-old question of the Gemara: *Kesef minalan?* Pragmatic sacrifices are an unfortunate, but frequently necessary part of running any operation as

complex as YU. This is part of the reason why I am not interested in commanding administrators to rebalance their priorities. I was not privy to all the balance sheets and financial pressures that led to YU’s Jewish Studies’ recent adjustments, and so I abstain from judgment.

I share these stories, instead, for my fellow students. There are profound religious opportunities in YU’s Jewish Studies Department that I sincerely believe many more students should capitalize on. I’ve shared just a few of the more obvious intellectual and emotional spiritual impacts these courses have had on my life. There are other, subtler, perhaps even ineffable, gains to be had as well from a sophisticated yet reverent encounter with *Tanach*, Jewish history, and Jewish thought.

I would be delighted for more students to experience the meaningful courses in, and to share in my (now rather public) enthusiasm for, YU’s Jewish Studies. I firmly believe that by cultivating a culture of positivity, by appreciating the astounding, once-in-a-lifetime resources available and consequently, to quote Rabbi Shalom Carmy, “growing as thinking religious people,” we could elevate both ourselves and Yeshiva University to new heights.

Do you have any thoughts or comments? I’d love to hear them: please reach me at zrosent1@mail.yu.edu

The MARVELous World of Torah

By ELISHEVA ADOUTH

Charles Dickens begins his novel “A Tale of Two Cities” by stating, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” While Dickens may have intended to speak about the French Revolution, I believe he was talking about the quarantine periods of the COVID pandemic; we differ in our opinions.

When the pandemic began, all my peers studying in Israel for the year and I were abruptly sent home. Seminary, the year that was supposed to change our lives, had ended early and my whole cohort was forced to make the most of our situation. As we approach the end of the craziest year of our lives thus far, it is vital for us to reflect on the events of the last year.

When I returned from seminary, I spent every day in my house for seven months straight, attempting to keep my parents safe from the virus that was ravaging the globe. My days were spent in online seminary, my evenings were spent listening to *shiurim* found through the web and at night I had absolutely no plan. With so much time on our hands, my mother and I wanted to have the most productive quarantine possible, as we wanted to remember this period of our lives as one that was not just spent sitting at home doing nothing. We wanted to make this a period of growth, including attaining knowledge and becoming better people. So, rather than allowing the time to float by, we watched all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films in the movies’ internal chronological order.

I am not entirely sure why I began connecting Marvel to Torah. It might have been the fact that I was learning during the day and watching these movies at night. Or it might have been the fact that I was trying to make myself feel better about spending a whopping 3,015 minutes (that’s 50 hours and 25 minutes for anyone who is curious) doing something which felt like a waste of time. Either way, I came to an important conclusion: Stan Lee (the creator of the world that is Marvel), was an extremely *frum yid*: His superhero movies reflect many of Judaism’s values!

The structure of the Marvel Universe itself can be compared to the tapestry *mashal* (parable). Often, when things are playing out, we see the back of a tapestry, which is messy and confusing to the average eye. Only at the end, when we flip the tapestry do we see the picture that Hashem has laid out for us, one which we could not understand in the moment but only years later is made clear to us. Marvel teaches us that

lesson, too, through the way it lays out its movies. From the first “Captain America: The First Avenger,” when one begins to see the Tesseract, nobody has any idea that it will lead to Thanos attempting to collect all of the Infinity Stones and bringing about “Avengers: Infinity War” and “Avengers: End Game,” but that is exactly what happens. Only after watching 20 movies that came out over the course of 10 years do we truly come to learn the significance of this shiny blue box. So, too, in Judaism we know that we all have our “shiny blue boxes” whose significance we don’t exactly understand, but in the future will be revealed to us by Hashem.

We wanted to make this a period of growth, including attaining knowledge and becoming better people. So, rather than allowing the time to float by, we watched all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films in the movies’ internal chronological order.

On a general level, the whole idea of heroes having imperfections is a theme that is greatly stressed in Tanach. Going through the Marvel films, I expected the heroes to simply be flawless people like the gods in Greek culture. I was proven wrong. In all of *Tanach*, something which I find to be beautiful is that our *avot* and *imahot* were not perfect. Everybody had their internal struggles and made mistakes, yet they are still people who we look up to. From Rivka tricking Yitzchak to the brothers selling Yosef, so many things are debated on a moral level within the Torah, a lot of actions that were taken were not clearly good or bad. However, they are still people who we can look up to, as the entire point is that they were not angels.

One thing about Marvel which I find fascinating is that the story arcs for the characters are not so simple. Every single character makes mistakes and has internal struggles on a consistent basis. Every character has good intentions for the most part, yet, as played out in “Captain America: Civil War,” those good intentions can easily take a turn for worse. Thus Marvel illustrates an idea which we value in Judaism, our heroes are

not immaculate gods and are flawed.

The Rambam often speaks about *mid-dot* in his writings. Two traits in particular which he spends a lot of time discussing are anger and arrogance. When speaking about these two character traits, the Rambam introduces us to “The Golden Mean,” and says that “one who is arrogant should degrade himself greatly. He should sit in the least honorable seat and wear worn-out clothes which shame their wearer. He should do the above and the like until the arrogance is uprooted from him. Such people may then return to the middle path which is the proper one, and continue in it for the rest of their lives” (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos De’ot 2:2).

I am not saying that the people who wrote “The Incredible Hulk” looked up all of the Rambam’s writings and said “let’s do this one,” but it happens to be that the Hulk as a character is very similar to what the Rambam describes as the perfect balance. “The Incredible Hulk” starts with Bruce Banner becoming the Hulk, whose main line in every movie is “Hulk Smash!” In “Thor: Ragnarok” the Hulk’s main trait is this sense of arrogance, a sense that he can beat everyone, and it is onset by anger. As much as it took us until “Thor: Ragnarok” to learn that arrogance and anger were the main reasons that Bruce Banner turned into the Hulk, Bruce Banner knew it from the beginning. When he realized that those were the Hulk’s two main characteristics, he went to live in Brazil, searching for a cure to his condition. In order to alleviate those negative character traits, he began to live in a run-down apartment with nearly nothing after being a renowned scientist for years. Additionally, he tried other things such as research, yoga, etc., and at the core of this was his desperate attempt to control those pieces of himself. Even though he is forced out of his self-prescribed exile, at the end of the day, his entire goal was to get to the opposite extreme and achieve “The Golden Mean.”

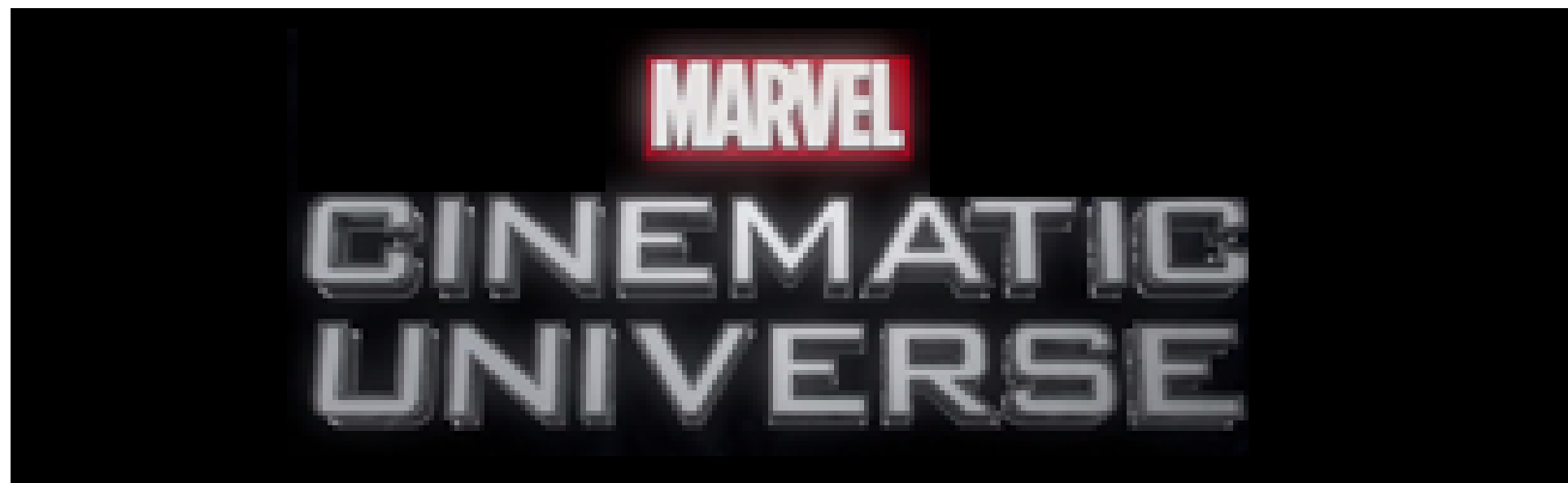
Although there are an immense amount of other examples of Jewish themes in Marvel, such as “Black Panther” being based on the idea that Wakanda should be a light unto the nations, or Captain Marvel learning not to judge people based solely on rumors, I want to conclude with one last example. The conclusion that I came to was reinforced by the recent release of Marvel’s “The Falcon and The Winter Soldier” on Disney+.

In this new television show, Bucky Barnes — the Winter Soldier — plays one of the two main characters. His entire character is one filled with sadness up until now. When he first appeared in “Captain America: The First Avenger,” he was a very wholesome,

good-hearted and loyal person. However, his life took a turn for the worst. He was captured by Hydra, a branch of Nazi Germany, injected with a super-soldier serum, and controlled by an organization that was directly connected to the Nazis. Everything that he went through was sad and unfortunate. However, in Marvel’s latest release, we see him continuously trying to redeem himself, even going so far as to have a list of people whom he needs to apologize to and make amends with. Furthermore, when put into a situation in the final episode of “The Falcon and The Winter Soldier,” where he saw many people in a burning car and had the ability to keep fighting the Flag Smashers, an anti-nationalist group, or save the people, it was obvious to him and everyone else that he was going to choose the latter. Bucky was a character who was a murderer not by his own volition, and ended up being the savior of millions of people. He was a person who spent years in Wakanda solely trying to control all of the bad within him.

Although Bucky’s situation was a little bit to the extreme side, this sounds a lot like the idea of overcoming our *yetzer haras*. Bucky spends almost all of his time from “Captain America: Civil War” up until “The Falcon and The Winter Soldier” trying to reclaim himself, and enhance who he was. He apologizes to the people he wronged, he spends time refining his character traits, and he is placed in similar situations and makes different choices. We as people spend our entire lives doing things that do not align with our values or Torah values in general. Yet, we do them anyway because we do not feel strong enough to stop what we are inclined to do or we are simply not in the mood to change. Bucky’s strong attempt at overcoming what was very clearly his *yetzer hara* is something which I recognized as honorable; he had to go against every inclination that he had. He spent years in Wakanda trying to push away what was inside of him and grow from it, and he achieved what he wanted and ultimately redeemed himself.

Now, I am not telling anyone to go pick up the remote and spend as much time as I did watching and studying the Marvel movies. I am saying, however, that if you do by some chance decide to, you should pay attention to the details and see the depth within the characters. Although they are not all aligned with Torah’s values (because Stan Lee didn’t *really* open up a Torah before writing any of these, although that would have been cool), we should try to see the good within each and every scene. Sometimes movies can surprise us, and I know that after 50 hours and 25 minutes, Marvel flabbergasted me.



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Trendy Trading

By SHMUEL METZ

As the world begins to emerge out of their homes and back into the crowds of the marketplace, a familiar feeling of normalcy seems near. However, the rubble left behind from a global pandemic is not yet completely in our past. With unemployment rates still higher than pre-COVID levels, and many small businesses continuing to struggle, it would seem reasonable to expect that the market has not yet returned to the same strength as it was before the pandemic. However, that is not the case; the stock market experienced a record-fast recovery and is now at historical highs. As Michael Arone, Chief Investment Strategist at State Street Global Advisors put it, "... investors continue to scratch their heads wondering why the stock market could perform so strongly while the economy, labor market and earnings face such challenges."

Although it is possible to disregard this discrepancy and assume this to be part of the natural ups and downs of the market, that may not address how historical highs were so closely followed by historical lows. The

Schiller PE ratio, which calculates the price per earnings of the S&P market for the past 10 years, and is a relatively good indicator if the market is overvalued, currently stands at 37.8, compared to a historical average of 16.5. This means investors are willing to pay a 130% premium to own shares in the S&P 500.

Whether or not a crash is ensuing, it's important to keep in mind that value-based investments will always prevail in the long run.

Historically, there are only two other times that the Schiller PE ratio has reached this level: in the months leading up to the Great Depression and right before the fall of the dot-com bubble. The Wilshire 5000 GDP ratio, which compares the total U.S. stock market value with the U.S. GDP, currently stands at 1.9 in comparison to the historical mean average of .83. In today's economy, this large discrepancy between the market evaluation with the actual gross revenue can be a red flag.

There are two major factors that may

be the impetus for the over-evaluation of today's stock market. In order to combat the economic distress of recent times, the U.S. government kept interest rates low so that Americans could borrow more money, spend it in the market and stimulate the economy. To make money more accessible and keep these rates low, central banks have

been printing more money. The production of money, and the subsequent spending occurring in the market inflates prices. With interest rates low, Americans are incentivized to move their money from their low-yielding bank accounts into more lucrative investments, such as real estate and the stock market, which has contributed to the upward trend of asset inflation.

The second contribution to the rise in the market is the ongoing influx of new investors and a frenzy of speculation. With easier access to investing in the market

and the newfound popularity of "trendy stocks," many uneducated investors are simply hopping on for the ride. As Chief Investment Strategist, Jeremy Grantham said, "there is nothing more supremely irritating than watching your neighbor get rich." The Bitcoin and GameStop craze are both prime examples of this attitude. In the age of social media it has never been easier to see your friends triple-digit percentage gains on a trending stock. The desire to buy in as well, only contributes to the inflation of prices that are not necessarily backed by value. This cyclical nature of buying is threatening to the market.

Regarding periods of speculation, Charlie Munger, the vice-chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, commented, "well these things do happen in a market economy. You get crazy booms ... My policy has always been to just ride them out ... [Many] buy stocks on frenzy because they see that they're going up, and that's a very dangerous way to invest." Whether or not a crash is ensuing, it's important to keep in mind that value-based investments will always prevail in the long run and patience is your best friend.

No Smooth Sailing

By WILLIAM MOGYOROS

At the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and restless with the familiar four corners of our rooms, my friends and I embarked on a trip to Hawaii. Although this may be perceived as a risky move, one that we were discouraged from taking, it was ultimately a fantastic trip. However, the exciting vacation did not come without restrictions. From constant COVID-19 tests to the strict state mask mandate, unfamiliar restrictions made this trip different from your typical vacation. Being that this was four months ago, the vaccination rollout was in its beginning stages. According to current reports, around 55% of Americans aged 18 and over have received at least the first dose, which positions the travel and vacation industry in an entirely different place than it was months ago.

As vaccinations become more readily available, consumers are beginning to feel more comfortable with traveling. Responding accordingly, the Centers for Disease Control

(CDC) stated that fully-vaccinated individuals are allowed to travel domestically without being required to quarantine or show proof of a negative COVID-19 test. Although the CDC remains cautious with regards to international travel, these new guidelines are a step in the right direction. As a result of this increased optimism, multiple aspects of the travel industry have benefitted tremendously. According to travel-booking agency Koddi, average hotel prices have seen appreciable progress over the past 30 to 45 days, and are now 5% less than they were one year ago. However, a few weeks ago, prices were set at a significantly higher 11%. The week of April 11, hotel demand in the United States was up 13.7%, the second-highest level this year. According to data from analytics platform Visible Alpha, statements from the top four airline operators predict summer seat capacity at around 78% of 2019 levels, which surpasses current forecasts.

Although various sectors of the travel industry appear to be successful, the cruise industry remains "docked." This traces back

to the beginning of the pandemic when the tumultuous relationship between the CDC and cruise industry began. During the early stages of the pandemic, several cruise travelers were infected with COVID-19. One notable example is the Japanese Diamond Princess cruise, where 700 passengers contracted the virus and fourteen died. A Wall Street Journal investigation concluded that cruise lines continued sailing despite knowing that passengers on board tested positive. This incident portrayed the industry in a negative light. Although the CDC released their "phased plan" to restart cruises, it will be a lengthy and expensive process of practice runs to ensure safety, and cruise ships were deemed high-risk for contraction. Despite the CDC's stamp of approval for those who are fully-vaccinated to travel, there is pushback from cruise industry leaders. President and CEO of Carnival Corporation & plc Arnold Donald expressed to the WSJ, "We'd just like to be treated similarly to the rest of the travel and entertainment and tourism sector." Cruise industry analyst Stewart

Chiron expressed similar sentiments towards the CDC, stating, "Travel is resuming at a very high level. Airplanes and hotels are packed, and no industry is better suited to restart than cruising. The lines are prepared, safety protocols are in place and now, with the high level of vaccine distribution, they feel it's a good time to resume operations."

Whether the CDC's extreme caution towards cruises is justified or not is a point of contention, but resulting from this is an inherent conflict between those looking to recall the past and others who would like to forget it. As Tara Kirk Sell, an assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, explains, "the C.D.C. wants to prevent people from getting sick and the cruise lines want to go back to business and start making money ... so there's going to be a central disconnect and tension there as we sort our way through this pandemic." Although the comment refers to cruises, this tension will likely remain until the travel industry experiences a complete rebound.

Archegos and Its \$30 Billion Mistake

By YOAV ZOLTY

The story of Bill Hwang and his multi-billion-dollar hedge fund, Archegos, and how he almost single-handedly caused the combined loss of close to \$30 billion in the markets, is one littered with red flags and a call for potentially more regulation of "family office"-style funds. Bill Hwang first gained attention after he spun off from the leading hedge fund, Tiger Management and formed the Asia-centric fund, Tiger Asia. His fund quickly rose to one of prominence as it grew to almost \$5 billion in the course of just 10 years. However, during this time, he was able to achieve tremendous gains through insider trading with various investment banks. This led to both a civil and criminal lawsuit where Tiger Asia admitted wrongdoing and was forced to pay \$44 million in damages.

Hwang pivoted from there, closing Tiger Asia and forming a family office-style fund, which allowed for much less regulation. Managing much less capital, Hwang was forced to take on large amounts of leverage to hold big positions in the market. He did this through a derivative called total return

swaps. A total return swap is when a payer approaches a receiver and arranges a deal in which the payer pays recurring fees to the partner in exchange for the partner to buy stocks for them in the market. The payer benefits from this arrangement through either dividends being paid from the various stocks or gaining from the increase of the price of the stocks, however he must also be wary of taking on the losses if the stock price

With the swaps, Archegos was able to hold over 10 percent equity of various companies without having to announce it. Archegos was also able to only put up 15 percent of the money for every position it wanted to hold, a deal that most banks would never agree to. On top of all this, Archegos did not maintain a diversified portfolio, meaning that its risk exposure was enormous. All the dominos were set to fall, it just needed one push.

When the banks, noticing the sudden drop of his positions, called for a margin call, Archegos was unable to deliver. This led to a bank firesale of all of Archegos's holdings, which dropped the prices of the stocks even further. All in all, the investment banks had a combined loss of \$10 billion. The two biggest losses came from Switzerland's Credit Suisse, which lost \$5.5 billion, and Japan's Nomura, which lost \$2.85 billion.

With these losses came outrage and calls for further regulation. Managers across all of the investment banks had to step down, most notably the Chief Risk and Compliance Officer of Credit Suisse, Lara Warner and investment banking head, Brian Chin. Some are saying this is not enough, with one partner at law firm Mayer Brown, Marlon Paz, saying "We should not be surprised if this leads to a re-evaluation of where family offices fit within the regulatory structure." Ultimately, only time will tell if these changes are enough to make sure that stories such as this don't repeat themselves.

"We should not be surprised if this leads to a re-evaluation of where family offices fit within the regulatory structure."

Marlon Paz

falls. The player uses leverage, while posting limited funds to potentially maintain huge positions. This is where Archegos, being a family office and using swaps, was critical. With this lack of regulation, Archegos was able to maintain a level of anonymity and go to various investment banks without having to disclose the positions they already held, the other banks they already had deals with and how much they already were leveraged.

The push came on March 22, when ViacomCBS stock dropped more than 25% after it was announced that they were releasing more stock. This started a vicious cycle, where Archegos, forced to cover the losses from ViacomCBS, started selling large amounts of their other positions. Those sales then led to further losses, as the stocks Hwang was selling also lost value due to the large volume of what he wanted to sell.

How Cryptocurrency and Modern Art Push the Definition of Value

By DAVID SCHMIDT

On March 11, 2021, British auction house Christie's minted the third most expensive living artist in the world, Mike Winkelmann. The 41-year-old South Carolinian, who began creating artwork in 2007 under the alias "Beeple," created one piece a day and combined works from five thousand days into a single block for the sale. In addition to the sheer number of works sold at once, and an astronomical \$69 million price tag, the auction was exceptional for another reason: the works were all digital.

To some, selling a JPEG file might seem like the scam of the century. Nothing could seem more valueless than an arrangement of pixels being copied endlessly, millions of times over, until there are more copies than could ever be demanded. But within this particular JPEG hides a unique feature allowing the file to be bought and sold.

These art pieces were each minted into an "NFT," or "non-fungible token." Non-fungible refers to each NFT's individuality, as fungibility is a term borrowed mainly from economics, referring to an item that you would not mind having replaced for another of the same value, such as currency, government bonds, or even Dave and Busters tickets. "Token," in this context, refers to each artwork having a digital certificate of authenticity stored on the blockchain. Art's ability to maintain value lives and dies by the existence of certificates of authenticity and their ability to generate validity-backed scarcity. This level of verification allows an asset to be considered for purchase and trade.

This certificate, created on the blockchain, uses "proof of work" to identify exclusivity and ownership. Blockchain technology has found recent popularity through the crypto-currency Bitcoin, as well as nascent coins like Ethereum. There is an essential difference between digital coins and tokens: where a coin is a store of value that can be exchanged for other assets of worth, a token is a digital representation of an asset with neither particular market use nor an established relationship with online payments.

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Because the accessibility of these tokens depends on other digital programs, many NFTs, and other tokens, exist on the extant Ethereum blockchain.

"Proof of Work" is a blockchain concept term referring to the consensus algorithm that verifies transactions on blockchains. It signifies the computational puzzle a computer must solve before adding new information onto the chain constituting the blockchain ledger. This "ledger" records the information critical to maintaining these technologies, like who owns a bitcoin at any particular time, and whether or not this JPEG is the original NFT, rather than one of the imposters. Internet users can employ this technology to mint an image or sound into a token, and generate their own creative take on the nascent cyberart market.

In recent months, NFTs have exploded onto the scene in every shape and form.

Whether it's Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey minting the social media platform's first tweet, a Croatian Tennis player selling the rights to temporarily tattoo her right arm, or the humanoid robot Sophia selling its AI produced art, the technology has branched off into a futuristic realm where flying cars and virtual reality schools would be commonplace.

In a desultory fashion, I attempted to buy an NFT artwork for the purpose of putting an image to this illusionary concept. Knowing that even free NFTs found on OpenSea and

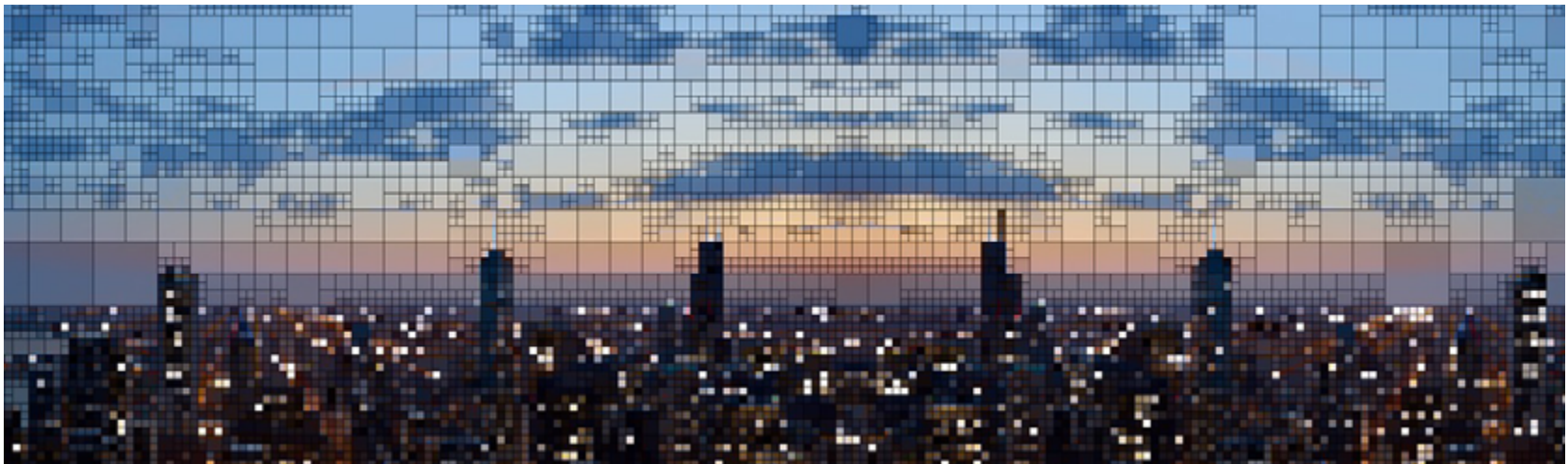
how does artwork ownership distinguish itself from non-ownership? Furthermore, is there value to being the owner?

Shortly after his purchase of Beeple's aforementioned artwork, Crypto-investor "Metakoven" explained his reasoning for purchasing to CNBC: "I think this is a significant piece of art history... this is a change in medium and there will be an economy around it. The first piece in that movement will be incredibly valuable going forward." While Metakoven, whose real name is Vignesh Sundaresan, seems to believe there is room for growth in the world of NFTs, the very artist who sold him his works seems to disagree. Beeple, or Mike Winkelmann, immediately liquidated his Ethereum into cash and announced that "NFTs are absolutely a bubble."

The Winklevoss twins were early investors in cryptocurrency and built platforms to further their ease of exchange. Their most recent purchase was Nifty Gateway, a platform designed to streamline the NFT trading process. They espouse the oncoming "Metaverse," a virtual reality enhancement of the physical world, which induces thoughts of The Matrix, and Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt." Early proofs come from the video game Fortnite, where people have bought concert tickets and clothes to dress their characters, despite these purchases existing solely in the digital ethersphere. Although it remains uncertain whether or not the true forward motion of the human race will be virtual, early investors will continue to try their luck at NFTs, and uncovering the next crypto-asset to fuel the revolution.

similar markets will have high costs associated with processing the transfer and maintenance of these technologies, it prompts the question of why someone would buy an NFT at all.

More than 8 million people visit the Mona Lisa in Paris each year, often waiting in long lines looping around the Louvre Museum, for what is currently a thirty-second viewing experience. However, viewing a painting online rather than at a museum is not considered an authentic experience. The disparity between in-person and virtual observation is what generates museum viewership of art, concert ticket sales and even basketball game attendance. The baffling aspect of NFTs popularity is that the viewing experience is the same for both owners and online viewers. Because there is no difference between my computer screen displaying Beeple's artwork, and the owner's viewing experience,



In recent months, NFTs have exploded onto the scene in every shape and form.

PIXABAY

Death by a Thousand Haircuts

By ALIZA LEICHTER

Alexa, remind me to ... never get layers again?

On April 20, 2021, e-commerce leader Amazon announced their latest venture: Amazon Salon, a two-story hair salon occupying more than 1,500 sq. ft. in London's Spitalfields neighborhood. The salon will initially open exclusively for Amazon employees before accepting bookings from the general public. In a statement about the launch, the company's United Kingdom Country manager, John Boumphrey, commented that, "We want this unique venue to bring us one step closer to customers, and it will be a place where we can collaborate with the industry and test new technologies." However, Amazon's attempt to magnify its presence in the beauty industry delivers the latest blow to independent salons.

In 2020, Amazon's revenue was up 38%

to a record \$386 billion, an over \$100 billion yearly increase, and net profit was up 84% from the previous year. While Amazon thrived as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increased dependency on e-commerce retailers, adverse effects were inflicted on small businesses. According to the United States Chamber of Commerce, the economy is experiencing something similar to a "K-shaped" recovery, referring to the industries that emerge from a recession at different rates and magnitudes. The top of the "K" represents industries that are doing well, while those at the bottom struggle. Currently situated at the bottom is the service-providing industry, which experienced 82% of the total job losses incurred since February of 2020. In mid-April of 2020, foot traffic to hair salons and barber shops declined by 60%, primarily because of social distancing guidelines and the forced shutdown of non-essential businesses. By the second quarter of 2020, year-over-year

revenue for small businesses plummeted by 52%. Hair salon owners throughout the U.S. furloughed employees with the presumption that workers would file for unemployment benefits, which became possible for independent contractors and gig-workers through the CARES Act.

In an effort to establish itself as a force within the salon industry, Amazon recruited Elena Lavagni of Neville Hair and Beauty, an independent salon located in London, and her team to provide hair care and styling services. The press release acknowledges Elena's credible past as a stylist for London Fashion Week and Cannes Film Festival, a necessary reassurance in part because Amazon's inexperience within the industry may cause hesitation among prospective clients.

Recognizing the need to differentiate itself from others in the highly competitive salon industry, Amazon's diversification strategy consists of using augmented reality technology in services. Clients will be able to

visualize and experiment with different hair colors prior to receiving services. Another feature is "point-and-learn" tech, which will enable consumers to point at hair care products available for purchase, and subsequently receive relevant information and educational content based on their selection. Amazon Salon puts itself in the unique position of cross-promoting Amazon products and technology. In fact, the inclusion of Fire tablets at each styling station makes online purchasing nearly unavoidable. Although there are "no current plans" to establish Amazon Salon locations outside of London, should Amazon decide to expand their experiential venture, small businesses within the salon industry could be forced out of business. With current restrictions of 50% capacity in states like New York, salons' revenue as it stands is completely insufficient to cover stylists' salaries, let alone enough to compete with an e-commerce mega-giant.