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Seforim Sale to Return in February After COVID Cancellation Last Year

By YONATAN KURZ

This article was published online on Jan. 25.

After being canceled last year due to COVID-19 safety concerns, the 2022 Seforim Sale — North America’s largest Jewish book sale held annually at Yeshiva University — will be taking place Feb. 6-24 in Belfer Hall’s Weissberg Commons.

The sale will require both proof of vaccination at the door as well as masking throughout the duration of the sale, and capacity in Weissberg Commons will be cut to 70%. According to Seforim Sale CEO Eli Seidman (SSSB ’23), this will likely mean fewer employees on hand than in the past to allow for more customers, but there will still be enough employees to keep the sale going with full customer service.

“We came to a final decision that worked for everyone including the COVID Team and the administration and medical director,” Seidman told The Commentator.

The Seforim Sale’s online store will be running as usual despite concerns regarding international supply chain and shipping issues that have arisen amidst the pandemic this past year.



2022 Seforim Sale in the early stages of assembly

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

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YU Wins Appeal Challenging Anonymity of 32 Plaintiffs in Sex Abuse Lawsuit

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was published online on Jan. 27.

A panel of appellate judges on Thursday, Jan. 20 unanimously overturned the lower court’s decision to allow 32 plaintiffs to remain anonymous in the sexual abuse lawsuit against Yeshiva University, citing insufficient evidence to validate the plaintiffs’ anonymity.

“It’s remarkable that people still don’t understand that bringing a sex abuse case speaking about as a child is difficult for these plaintiffs and causes a lot of trauma in and of itself.”

Plaintiff Lawyer Kevin Mulhearn

In August 2019, 38 former students sued YU for covering up sexual abuses by staff members of its Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy (MTA) high school for boys, including its then-principal, George Finkelstein. The suit was filed one week after the New York State Legislature passed the Child Victims Act, which provided a one-year window that began on Aug. 14, 2019 — later extended for another year because of the pandemic — for individuals who were sexually abused as children to seek compensation through civil proceedings. Since others joined later on, the total number of plaintiffs in this suit currently sits at 47, with only seven using their real names.

The appellate judges — Barbra Kapnick, Anil Singh, Peter Moulton, Martin Shulman and John Higgitt — wrote that the plaintiffs “only submitted a short attorney affirmation, which merely repeated the relief requested in the order to show cause and made a single vague statement that plaintiffs might suffer further mental harm should their identities be revealed.”

In closing, the judges wrote, “Plaintiffs failed to provide any specific evidence as

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YU to Restructure Title IX Office, Improve Sexual Assault and Harassment Resources

By SRULI FRUCHTER
AND JONATHAN LEVIN

This article was published online on Jan. 11.

Yeshiva University will implement a “restructured” Title IX Office and bring on professionals experienced in handling sexual assault and harassment complaints for the spring semester, among other changes. President Ari Berman announced this to students via email on Tuesday, Jan. 11.

Berman’s email linked to a letter from Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon that made various recommendations to the university regarding those issues. Earlier in the year, Bacon was asked to lead a committee to address sexual assault and harassment on campus after an anonymous YU student alleged that she was raped by a male athlete and that the university failed to help her last year. The committee is comprised of Rabbi Josh Blass and deans Sara Asher, Joe Bednarsh, Leslie Halpern and Danielle Wozniak.

Currently, YU’s website lists Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel as its Title IX coordinator, along with three deputy

Title IX coordinators, including Bednarsh. Although Bednarsh was promoted from athletics director to associate dean of students in July, the website still attributes him to his former role. It is unclear if Nissel and Bednarsh will continue to work in the Title IX Office after its restructuring.

“We care deeply about the safety and well-being of our students.”

Undergraduate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Karen Bacon

Bacon’s letter also recommended that the university’s website should include a concise flow chart that easily demonstrates the policies and procedures for allegations of sexual misconduct. SHARE — sexual harassment and assault response & education — counselors should be “trained to be available to students” in navigating Title IX procedures,

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Love or Be Loved? The Dilemma of Jewish Journalism

By **SRULI FRUCHTER**

The “in-crowd” of Jewish journalism is more elite than the cool kids’ lunch table in high school.

The prerequisites for holding such a title are relatively clear and easy to abide by: cover glowing community achievements, report only on soft news and reaffirm a world view that the Jewish community is comfortable with. These outlets are popular because they preach to the choir and avoid veering off-script. We can all think of several Jewish newspapers that fit this mold — they air the clean laundry and leave the crumpled ball of dirty clothes in the corner.

To be fair, these types of publications do fulfill a want and need of our community. We deserve to take pride in our successes and to indulge in “positive news.” At a time when global and domestic events can be less than comforting, to say the least, that makes sense. But at the same time, we must ask ourselves: If our community journalists are only reporting on what we want to hear, then what will happen to what we need to hear?

Such a responsibility is undertaken by another set of Jewish journalists — “the outsiders.” From this cohort, stories can include ones like those coming from the in-crowd, but they are not limited to them. They also cover the not-so-positive news from our community, everything from corruption scandals to sexual abuse coverups. These are the stories the community does not want to hear, but they are the stories it needs to hear.

From the perspective of the journalists, the decision of what to report boils down to one question: Would they rather love or be loved by the Jewish community? This dilemma defines the essence of the Jewish journalist’s experience.

Take, for example, a story by The Jewish Week’s former editor, Gary Rosenblatt. In June

2000, he published a 6,000-word exposé on Baruch Lanner, an esteemed rabbi and Jewish educator whose sexual, physical and emotional abuses were “an open secret in Orthodox circles” but wholly ignored. Lanner worked with teenagers for over 30 years at that time, namely through NCSY programs, and it was only once Rosenblatt’s article hit the public stage that his abuses were taken seriously. New Jersey law enforcement undertook the case, and two years later, Lanner was convicted of sexually abusing two girls.

Ultimately, the difference between journalists committed to serving the community and journalists committed to serving themselves is what they do when their help is not wanted, but it is needed.

Today, there’s no question that we look back on that revolutionary moment with positivity and gratitude — for the sake of Lanner’s past and potential victims — but that wasn’t always the case. While Rosenblatt received overwhelming support for his work at the time, he was also vilified in the aftermath. The backlash against him was, as one Jewish editor put it, for violating the eleventh of the Ten Commandments: “Thou Shalt Not Air Thy Dirty Laundry.” Rather than address those problems, people wished Rosenblatt never uncovered them.

For Rosenblatt, the answer to the aforementioned was clear. He cared more about loving his community — reporting on its

most heinous problems in their entirety — than being loved by his community — burying the story as if it never existed. But this isn’t a perspective people tend to hold.

On The Commentator, we are often met with a jaundiced eye when reporting on YU’s most contentious issues, whether that’s relating to the rape allegations, LGBTQ discrimination or the sex abuse lawsuit. People will half-seriously jest that we only care about the “controversial topics” because we “love the hock.” Others will condemn the paper as something unbecoming of a *yeshiva* that antagonistically wants to stir the pot on campus. This characterization of the paper is insulting and hurtful, but most of all, it’s untrue.

The reason that The Commentator’s writers and editors do what they do is because we love the YU community. We love the community enough to risk ostracization when reporting on hot-button issues. We love the community enough to spend hours each week ensuring we publish truthfully and effectively. We love the community enough to forfeit being loved by it so that we can truly serve it. Everything we do is because we believe it’s best for YU. The gap in people’s understanding about this core of Jewish journalism leads to those misperceptions.

Do we wish that we could both love and be loved by the community? Absolutely. But that is not often possible. Ultimately, the difference between journalists committed to serving the community and journalists committed to serving themselves is what they do when their help is not wanted but still needed. Despite the difficulties inherent in that decision, genuine journalists know what must be done, and they’re willing to accept the risks all the same.

THE COMMENTATOR

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 87 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.

Read more at yucommentator.org



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Get ready for engagements among YU students to spike tenfold.



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Not sure I would've made it through another semester of Zoom



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Some things never change

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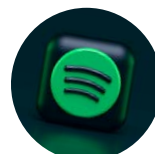
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Letters to the Editor

All Macs Coverage Must Include The Rape, Harassment Allegations

By DONIEL WEINREICH

To the Editor:

I've been incredibly disappointed to see that The Commentator's recent coverage of the YU men's basketball team has neglected to even once mention the sexual assault and harassment allegations that were first aired in this very paper. While I would love to be able to celebrate the Macs' historic win streak and ranking, victims of abuse and the moral integrity of our community must come first.

Carrying on as if nothing is amiss upholds and perpetuates a status quo that we know is decidedly hostile to victims of sexual violence.

Since the publication of those allegations in August, the Macs and YU Athletics have taken no public action, nor have they made any public statement. In that time, The Commentator has not only published three separate news articles about the basketball team that contain no whiff of said allegations, but the paper has even dedicated its latest editorial, titled "The Legacy Is On

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YU Broke the Law in Responding to the Rape Allegations. Blame It, Not the Basketball Team.

By ELLIOT HELLER

To the Editor:

YU's actions don't just seem wrong — they are wrong. In the eyes of the law.

The August article in The Commentator, in which an anonymous student tells her story of being a victim of rape at the hands of another student, and the school's lackluster response to her complaint, has gained increased attention recently. This was primarily due to national media attention received by the YU basketball team as its winning streak reached 50, as well as a letter to the editor by Doniel Weinreich criticizing The Commentator for not mentioning the allegations in its coverage of

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SEX ABUSE CASE*Continued from Front Page*

to why each unnamed plaintiff should be entitled to proceed anonymously.”

On July 6, 2020, Judge George Silver made the initial ruling that those plaintiffs could continue using pseudonyms as opposed to their real names. “[It] is axiomatic that plaintiffs should be afforded the protection of anonymity,” he wrote in that ruling. “To be sure, the instant case involves alleged acts that will no doubt center on information about plaintiffs of a sensitive and highly personal nature. The court recognizes that plaintiffs, as the alleged victims of sexual abuse, have undoubtedly suffered great emotional distress.”

Kevin Mulhearn, the plaintiffs’ lawyer in this case, told The Commentator he intends to resubmit the 32 plaintiffs’ affidavits and expects that they will be able to retain their anonymity, as he credits the appellate judges’ decision to a technicality.

In their appeal, YU’s main arguments against granting the 32 plaintiffs anonymity were that the plaintiffs did not file “specific reasons” to justify each person proceeding anonymously and did not file individual affidavits. The appeal noted that other anonymous plaintiffs who did so were “not at issue in this appeal.” (Sometime after the appeal

was filed, one of the anonymous plaintiffs dropped out, bringing the number of those in question down from 33 to 32.)

In a statement sent to The Commentator, a legal spokesperson for YU declined to provide further information but said, “we can share that these were procedural issues that, as reflected by the Appellate Division’s unanimous ruling, are common in this sort of litigation.”

“It’s remarkable that people still don’t understand that bringing a sex abuse case speaking about as a child is difficult for these plaintiffs and causes a lot of trauma in and of itself,” Mulhearn said. “We think that it’s important for a client or plaintiff to remain anonymous if he or she so desires. Otherwise, if forced ... they [may] decide to not pursue their case.”

This suit names YU, its MTA high school, the board of trustees, former Chancellor Rabbi Norman Lamm, who passed away in 2020, and former Vice President Robert Hirt as defendants.

As of publication, Karen Bitar, one of YU’s lawyers from Seyfarth Shaw LLP, did not immediately respond to The Commentator’s request for comment.



In August 2019, 38 former students sued YU for covering up sexual abuses by members of MTA’s staff, including its then-principal, George Finkelstein.

MICAH PAVA

TITLE IX AT YU*Continued from Front Page*

Bacon added. Last, the committee advised that YU’s Title IX educational program be enhanced with in-person and online materials and training. While the program is currently mandatory, the university has been unsuccessful in ensuring students participate in the program.

“Dean Bacon and her committee have concluded their committee’s work with a number of recommendations that we will begin to implement for the Spring semester,” Berman wrote in his email. “I thank her and her team for their thorough work and all of our compassionate professionals who work to safeguard our students’ well-being.”

Bacon also noted that the committee consulted with “third-party experts” to evaluate YU’s current tools and procedures regarding sexual assault and harassment on campus. The committee concluded that YU “follows all federal Title IX and NYS guidelines and procedures” for those issues.

The letter added that YU’s current policy is to out-source sexual assault claims to “top tier third-party firms” that are “experts in conducting such investigations and fully investigate the allegations.” The investigative report is made available to the involved parties and each has the ability to appeal the final decision.

“We care deeply about the safety and well-being of our students,” Bacon wrote

in concluding her email. “Please feel free to reach out to me or any other committee member if you have any questions.”

“We’re making progress, and for that we are very thankful; this is a wonderful step in the right direction,” Noa Berman (SCW ‘23) and Cayla Muschel (SCW ‘23), co-presidents of Students Against Sexual Assault, said in a statement sent to The Commentator. “The next step is for the university to acknowledge past missteps and work toward correcting them. Accountability is extremely important, especially when mending the relationship between the administration and the student body.”

In recent weeks, the anonymous student’s story gained traction on social media and across media outlets. During the Mac’s rising win streak, articles in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency mentioned the student’s allegations since her accused rapist was a player on the basketball team.

More recently, Jeff Lax Live, a radio show on Zev Brenner’s Talkline network, interviewed the student using an app to alter her voice and let her retain anonymity. In the interview, the student spoke about the alleged rape and the events leading up to it.

She explained that she and the other student had some mutual friends, but she did not personally know him. Then, they matched on JSwipe, a Jewish dating app.

When they connected, they agreed to meet up at his building for their date. “I was pretty adamant beforehand that I was not going to go into his apartment [and] I would meet him outside of his building,” she explained in the interview. After their date, “he asked me to help him bring something upstairs, so I did, and that’s when it happened.” The student said she now believes the athlete’s request was a trick.

She then spoke more directly about the alleged rape. “My mind blocked out a lot of it,” she said. “But from what I do remember, he was holding me down. When I went to the hospital I had marks on my neck and bruising on my leg as well.” Afterward, she went home, before going to the hospital the following day and completing a rape kit, which involved the hospital collecting DNA evidence and taking photographs of her bruises.

She eventually contacted the university about the alleged rape, and an investigation ensued. According to the university’s statement, published by The Commentator in August, the university directed both students to sign a non-disclosure agreement before receiving the investigative report. The investigation’s conclusion did not support her case.

The student has since tried to reopen the case, but her requests have been denied.

“They missed out on DNA evidence, they never accessed my rape kit at the hospital, [but] every time I brought that up to the school, the person in charge says that the case is closed, and that’s that.”

Aside from that case, the student also said she contacted the university on multiple occasions to avoid having to encounter the other student and another athlete who harassed her on campus. The university told her that “it was up to him if he wanted to give me space on campus or not,” and that it is unlikely he would do so, because “there is a lot of anger from him.”

Midway through the interview, Lax asked her, “Are you scared of the player who did this to you, that he’s going to come after you? Is that why you’re keeping his name private?”

“Yes,” she said. “And I’m worried he’s going to tell people who I am.”

Near the end of her interview, Lax asked the student why she partook in the interview. “At the end of the day, if it helps anyone else, that’s all I want,” she answered. “I want other people to not be afraid to speak up and at the end of the day, as much as I also want justice for what happened, I’d rather other people be comfortable being able to speak up and have their voices heard as well.”

SEFORIM SALE*Continued from Front Page*

Still, despite the current plans, Seidman acknowledged that nothing is guaranteed. “Everything is subject to change,” he said. “[I]f the world changes, we change, and if YU closes down and there are no students on campus, then there won’t be any students to run it, but right now we’re fully planning ahead.”

The previous Seforim Sale in 2020 generated about \$740,000 in revenue and sold over 28,000 books with roughly 89% of the sales coming from in-person purchases and the remainder through sales online, according to Hudi Rosenfeld (SSSB ‘21), the 2019-20 CEO of the Seforim Sale.

The sale, established in 1964, is entirely run by students of YU and draws around 15,000 customers yearly, with the profits going toward “YU Student Life initiatives,” according to the sale’s website.

Seforim Sale workers are excited for the sale’s returns after last year’s cancellation. “It provides a unique experience for students to share their passion for *seforim* with the broader community,” Rafi Kapitanker (SSSB

‘22), a floor manager, said. “This unique experience also requires us to utilize the lessons which are taught in our classes and grants us the opportunity to apply our knowledge to a real business endeavor. I’m looking forward to welcoming everyone on February 6th!”

Chief Operating Officer Ari Hagler (YC ‘22) agreed. “After an off-year because of the pandemic, everyone here is working really hard to make this an amazing Seforim Sale — we have all the newest titles and anything else you could be looking for,” he said. “We’re really excited.”

“We came to a final decision that worked for everyone including the COVID Team and the administration and medical director.”

2022 Seforim Sale CEO Eli Seidman (SSSB ‘23)

Student Admits To Disposing of Stacks of Commentator Issues

By JONATHAN LEVIN

A student came forward and admitted to disposing stacks of The Commentator's final issue last semester from its stand in the lobby of Mendel Gottesman Library. The student will provide restitution to The Commentator for incurred losses.

The student only took responsibility for removing copies of The Commentator's sixth issue from its stack near the library approximately one day after they were distributed on Tuesday, Dec. 28. He denied knowledge of any of last semester's previous incidents.

The Commentator first reported the matter on Jan. 3. After editors discovered that the news stand in Morganstern Residence Hall was also emptied less than a week after this incident, the Security Department recommended filing a formal incident report, which was subsequently filed. As of publication, there is no update on the Morganstern stand.

On Thursday, Jan. 13, Vice Provost of Student Affairs Chaim Nissel forwarded an email to The Commentator from the student with the subject line of "A Second

Thought." In the email, the student, whose name was removed by Nissel, took responsibility for clearing the stand, apologized and offered to reimburse The Commentator. (The Commentator decided to exclude any identifying details of the student from this article.)

"Recently, I was under a lot of stress during reading week. I was not in the right state of mind and I acted impulsively without speaking to the right people," he wrote. "I disposed the commentator issues from the stand in our Yeshiva building and that was not my decision to make. I'm sorry and I'm willing to pay for those issues and reimburse the yeshiva." The student did not provide any further explanation on what motivated his action.

The student's admission to Nissel came shortly after a resident advisor identified him on security footage that captured the incident. There is a security camera directed toward the Gottesman building's lobby where the stand was stationed.

Based on discussions with the Office of Student Life and a new photograph of the stand before it was cleared, The Commentator

estimates that the total number of discarded issues was between 275-300 issues, higher than the previous estimate of 150-250 issues provided in the original article.

On Jan. 14, the student emailed The Commentator with a similar message to what he sent Nissel but added that he didn't remove any previous issues. "This was the only time that I disposed of the Commentator's print copies," he wrote. "I know nothing about your articles disappearing in any other instances."

The student also included a photograph of the stand immediately prior to his removal of the papers, providing a more accurate estimation of the number of copies lost. The email the student used to contact The Commentator was from an account labeled fruchtersruli@gmail.com.

The incident is now being handled by the Office of Student Life (OSL). As of publication, Nissel and Senior Director of OSL Rabbi Josh Weisberg could not be reached for comment.



THE COMMENTATOR
The student's admission to Nissel came shortly after a resident advisor identified him on security footage that captured the incident.

YU Students, Staff Volunteer To Help Bronx Neighbors After Fire Took 17 Lives and Displaced Over 100

By SAMMY INTRATOR

This article was published online on Jan. 17.

YU students and staff volunteered last week to assist survivors of Jan. 9's devastating fire in a Bronx apartment complex that took the lives of 17 — nine adults and eight children — and left over 100 displaced residents in need of food, water, shelter and basic supplies.

The morning after on Monday, Jan. 10, Yeshiva Student Union President Elazar Abrahams (YC '22), Assistant Director of Student Life Rabbi Herschel Hartz and Director of Government Relations Jon Greenfield reached out to the local councilman's office and other local volunteer

organizations in the Bronx to coordinate opportunities for YU students to assist in relief efforts. These calls led to students stepping in that Monday and Wednesday.

"YU is filled with the best people, and I'm proud that my fellow students stepped up when tragedy struck right next door."

Yeshiva Student Union President Elazar Abrahams (YC '22)

Later that morning, Abrahams emailed the student body calling on those around campus, as school is on winter break, to join in the relief efforts. "Like our values instruct us to, we are trying to corral forces to go to the site and potentially physically volunteer, as the site is close to the Wilf Campus," he wrote in the email. "We've been in touch with our head of Government Relations, but before we reach out to local people on the

ground to offer help, we need some people that are interested and available."

The first day, given the short notice, a small delegation of three YU students and

Rabbi Hartz brought 50 pounds of food, 200 water bottles, and sweatshirts to Councilman Oswald Feliz's office, according to Abrahams. Students then distributed 1,000 water bottles at three different hotels housing displaced victims from the fire.

"Even though we started off uncoordinated and had some difficulty about how to assist, we did the best we could under the circumstances and we were still able to

accomplish a lot," said Levi Wolf (SSSB '22), one of the three students who volunteered with Rabbi Hartz on Monday.

Students' help didn't stop there. On Wednesday, Jan. 12, about 15 students from YU's undergraduate schools and its Wurzweiler School of Social Work organized boxes of clothing to divide among the survivors of the deadly fire. They also sent toiletries and helped organize food for victims with the help of local Councilman Oswald Feliz. Kimberly Moore, the new director of Wurzweiler's Care Café, which centers around community outreach, worked with Rabbi Hartz and Greenfield to coordinate that day's work.

Prof. William Sutton, director of Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology's Parnes Clinic, offered the clinic's services for mental health and crisis intervention support, though the Department of Health already had a full-time mental health team on site.

"It is essential at Yeshiva University for us to practice what we preach," said Rabbi Hartz. "When our students saw the tremendous destruction Sunday, many were asking what we could do. The next day, we had corralled many forces, internally at Yeshiva and externally with our partners in the general community, to see how we could help the best ... It was a true community effort."

"It was inspiring to see how we were able to coordinate this even over winter break," said Abrahams about the quick and productive response by students "YU is filled with the best people, and I'm proud that my fellow students stepped up when tragedy struck right next door. Club events and all that are important, but we have the opportunity to effect real change if we care to, and this initiative was a reminder of that."

The blaze started at around 11 a.m. on Jan. 9 in the East 181st St. apartment complex. NBC News reported that New York City Fire Commissioner Dan Nigro identified the cause to be a malfunctioning electrical space heater.



About 15 YU students organized boxes of clothing for survivors of the Jan. 9 blaze.

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

For Third Time This Semester, Stacks of Commentator Issues Removed From YU Without Notice

By **SRULI FRUCHTER AND JONATHAN LEVIN**

This article was published online on Jan. 3.

Stacks of The Commentator's latest issue — estimated to be between 150-250 copies — were removed without authorization from their newspaper stand in the lobby of Mendel Gottesman Library on Wednesday, Dec. 29, one day after they were distributed on campus. This was the third time that issues of The Commentator have been removed from this location in the past two months.

The Commentator printed 550 copies of its final issue of the semester on Tuesday, Dec. 28. That morning, the issues were distributed throughout various buildings on Wilf Campus, including two newspaper stands in the Gottesman building lobby, where they remained throughout the day. A full stack of issues in one of the stands was designated for Beren Campus, to be delivered the next day. By the following afternoon, the stand was empty.

In the lobby, two other newspaper stands remained untouched. One held Commentator issues and was across the room beside Nagel Cafe, and the other held several of The YU Observer's previous issues, stationed several feet from the empty Commentator stand.

At this time, it is unclear who removed the newspapers and for what reason.

After discovering the latest incident, The Commentator reached out to several university departments about the matter but nearly all inquiries were unanswered. The two administrators who responded — Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel and Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum — did not have any information regarding the paper's disappearances nor the motives behind their removal. The university also did not provide any assurances that this won't reoccur.

"No idea," Apfelbaum wrote. "We could see if the security cameras captured something but I don't think there are any aimed at that area."

Nissel responded, "I am sorry to hear

this," before urging The Commentator to speak with the Security Department to investigate the matter and "see how this can be prevented."

Over the last two months, The Commentator contacted security on six separate occasions to inquire about these incidents but was told the department did not know anything about the incidents.

The first of these incidents, occurring in late October, saw both The Commentator's and The YU Observer's issues removed from their stands; this incident took place days after The YU Observer published its October issue.

The Commentator discovered this independently and subsequently contacted the administration about the incident. At the time, at an administrator's recommendation, the Security Department was contacted. One security guard noted that he did not know anything about the incident and that

he could not access the Gottesman building lobby's security camera.

A few weeks later, before YU's Wilf Campus open house on Sunday, Nov. 21, the newspaper racks in the Gottesman building's lobby were transferred to a side

issue. In this case, as with the others, The Commentator did not approve of the stands being emptied.

A few weeks ago, according to The YU Observer, two of its newspaper stands in Beren Campus' 245 Lexington Ave. build-

A full stack of issues in one of the stands was designated for Beren Campus, to be delivered the next day. By the following afternoon, the stand was empty.

storage area without The Commentator being notified. After The Commentator contacted Aliza Berenholz Peled, assistant vice president of events and special projects, The Commentator was informed that the stands were removed by custodians since "they were all empty and sitting there." The stands were returned Tuesday morning before The Commentator published its fourth

ing were turned to face the wall, effectively hiding the papers from public view.

Both The Commentator and The YU Observer are operated independently of Yeshiva University, which includes each paper raising and securing its own finances. The long-standing arrangement between the student papers and the university has been for each paper to house its printed issues in stands across both Beren and Wilf campuses.

Costs for printing each Commentator issue amount to several hundred dollars, depending on the number of papers and other factors, such as printing in color. The university did not address The Commentator's inquiries to whether it would reimburse the paper for its financial losses incurred from these missing papers.

A similar series of events occurred to The Commentator in the past. In 1999, The New York Times reported that 1,800 copies across multiple issues of The Commentator, many of which had articles critical of YU, were removed by university officials prior to events where outsiders were expected on campus. One removed issue included an article that university officials were behind the paper's removal. At the time, editors at The Commentator requested approximately \$2,000 in reimbursement related to lost costs.

After Times reporters contacted the university about the disappearances and shortly before the Times published their article, the university reimbursed The Commentator \$1,800 and sent the paper a letter saying that YU "did not condone removing or disposing of the paper."



On Tuesday night, the stand was full. The next afternoon, an editor noticed it was empty.

THE COMMENTATOR

Growing Body of YU Students, Parents Are Opposing YU's Booster Shot Mandate

By **CHAIM BOOK**

This article was published online on Jan. 10.

Over 1,300 people signed a petition opposing YU's requirement for individuals to receive COVID-19 booster shots before returning to campus for the spring semester. In the days surrounding the petition's emergence, WhatsApp groups for YU students and parents were formed to allow students to "make a choice for themselves."

The petition, called "Say 'No' To Yeshiva University Mandated Booster Shots," was created by an account under the name "Yishai Kornwasser" on Jan. 1, two days after YU informed students of the mandate. (No student contacted by The Commentator knew who Kornwasser was or whether the name was an alias.) As of publication, the petition has obtained 1,301 signatures on the change.org petitioning platform.

"While we respect the students who have decided to get a booster shot of their own

volition, there is a plethora of YU students who do not want the booster shot forcefully injected into their bodies," the petition says. "We recognize that if we comply yet again, the administration will never stop with the mandates. It is time to say enough is enough."

In its earlier complaints, the petition noted YU's mask mandate and testing requirements this past semester for vaccinated and unvaccinated students.

the Supreme Court in opposition of vaccine mandates was brought by a group of Indiana University students and was rejected.

Two weeks ago, at the beginning of reading week, 120 students tested positive for COVID-19, broken down to 78 from Wilf Campus and 42 from Beren Campus according to YU's COVID-19 Tracker. The week prior, 106 students tested positive. The tracker has not been updated for last week's data.

"We base a lot on the national consensus amongst what the true experts on the field agree on."

YU Medical Director Dr. Robert Van Amerongen

Many NYC universities, such as CUNY and NYU, have mandated boosters for the upcoming semester. Throughout the country, there have been other petitions in protest of individual schools' decisions to require the shot. Back in August, the first case to reach

On Friday, Dec. 31, two WhatsApp groups were formed to encourage and collaborate on working against the booster mandate — one for students and one for parents. As of publication, the student chat, called "No to forced boosters @YU," has 114 members,

and the parent chat, called "YU Parents-no force boost" has 51. There are overlapping members in both groups, and it is unclear how many, if any, are not from the YU community.

"I understand from the administrative perspective that it is an easier decision to place a mandate on the entire student population, but to require a population of people in their twenties to take a booster, including those who have had recent natural infection, is unethical," Nerya Miller (YC '24), an admin on the student WhatsApp chat, told The Commentator. "This should be evaluated on a case by case basis, and the community of supposed 'future leaders' of the Jewish people should be trusted to make responsible decisions."

The chats circulated links to articles and studies suggesting the dangers of the vaccine and ethical issues with the mandate. "I'm not going to have you dictate your medical opinion over that of my own doctor. It's irresponsible and my kid deserves better,"

Continued on Page 7

Over 100 Students Tested Positive for COVID-19 Last Week

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was published online on Dec. 25.

106 students tested positive last week — broken down to 51 Wilf students and 55 Beren students — according to YU’s COVID-19 Tracker.

On Monday, Dec. 20, the Covid Monitoring Team announced that classes and finals would move online beginning that Wednesday due to concerns about the Omicron variant spreading across New York City. Public spaces on campus, such as the libraries, batei midrash and dining halls, remained open. The team’s email did not mention any restrictions on Wilf Campus’ morning shiurim, which still operated partly in person. The week prior, Dec. 12-17, only 10 students tested positive between both campuses.

63 of YU’s cases, 23 of which were from

Beren Campus and 40 from Wilf Campus, came from its on-campus testing program, which requires students to test once every week.

This surge is the largest one YU has had since early October, when the university saw 75 cases in one week. Since then, weekly positive cases have significantly dropped, hovering around 10 each week.

“It is not fun to be stuck in a room, unable to leave, for over a week, so even if you aren’t concerned about catching COVID, please respect others’ concerns of becoming isolated and wear a mask until the present wave subsides.”

SSSB Student Council President Akiva Poppers (SSSB ‘22)

“The rise in cases is unsurprising. With the NYC outbreak right now, it makes sense. It’s a good thing YU went online when it did

to prevent an even higher positivity rate,” commented Leora Baitner (SCW ‘24).

As of publication, YU has not announced these latest figures, which were posted yesterday afternoon, to students. It is unclear how this outbreak will affect campus life over the next two weeks, as reading week begins on Tuesday and finals the week after. As of publication, Associate Dean of Students Joe

Bednarsh did not immediately respond to The Commentator’s inquiries on the matter. While the Covid Monitoring Team

stressed the importance of mask-wearing on campus in its Dec. 20 email, the university has still not enforced the mandate, which it has not done throughout the semester.

Akiva Poppers (SSSB ‘22), Wilf president of Sy Syms School of Business Student Council, urged others to be mindful of the current COVID-19 guidelines. “It is not fun to be stuck in a room, unable to leave, for over a week,” he said, “so even if you aren’t concerned about catching COVID, please respect others’ concerns of becoming isolated and wear a mask until the present wave subsides.”

Aaron Afrahim (YC ‘24) appreciated YU moving classes online. “I’m happy to be on zoom at the safety of my home and happy that the university was quick to change to asynchronous with the rise of cases on campus and across NYC.”

OPPOSING BOOSTER MANDATE

Continued from Page 6

wrote one parent on the WhatsApp chat.

Eventually, parents decided to take a more active role against the mandate. On the chat, many parents encouraged others to email written complaints to members of the YU administration and faculty. Several people in the parents chat created letter templates for students and parents to use, along with 17 email addresses of faculty members and administrators.

“The latest research indicates that COVID-19 vaccines are not nearly, if at all effective in preventing the contraction or transmission of COVID-19,” the letter claimed. “As such, there is no medical basis for requiring yet another vaccination.”

In what seemed to be a response to the petition and emails, the university sent out an email Tuesday evening, Jan. 4 inviting parents and students to send in questions for a Zoom Webinar discussing the university’s policies with YU’s medical director, Dr. Robert Van Amerongen, that Thursday night. Vice Provost for Student Affairs Chaim Nissel was also on the webinar.

During the meeting, Nissel recognized the petition and the many emails that the university had been receiving but made no indication that they would have an effect on the university’s policy. Van Amerongen addressed questions and concerns that were sent in prior to the event, frequently stressing that the university is following the experts in the field, such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Responding to one question about scientific studies suggesting dangers and ineffectiveness of the booster, Van Amerongen said, “We base a lot on the national consensus amongst what the true experts on the field agree on.” He added that the university does account for medical exemptions when applicable.

“There is not an ‘us’ against ‘them’ kind of attitude perceived in any of our meetings,” he said. “When we think about these policy procedures we are not necessarily thinking about each individual student per se, although of course students are our main priority. But we also have to take into consideration all the other people that make Yeshiva University Yeshiva University.”

After the Zoom, students and parents on the chats were upset that live questions were not taken.

Other students are upset about the

pushback against the booster mandate.

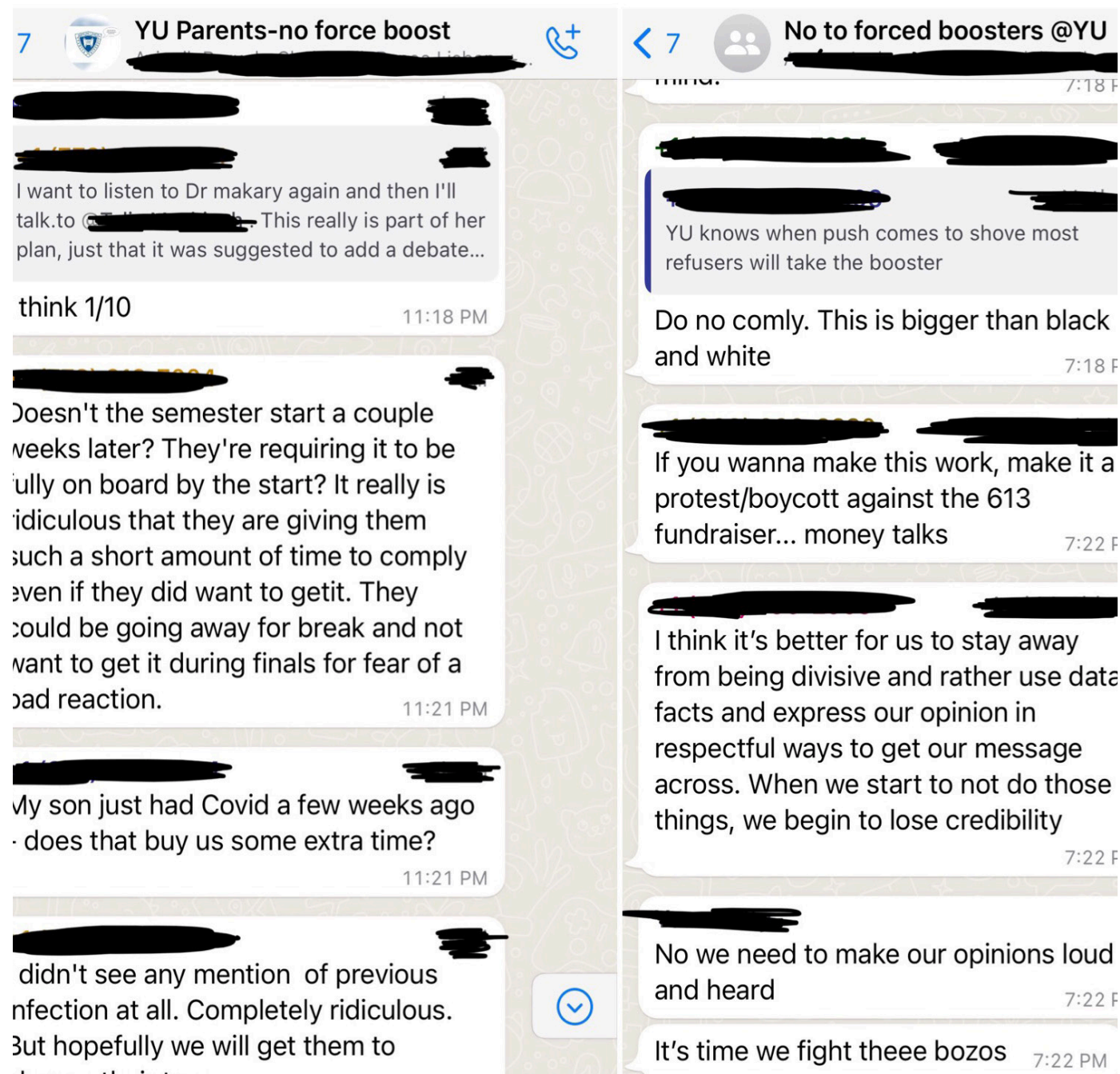
“This was not an appeal to weigh costs or consider other factors — just whining about perceived ‘promises,’” commented Ephraim Meiri (YC ‘24). “The issue with this is not just that the basis is utter fiction, but that the author and signatories seem to be unable or unwilling to weigh their own

minor frustration against the well-being of those in their immediate vicinity.”

Yonah Moise (YC ‘23) agreed. “Because I am immunocompromised and at higher risk of severe illness, I got my third dose before the Fall semester began, wear an N95 mask for over 10 hours on the average day on campus, and eat meals in my room,” he

said. “I don’t see why getting a booster and taking safety precautions such as masking seem problematic for my fellow students.”

He added, “This lack of concern for others weakens the communal bonds that I valued at YU before the pandemic.”



(L-R) Parent and student WhatsApp chats

Macs Snap 50-Game Win Streak in Devastating Loss to Illinois Wesleyan Titans

By ARIEL KAHAN

This article was published online Dec. 30.

The Macs lost 73-59 against the Illinois Wesleyan Titans, ending the team's 50-game win streak with its first loss since November 2019.

Since the Macs' first game of the season on Nov. 6, the team has been a spectacle of the Jewish world, receiving national media attention from ESPN and the NBA. The Macs entered the game ranked No. 1 in the NCAA DIII national ranking while the Titans ranked three spots lower at No. 4. Until this game, the Macs had not played against a

top 25 team, making it one fans expected to be intense.

The game was set for 8 p.m. in a packed Max Stern Athletic Center with thousands of fans tuning in through MacsLive. But once the game began, things took a turn for the worse. The Macs started the game slowly and never recovered, as the Titans jumped out to a 6-0 lead and never relinquished it. The difference in the first half was field goal percentage, with Illinois hitting every open shot while YU struggled from the field. YU only shot 10/25 from the field in the first half and 0/9 from downtown. By contrast, Illinois shot 19/29 from the field and 9/14 from downtown, over 50 percent in both categories. Additionally, YU was outrebounded 21-7 in the half. The score at halftime was

49-29 with the Macs down by 20.

Unfortunately for the Macs, the second half was not much better. The team found itself faced with the same problems of lack of space and missing shots on offense. While YU went on several short runs and Ryan Turell made challenging shots, the Titans kept on firing back with baskets of their own. In the last five minutes, YU cut the lead to 14 but it was too little too late — the game ended with a final score of 73-59 in favor of the Titans. At the end of the game, fans applauded the Macs despite the loss.

Ryan Turell led the team with 22 points, with Eitan Halpert contributing 16 and Ethan Lasko adding 10. Overall, YU shot at just 40% from the field and 25% from the three-point range, both significantly

below their season averages. The Macs also struggled with rebounding as the Titans scored 14 second-chance points.

The Macs' win streak dated back to 2019. The team advanced to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA DIII tournament in 2020 with its streak at 29, but it was cut short due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Macs tacked on another seven wins last season, which also ended early because of the pandemic. YU worked to further their streak this season, starting out with 12 straight wins until succumbing tonight to Illinois Wesleyan.

The Macs' game against the No. 17-ranked Williams College was set for 5 p.m. on Sunday but was reportedly canceled.



Ryan Turell led the team with 22 points in its game against the Titans.

MACSLIVE

YU Announces Spring Semester to Begin In Person, Mandates COVID Booster Shot

By AVIGAIL GREENBERG

This article was published online Dec. 31.

The spring semester will begin in person at its scheduled date of Jan. 24 with a new mandate for students and staff to receive their COVID-19 booster shot, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Selma Botman announced in an email on Thursday evening.

“We remain nimble in adjusting our infection-control protocols as necessary to meet the shifting landscape of COVID-19.”

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Selma Botman

Botman explained that “studies have shown that neutralizing antibodies to COVID-19 begin to diminish six months after vaccination” and “booster vaccinations

have proven to provide a significantly higher immune response.” Before the semester begins, students and staff will be required to submit verification that they received the shot. Anyone not eligible for the booster, such as those within six months of their original vaccination, must receive the shot within 30 days of their eligibility.

Additionally, all students must submit a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of returning to campus or a negative rapid test taken within 48 hours. Botman also wrote that YU will continue its current masking policies and testing requirements for next semester.

This announcement follows last week's decision to move classes and final exams online beginning Wednesday, Dec. 24. Two days later, YU's COVID-19 Tracker reported that over 100 students tested positive that week, split almost evenly between Wilf and Beren campuses.

Botman's email also noted that, over winter break, residence halls, libraries and athletic centers will remain open. Students on campus will be required to wear masks indoors and receive weekly, campus-given PCR tests. Those who participate in on-campus testing will not have to provide proof

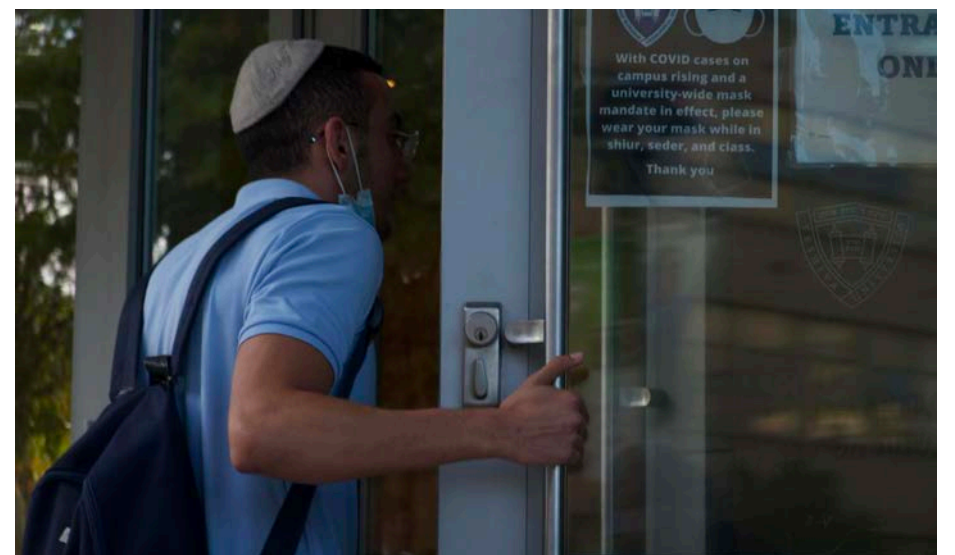
of a PCR test before the spring semester.

Regarding staff, over winter break there will be a remote schedule decided by managers and their employees to reduce the number of people on campus, Botman said. Upon return, staff must also follow the guidelines for submitting a negative test.

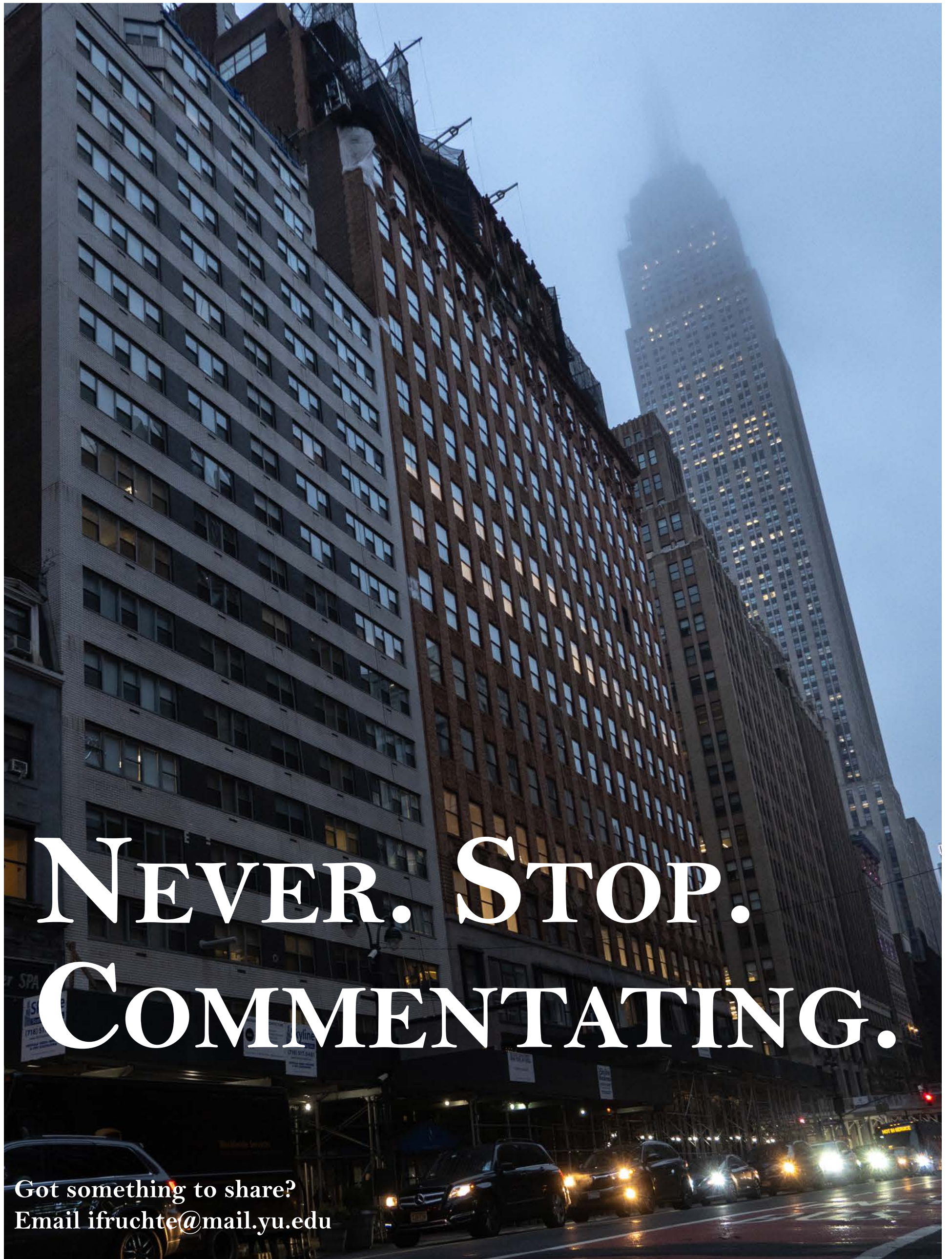
As of now, the current weekly testing mandate for students and random testing for

staff will be in effect, and testing frequency will be “reassessed based on COVID numbers during the remainder of the school year,” Botman said.

“We remain nimble in adjusting our infection-control protocols as necessary to meet the shifting landscape of COVID-19,” she assured.



MICAH PAVA



NEVER. STOP. COMMENTATING.

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WEINREICH LETTER
Continued from Page 3

The Line,” entirely to unencumbered adulation of the Macs. The editorial claims the Macs “serve as a source of inspiration” to our entire community and implores that community to “savor every moment,” “have a stake in every game” and “show our support.”

This treatment of the Macs is inappropriate and irresponsible. Essential context is being omitted. A casual reader of these articles would receive no inkling of the dark cloud hanging over the Macs and YU Athletics.

Nearly all of these articles discuss the recent history of the Macs, going at least as far back as the 2019-20 season, when both the current win streak and the COVID-19 pandemic began. If that is necessary and worthwhile context — let alone featuring an article from 1995 — then a member of the team allegedly raping another student during this very win

streak is surely necessary context as well.

Quietism can often possess the allure of neutrality, but this is an illusion. There is no neutral. Quietism is malignant. Carrying on as if nothing is amiss upholds and perpetuates a status quo that we know is decidedly hostile to victims of sexual violence. It wholly serves the interests of perpetrators, allowing them to continue unabated. It communicates to survivors that if they raise their voice they will be ignored or forgotten. That the slightest discomfort or inconvenience to their community is too much. That prestige conveys impunity. That they are alone.

This problem is not limited to The Commentator. YU features the Macs prominently in its latest marketing materials. President Berman tweets approbation. The gym fills with cheering fans for every game.

More students than ever seem to be involved in promoting the team on MacsLive. And YU supporters maintain their reputation as some of the most passionate and outspoken fans on #d3hoops Twitter. All involved in these activities are helping reinforce that toxic status quo and are sending an unconscionable message to survivors.

No doubt, only two players on last year’s team were directly indicted by the allegations. We have no way of knowing if they’re among the stars receiving accolades each week or if, perhaps, they are not even on the team anymore. And most of the blame for mishandling the report surely lies with YU’s Title IX administration. It can feel unfair to sanction the entire team when most members are not directly at fault for being put in this situation.

That they are in this situation cannot be

helped — and the fault for that lies squarely with the alleged rapist. However, every individual involved with the Macs, along with YU Athletics and the team as a whole, still gets to decide how to respond. As already stated, silence is not neutral. Silence supports and enables perpetrators. Silence discourages survivors. If a person or institution chooses that path — which includes quietly taking action exclusively behind the scenes — they are no longer blameless. They are siding against victims. They are making our community less safe.

We already know what it looks like when sexual violence at YU is ignored and covered up. That is the legacy to worry about. I hope it comes to an end.

Daniel Weinreich (YC '21)

HELLER LETTER
Continued from Page 3

the team. (The alleged rapist was a member of the team as of last year, and the student says another team member harassed and shamed her in a public forum at the time.)

The student’s complaint contained three primary elements: the school’s compelling her to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) before completing its investigation, its failure to penalize the alleged rapist in any way and its failure to take any action to accommodate the student’s requests for increased protective measures for her on campus. (There were other complaints she mentioned in the original article; I recommend reading it to refresh your memory and give this full context.) Needless to say, these actions don’t exactly embody the values of a culture of non-tolerance for abuse, protection of victims and prioritization of student safety. But after conducting some

research, I discovered that YU’s actions don’t just seem wrong — they are wrong. In the eyes of the law.

Section § 106.45 of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations states that an educational institution’s receipt of a “formal complaint of sexual harassment” (clarified elsewhere to include sexual assault) must require “an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence — including both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence.” In other words, the school has to conduct and complete an investigation, including transmitting its findings to all relevant parties. There is no reason to think this obligation changes if the complainant refuses to sign an NDA as YU implied, as per the student. To make matters even more clear, the U.S. Department of Education ruled in April that Arizona State University was in violation of federal

Title IX regulations by requiring students alleging sexual assault to sign an NDA prior to completing its investigation process. If YU forced the student to sign the NDA for the investigation to move forward, as the student herself says, then it clearly and unambiguously violated Title IX — which, to be clear, constitutes a violation of the law. The department states this explicitly: “The University cannot place conditions of any kind on a victim of an alleged sexual assault or their advisor, including the execution of a non-disclosure agreement as a pre-condition to full participation in the disciplinary process or to access to simultaneous written notification of the outcomes of a disciplinary proceeding.”

It would seem that YU violated the law in another respect as well. The Department of Education has made it clear that under

Title IX, an educational institution must provide someone who files a complaint of sexual assault with “supportive measures designed to protect the safety of all parties or the [school’s] educational environment, or deter sexual harassment,” including “campus escort services,” “increased security” and “mutual restrictions on contact between the parties.”

But per the student, this was simply not done. In her article and in a recent radio interview with Jeff Lax, she revealed that she contacted the university on multiple occasions to express concerns about her safety due to the likelihood of encountering her alleged attacker on campus but to no avail.

“I have been told to just deal with it and that nothing can be done by YU — not one thing,” she wrote. The administration told

Continued on Page 20

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Consult with your academic advisor or program director to be sure that all of your graduation requirements have been met.

Visit yu.edu/academic-advising to schedule.

STEP 2

Degrees are awarded in September, January and May. Contact your campus Registrar to determine if you are eligible to attend Commencement.

Visit yu.edu/registrar/graduation for additional information.

STEP 3

Apply for Graduation by your degree's deadline:

February 15th **March 1st**
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The Application for Graduation—Undergraduate Degree can be found here: yu.edu/registrar/forms

NOTE: If you miss this deadline your name will not be included in the Commencement Program.

Be sure to RSVP on the application to Commencement and give your accurate height and weight so your gown fits just right!

STEP 4

Pay your graduation/diploma fee of \$150 to the Office of Student Finance.

STEP 5

Cap and Gown Distribution Events will be held on each campus in early May.

Come with friends; have your picture taken in the photo booth to be featured at Commencement!

If you cannot pick up your attire at a distribution event you may pick it up from the Office of Student Life starting the day after the event.

No attire will be distributed at Commencement.

STEP 6

Each graduate will receive **6 guest tickets** when picking up their cap and gown.

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Shenat Hasheva Is Changing Shemittah in Israel. We Saw It First Hand.

By CHAIM BOOK

"Shabbat Shalom!" The sound system blasted the rabbi's voice through our confused ears on the sunny Monday morning. It was an exotic scene. Green fields and rickety boxes of oranges surrounded a stage set up for presentations as various distinguished rabbis gathered to meet us. Escaping the city streets of Washington Heights to the rural setting of the Israeli *moshav*, we were thrown into the unfamiliar world of *Shemittah* in the holy land.

It was surreal being there. As we followed our revered *rebbeim* and *roshei yeshiva* down the rocky path to where Shimon, a farmer applauded as a Jewish hero, was proudly showing us his dried out and fallow grapevines, many of us had to pinch ourselves to conclude that it was not a dream. Just days before, Israel had declared the United States a red country for COVID-19, barring us from entry and prompting some of the trip organizers to send us emails suggesting that our winter break plans were going to be pushed off. However, Rabbi Dr. Ari Bergmann, a Jewish Studies professor at Yeshiva College founder of the Shenat Hasheva organization and coordinator of the trip, had no doubts. "This is *Shemittah!*" he exclaimed in his typical charismatic style when we arrived from the airport. "It is about

bitachon – Hashem wanted us to do this! I knew it would happen."

We were traveling to Israel to experience the commonly misunderstood mitzvah of *Shemittah* and to bring our experience back to the United States where its observance often passes by unnoticed. We were a small group, nine undergraduate students and three RIETS *semikha* and Kollel Elyon members who were accompanying the prominent group of YU *rebbeim* – including Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Elchanan Adler, Rabbi Daniel Feldman, Rabbi Tanchum Cohen, Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky and RIETS Dean Rabbi Menchem Penner – as they

growing in stark contrast to the barren brown stems in front of us. Noticing our confused expression the farmer explained, "Those grapes are for the *Otzar Beit Din*." This was the beginning of our week-long adventure into the complex and diverse approaches to the observance of *shemittah* in the modern age.

As our bus pulled up to Beit Chilkiyah, where the headquarters of Shenat Hasheva is located, we were introduced to the revolutionary system of Shenat Hasheva's *Otzar Beit Din*. Although the concept of an *Otzar Beit Din* is ideal and has precedent from the times of the Mishna, it was not able to

charge a set price for their work distributing the free *Shemittah* fruit. In this communal farmers market, prices decrease dramatically because farmers are paid directly without having to employ distributors and super-markets as middlemen.

On the long bus rides, our *rebbeim* explained the history and complexities of contemporary *Shemittah* as the serene farmland of Israel presented itself through our windows. The message the Torah wished to imbue through the mitzvah of *Shemittah* was that God is in control of the world; it is His will and not our actions which produce it. By not working the land in a way that increases the production of fruit and by allowing the produce to be consumed and shared by everyone, we relinquish our sense control to God and demonstrate that God's world is a gift to us all.

With the help of Shenat Hasheva, the spirit of the mitzvah of *Shemittah* remains intact while allowing the farmers to make a halachically honest living. The trees are maintained but not treated to further produce and people appreciate the dramatic decrease in price, experiencing the message of sharing, communal ownership and God's hand in production. Produce does not go to waste and Israeli agriculture is self-sustained.

Continued on Page 13

With the help of Shenat Hasheva, the spirit of the mitzvah of Shemittah remains intact while allowing the farmers to make a halachically honest living.

advocated for a revolutionary approach to the observance of *Shemittah* in modern day Israel.

Pointing to the dried out grapevines in front of us, Shimon proudly pronounced, "This is *hashbata*." Many of us were expecting this. We had heard of the Torah's commandment to lay the land fallow every seventh year. However, squinting further into the distance we noticed glistening grapes

be successfully implemented until now. We took a tractor ride around the fields and the distribution center and smiled for pictures with the mayor in front of forklifts filled with fruit as the *Otzar Beit Din's* approach was presented to us. In conjunction with the rabbinic court, farmers can participate as paid harvesters and distributors on behalf of the people. Instead of consumers in the cities paying for the produce itself, farmers can



YU Shemittah Trip

We Asked, Y(O)U Answered

Expectations for the Coming Semester

By **ETHAN SCHUMAN**

At the beginning of every semester at Yeshiva University, every student comes in with their own set of expectations and goals for themselves that they want to achieve. However, each student's expectations and goals could vary tremendously from each other, ranging from achieving a high GPA to having successful relationships. Furthermore, many students have new expectations and goals compared to previous semesters on campus. As a result of this variability, The Commentator reached out to several students, asking them what their expectations and goals for this semester are, and what similarities and differences they predict to see this semester compared to the last one.

Jacob Katz (YC '24)
Psychology

"I expect it to be a crazy but exciting

semester. There will be a lot of work. I am ready though to take it on. This semester has a heavier course load compared to last semester. I am more ready though going in as I have become more comfortable with the YU learning experience.

I wish, this semester and throughout the rest of my time at YU, to gain a deeper understanding of the different aspects that make up the world of psychology. I want to learn more about the different lenses through which each person can look at the world."

Yitzchak Tollinsky (YC '24)
Biology

"I am expecting this semester to be similar to my previous ones. I hope to work hard and hopefully will do well. I have got to keep up with my work and show up to class and that should set me up well. I do not think it should be so different from before. There will be less football to distract me now though.

I do not have any particular goals or ambitions, just to do well in my classes, have a good time, and get to know my classmates better after being so long on Zoom."

Racheli Jian (SCW '25)
Biology

"I expect myself to learn how to more effectively study and take notes in classes. I also have a goal to start a club. Lastly, I hope to make more connections with my professor. Last semester, I was a first semester freshman so I was very unsure about almost everything. I think this semester I know myself a little bit better and I will be able to succeed because of this. I expect that this semester and last will be the same in the types of courses. Since I'm a freshman they will most likely consist of gen eds.

I have a goal of trying to start a club, meet new people, and take classes I enjoy and find interesting."

Asher Martin (SSSB '24)

Business Management

"I expect to push myself this semester and excel in all my secular studies. This semester is all in person compared to my first semester which was online. This means I will be able to finally be in a real classroom setting and develop stronger connections with my professors.

My primary goal for this semester and my entire time in college is to achieve the highest GPA I can possibly get."

Moishe Rechester (SSSB '25)
Undecided

"I expect to succeed in my studies and all the work I do. Also, even though I will be taking different classes and professors, I predict that my classmates for the most part now, and in future semesters as well, will be the same.

I want to be able to have a declared major by the end of the year hopefully."

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

(November 15, 1962; Volume 28, Issue 3) — America Is Too Weak In Foreign Affairs

By **ARYEH BOTWINICK**

Editor's Note: The current state of global affairs is heating up as tensions between the United States and Russia continue to rise. Written at the height of the Cold War and Kennedy's crisis with Cuba, the author, Aryeh Botwinick, addresses issues that are relevant in American foreign policy today.

The current crisis over Cuba points up what may be called the congenital disability of the United States to exert its power successfully in the field of foreign affairs.

The debacle at the Bay of Pigs last April taught us what disastrous consequences can result from assigning too great a weight in our actions to that amorphous and elusive entity called World Opinion.

We were afraid to nip the Communist menace in its bud before the placement of Soviet missiles on the island because of the highly moralistic and self-righteous reaction that would probably have been forthcoming from leaders of the stripe of Mr. Nehru.

Fail To Realise

We did not realize that if there is anything that the leaders of neutral nations like less than an irresponsible assertion of strength, it is the cowardly non-assertion of it in the face of a clear and present provocation to do so.

The origins of this shying away from the use of power in the arena of foreign affairs lie deep in the character and history of the United States. Certainly the first generation of American statesmen, the generation we reverently refer to as our Founding Fathers, understood the meaning of power.

One need only call up the names of John Adams, James Madison, or Alexander Hamilton, and recall some of the papers in *The Federalist*, written by the latter two, to realize the extraordinary comprehension that that generation had of the place of power in the conduct of human affairs.

Remember The Maine

The Spanish-American War, can, I believe, serve as a prototype for the weaknesses that have since afflicted America in

its conduct of foreign affairs. In order for us to have entered the war in the first place, there had to be a bogus ideological crusade trumped up by Mr. Hearst.

We refused to admit, even to ourselves, that economic aggrandizement might be one of our motives in centering and to a very large extent creating this war. Since our motive for entry was ideological and therefore limitless, we did not secure a peace treaty that was practical and therefore limited to our own best interests. A war in order to be successful must be fought for specific national aims and the terms of peace, in order to prove enduring and not provide a seedbed for future wars, must be limited to embodying those specific aims for which the war was fought in the first place.

The United States as a world power has never fought a war in this traditionally understood, historical sense.

President Kennedy Acts

President Kennedy, upon assuming office, besides being at the mercy of a faulty intelligence setup, was also entrapped by the

ingrained American tradition of concealing our baser and perhaps truer motives in the conduct of foreign policy.

Possessing the self-confidence of youth and armed with Richard Neustadt's manual for new Presidents, *Presidential Power*, Mr. Kennedy was forced to yield to the pressure of circumstances before he could learn from experience how to assert strong aggressive leadership.

Learned From Experience

That he has learned from experience is evident from his handling of the current Cuban crisis. He has not been embarrassed by the exercise of power, nor has he yielded to the temptation of pushing the assertion of power beyond the attainable goals of getting the Soviets to remove their missile bases from Cuba.

Mr. Kennedy, I believe, has exercised mature leadership during the prevailing crisis. He has shown that he has profited by experience, which augurs well for the future of American foreign policy.

SHEMITTAH

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Back on the streets of Jerusalem we witnessed the end of the process, fully appreciating how Shenat Hasheva had revolutionized the *Otzar Beit Din*. Teaming up with Mishnat Yosef, a religious distributing company that cuts the cost of middleman on all products for poor families during the year, they discovered a system to cut the costs of *Otzar Beit Din* for everyone during *Shemittah*. We watched as happy families picked up their everyday needs — from shampoo to COVID tests — directly from shipping boxes in the street. Without having to employ a third party of middlemen and warehouses, consumers can pay the farmers directly without having to pay the extra charges of the supermarkets.

Cheaper prices incentivize consumers and create a self-sustaining economy.

This approach was recently approved and advocated for by religious leaders of all stripes and colors, uniting the nation in a solution for a once highly divisive issue. In Shenat Hasheva's most ambitious upcoming "Pri Yomi" project, *yeshivot* in Israel will band together in the eating of exclusively *Otzar Beit Din* fruit every day. Following in the unifying spirit behind the program, we visited many rabbis and *yeshivot* from across the religious spectrum as they spoke to us about the importance of this revolution. We connected with students in Yeshivat Chevron, learning in their *beit midrash* and

joining in a *kumzitz* with them in the home of Roni Sharon, a potato proprietor who had earlier showed us around his potato farm, describing his sacrifices for the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*. In a fireside session near Kibbutz Lavi we participated in a joint experience with the "Shomer Hachadash" youth movement which uses the message of *Shemittah* to connect even secular Israelis to the nature of the land.

Coming back to the YU Israel Campus for *Shabbat Shira*, friends and *rebbeim* together digested the weeklong overload of inspiration and information. Together with Yeshivat Torat Shraga we were privileged with the unique opportunity of open access

and shiurim with the group of YU Rabbis who had joined us for the trip.

Our trip concluded appropriately with a Tu B'Shevat *seder*, celebrating the fruits of the land in a way we never had before. At the end of the ceremony, we were informed that our mission had just begun. It was now our job to share our experiences and spread the message of *Shemittah* in the United States. RIETS has partnered with Shenat Hasheva to unite the Jewish people through the spirit of the *mitzvah* of *Shemitta*. As part of our mission, our group will participate in events and promotions in an attempt to bring our experience to everyone. Rather than ending there, our journey is just beginning.

Maximizing Their Grant: Advice for the Career Center

By YONI MAYER

The most underrepresented deficiency in the YU college experience is not the size of the campus. It is not the cafeteria food, the dorm rooms or the curriculum. It isn't that it's paradoxical in being too religious and also not religious enough, too progressive and not progressive enough, or the proper mixture of Torah Umadda yet also an institution that misses the mark.

Those may be the common complaints we hear in campus discourse, but they are not the main shortcoming of Yeshiva University.

The underrecognized issue, the omission I feel most palpably right now, is the lack of on-campus recruiting.

My internship application process is currently underway (and feels like it might never end). Part of the process is networking; reaching out to people on LinkedIn, connecting with alumni and asking friends about their summer plans. I usually ask how they ended up in their job, and, although it isn't always the answer, I've heard an overwhelming amount of "on-campus recruiter." Referring to people who are sent to college campuses to present their companies, attract students to working positions and recruit.

Of course, this isn't the only way students get jobs; however, it presents a huge leg up and an opportunity to get a foot in the door. And that's what on-campus recruiting is. It isn't the assurance of post-graduate hiring but rather a first encounter with recruiters. Since these would be the first people to see your online resume anyway, getting to first meet them in person and make an impression is a huge advantage.

I admit this is a fault of the companies themselves. In recent years, dozens of YU alumni have shuffled through the ranks of various companies. The companies should take note of this and start sending representatives to recruit. It is ultimately their decision where they choose to send their on-campus recruitment team.

However, a 2017 study of the factors that companies consider for sending on-campus recruiters found that the reputation of the school, personal relationships with faculty/career services and influence of alumni at the company are three of the main criteria companies prioritize in their decision.

YU has made known that they have risen the ranks of the national college ranking and YU alumni have risen to prominent positions in top global companies. This leaves personal relationships with career services as the main avenue through which Yeshiva University could be targeted for on-campus recruiting.

It is here that I shunt the blame to YU. Last year, YU received a sizable donation to

initiative and provides an invaluable connection between YU students who are seeking advice and alumni who can provide answers. However, the career search must extend beyond the boundaries of Yeshiva University and its former students. Recruiters provide an invaluable service; they help students personally interact with people at the companies they're interested in, ask questions about the

be organizing career fairs that play host to companies of interest for the student body's diverse career trajectories. Recruiters visiting campus would be the most direct and tangible proof of the career center's efforts to set students up with internships and jobs.

YU students will forever be divided on core YU debates; it's the nature of the diverse student body and of the questioning, college-aged mind. There will be actions YU takes which we don't agree with and opportunities YU doesn't provide which we'll plead on deaf ears for. However, YU students can agree that college is not the be-all, end-all of life. There's an inevitable life after college that, like it or not, has been our focus from our earliest days as freshmen and sophomores. Colleges need to help in any way they can to make the transition into the real world as seamless as possible. If they do, their students will thank them for the opportunities, and ultimately, corporations will thank them for the wealth of talent and boundless creativity they've shared with the world at large.

YU should be using [its] career center grant to attract on-campus recruiters, [which would be] the most direct and tangible proof of the career center's efforts to set students up with internships and jobs.

its career center, upgrading its resources and changing its name to the Shevet Glaubach Center for Career Strategy and Professional Development. On top of that, YU has recently announced that its \$613 million dollar fundraising program is underway and that it has already raised over one-third of its target amount.

It's not dishonest to say that the lynchpin of a college's responsibilities is to improve students' lives and careers after college, rather than just the four years spent on campus. College can, and should, have amazing extracurriculars, sports teams, clubs and opportunities. However, at the end of the day, college is a blip in our lives. The greater portion of our years are spent in the workforce and the first foray into that workforce, the introduction to life after college, is at college itself. It therefore lies in the college's hands to best prepare us for and introduce us to that workforce; this is one of the main goals of a college.

Yes, I know that YU already has impressive success regarding student career placement post-college with 93% of graduates securing a role in either the workplace or a master's program. I don't believe that success is all in the numbers nor should it be chalked up to the career center. The YU student body is a well-connected, networking-minded and generally motivated group and would be forging their way with or without the career center. It is the career center's role to make the career search easier and more accessible. YU MVP, YU's student-alumni business network, is a commendable

workplace, network, and understand which career they're truly fit for (before sending out dozens of applications to places they might not be compatible with.)

YU should be using the career center grant to attract on-campus recruiters. They should be publicizing the Yeshiva University name and forging relationships with recruiters at major companies. They should



The Shevet Glaubach Center for Career Strategy and Professional Development

THE COMMENTATOR

Biden's Approval Tailspin and What Can be Done

By ELISHAMA MARMON

President Biden is in serious trouble. Recent approval polls show that the American people are losing faith in him, his agenda and his party, and it's only getting worse. If Biden and his team want to pull their approval ratings out of the red, they have to start focusing on what Americans care about. However, it seems unlikely given Biden's own statements that he will make this critical shift, the absence of which will doubtlessly spell catastrophe for the Democratic Party and their agenda in the midterm elections.

First, a look at the polls: A recent Quinnipiac poll put Biden at only a 33% approval rate, and while that is an outlier, his FiveThirtyEight polling average is at 41.7%, a continuation of a consistent downward trend during his entire presidency. It's particularly shocking given that only a year ago he was polling at 55%. The Democratic party is now polling at only 42% to Republicans' 47% (in party identification), numbers that we

haven't seen for at least 20 years.

Clearly, Americans are unhappy with Biden's performance over the last year. And the reasons for this disappointment are numerous. Inflation, one of the public's top priorities, rose at an annual rate of 7% this

If the President and his administration get out of this tailspin, they have to start listening to what the people are saying.

December, the highest since 1982. 70% of Americans disapprove of Biden's handling of inflation.

COVID-19 persists, hitting an unprecedented million in cases on Jan. 3, 2022. Biden ran on promises that solving the issue of COVID-19 was simple with a steady hand on the tiller, claiming that he could "shut down the virus." However, despite the current vaccination rate being over 80% of eligible Americans, including 95% for the critical category of Americans over 65, the country is still not back to normal. As I write this, it's been a year since the start of Biden's "hundred days of masking," and the

Biden administration just recommended that people start wearing N95s, finally acknowledging the reality that cloth masks were never effective against COVID-19 but also refusing to drop recommendations to mask. 36% of Americans think Biden has handled

COVID badly, and even as fewer people see COVID as a top priority, they blame Biden for bad COVID policies.

On foreign policy, things aren't any better for Biden. After a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, his approval rating dropped below 50% for the first time. Biden has also repeatedly bungled the growing crisis in Ukraine. We are potentially days away from a large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia caused at least in part by Biden's projection of weakness with the Afghanistan withdrawal and the concession to Russia of allowing them to build Nord Stream 2, a pipeline intended to bring Russian oil to Germany,

bypassing Ukraine by going underwater. The Biden administration actually lobbied the Senate to reject a bill designed to reimpose sanctions on the pipeline. At a recent press conference, Biden made things even worse, appearing to greenlight a "minor invasion" of Ukraine, which naturally horrified Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who said that "there are no minor incursions." Furthermore, Biden exposed differences of opinion within NATO about how to respond to varying levels of Russian aggression, mentioning that sanctions on Russia would hurt NATO economically. He also threatened, as his coup d'etat, to levy sanctions like "[Putin]'s never seen" on Moscow, but only after Putin invades Ukraine, implying that the response to anything less than a full-scale invasion would be less severe. Here, too, Biden has truly dropped the ball on his foreign policy, and people are noticing.

If the president and his administration get out of this tailspin, they have to start listening to what the people are saying. People's actual priorities diverge significantly from

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Why Davening For Someone Else Helps

By RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES

Editor's Note: The following is an edited speech, transcribed by Zachary Orenshein, given by Rabbi Michael Taubes on Wednesday, Jan. 12, one month after he suffered from a stroke.

It's certainly wonderful to be back here in the *beis medrash* – to be back with all of you. I know that today is the last day before finals and you now have *chazzarah* with your *rebbeim*. I don't want to take away time from that. But I did want to speak for just a few moments to in effect share my profound sense of *hakaras hatov*, my gratitude, to each and every person in this *beis medrash*.

In this week's *sedra*, Parshas Beshalach, the most famous passage is the *Shiras HaYam* – the song which *Bnai Yisrael* sang after the splitting of the Red Sea, which we of course say as part of the davening every morning. It opens with the words “*Az yashir Moshe u'vnei Yisrael*” – then Moshe and *Bnai Yisrael* sang this song. A lot of commentaries are troubled by the use here of the word “*az*” – then. What is added by that word? Clearly, what is about to be described, the *Shiras HaYam*, followed whatever came before it. We don't usually have in the Torah a passage introduced by the word “*az*.”

Here, the Torah presents the events, the splitting of the sea, followed by the people's reaction: “*Va-yar Yisrael es ha-yad ha-gedolah asher asah Hashem be-Mitzrayim va-yiru ha-'am es Hashem va-ya'aminu ba-Hashem u'vMoshe 'avdo.*” The next *pasuk* should say “*Va-yashiru Moshe u'vnei Yisrael*” – Moshe and *Bnai Yisrael* sang. What additional point is made by the word “*az*”? In English, when you are writing a composition or an essay, you don't say, “Then we did this, and then we did that; then he said this, and then he said that.” You don't introduce each new thought by writing the word “then.” Obviously, when you are presenting a sequence of events, the assumption is that they occurred in the order in which they appear. The Torah here should therefore say simply that Moshe and *Bnai Yisrael* sang; we would understand that the song came then and right then, without the word “*az*.”

The Netziv, in his commentary here, notes that by using the word “*az*,” the Torah is stressing that the song, the *shirah*, was sung only at that very point when the *yeshuah*, the salvation, was complete. *Bnai Yisrael* had gone through a lot in what was the entire previous year, as *Chazal* tell us. They experienced all the *makkos*, and of course, the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* itself, and thus had a lot to be grateful for. But the *shirah*, the great song of thanks to Hashem – that was *davka* then – “*az*” – after the entire *yeshuah*, after the salvation was complete. You don't sing Hashem's praises fully when the results aren't all yet in. There are other ways of expressing thanks to Hashem at that point, but the full song of praise to Hashem – that is recited only after the completion of the *yeshuah*.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik is quoted in the writings of his son Rav Velvel on a *pasuk* in Tehillim (13:6) that we also say in the davening every day as conveying the same idea. We affirm “*va-ani be-chasdecha vatachti yagel libi by'shu'asecha*,” meaning that I have *bitachon* – I trust – I am confident in, the *chessed* of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and my heart will rejoice in His (forthcoming) *yeshuah*. But “*Ashirah la-Hashem*” – I will sing to Hashem – when? Only “*ki gamal alay*” – when what was done has been

completed in its entirety. “*Ki gamal*,” when it is in past tense, when it has already happened. Full *shirah* to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is appropriate only after the full completion of the salvation.

Now, full disclosure, the Shaloh in commenting on our parsha, and perhaps the Vilna Gaon in one place (Mishlei 11:10) learn differently. Perhaps one can sing even before the salvation is complete. That's a question. Do I have enough *bitachon* to sing praises to Hashem even beforehand? Is that right? It is an interesting topic.

Personally, I feel a little torn at this time.

The idea of saying Tehillim and davening for somebody else is that you care. You care about what happens to that person.

All of you know that a month ago I suffered a stroke. For those who are not exactly familiar with what a stroke is, a stroke is to the brain like a heart attack is to the heart. Somehow, some blood does not circulate properly in the head; in my case it was the back part of the brain. As a result of that, in my particular situation, I could not move my left arm – any part of my arm. Not my shoulder, not my elbow, not my wrist, not my fingers. And I couldn't move my left leg at all. I couldn't bend my foot, I couldn't move my toes, I couldn't bend my knees. The whole left side of my body was taken out. Now, *baruch Hashem, chasdei Hashem*, I can walk by myself, and I have full use of my arm. A couple of weeks ago, I couldn't even button my shirt because I didn't have the dexterity in my fingers – and now I can. *Chasdei Hashem*. So on the one hand, I have tremendous recognition of the *chessed* and the *rachamim* that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has bestowed upon me.

On the other hand, I am not there yet. I wish I were 100% now, but I am not. I have to walk a little more slowly with a little more effort, and my arm is still weak, but *baruch Hashem*. So I am figuring it all out. Should I sing to Hashem now? Should I not sing yet? It's a discussion; maybe your *rebbeim* can talk to you about it. Should I *bentsh Gomer*? I actually have not *bentshed Gomer* yet, as some *poskim* feel that one should be closer to 100% recovered before *bentshing Gomer*. *B'Ezras Hashem* I will do so within the next few days, but we are not here to discuss the *halachic* issues right now.

I asked for the opportunity to address you because there is absolutely no question in my mind – no question – that all of the *tefillos* and the Tehillim and the learning that was undertaken by the *talmidim* of this Yeshiva – by you – greatly helped my recovery. I have no question. Yes, I had good doctors and good therapists and everything else. But *B'Chasdei Hashem*, I progressed more quickly and strongly than they originally thought.

To be perfectly honest, when the stroke first hit – the first day – it was a *Motzaei Shabbos*. I was actually giving a *shiur* on Zoom when it happened. I was able to finish the *shiur*; but then I couldn't get up out of my seat. The next morning, Sunday, it was right after Parshas Vayigash – I'll put it this way – it was far, far from clear that I would ever walk normally again. One of the doctors indicated to my wife the possibility that I would be in a wheelchair for a long time. *Chasdei Hashem*, that is not the case. I started slowly, first with a walker and then with a cane. *Baruch Hashem*, now I don't need any of that. Again, I do have to walk more slowly, but hopefully over the next several weeks, I'll continue to improve. I still have to participate in outpatient therapy; a

few times a week I have to go in for exercise and so on. But *Chasdei Hashem*.

How did it happen? How was I able to progress so well, *baruch Hashem*? I have no doubt that the *kabbalos*, the things that were accepted by the *talmidim* of this Yeshiva made a big difference. It was a tremendous source of *chizzuk* to me when Rabbi Kahn and Rabbi Schenker told me that different *shiurim* undertook different things on my behalf. People were saying Tehillim and people were saying *tefillos*. There is no doubt – no doubt at all in my mind – that all this helped.

In the rehab center that I went to after coming out of the hospital for a few weeks, they were very, very pleased to say the least – indeed surprised – by the pace of the progress. But it was because I had something else. Again, the therapists were excellent, I'm not saying they were not, but I believe I had something else in my corner.

But how does that work? How does it help when we say Tehillim for someone else? What does my davening have to do with somebody else? How does my Tehillim make a difference? I have often wondered this myself. When we say Tehillim for somebody at the end of davening – someone needs a *refuah sheleimah*, so and so is having a procedure today so we are going to say Tehillim after davening – how does it work?

I would like to suggest for your thinking as follows, and please bear this in mind any time you are asked to *daven* for somebody else.

You know, when a human court – even a Jewish court, a *beis din*, or a secular court – renders a decision, they have to take into account the facts that they have in front of them. And, let's take a secular court: If someone is found guilty of whatever the crime, he is sentenced to serve, say, “x” number of years in jail. That is the punishment. Evidently, he deserves it. But one second. If he is going to go to jail, now his wife is going to suffer also. If he has children, then his children will suffer too. But they didn't do anything wrong! Why should they be punished? Why should we send this guy to jail – maybe he deserves it, but his friends and his family members, they didn't commit any crime, yet they are going to suffer, too! The answer is that we can't control that. Human beings can't consider all that. We have to have a system of laws, with penalties and so forth, with crime and punishment, so we have to do our best even though in a certain sense it is not fully fair. There are people who are going to be punished even though they do not deserve it.

Not so, however, with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The *pasuk* that we say at the end of mincha on Shabbos afternoon (Tehillim 36:7) says, “*mishpatecha tehom rabbah.*” Your judgment, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, is “*tehom rabbah*” – it goes to the great depths, deep down. It takes everything into account. Everything, the whole situation, such that when *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* judges, it ends up being fair to everybody. And that may mean that somebody who committed a particular crime will get a seemingly “lighter” punishment because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is not going to hurt his wife and his children because they don't deserve it. Everybody involved gets what they deserve. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* takes into account the whole picture, and, to use the English term, He plumbs to the depths – to the “*tehom rabbah*” – to

see all the ramifications.

Rabbosai, if I daven for somebody else, and I am sincere about it, I am saying to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that maybe he deserves whatever it is that is happening, but I didn't do anything wrong; I don't deserve to be punished by seeing him suffer. And if two people daven for somebody else, then now there are two people who are friends of his who are going to be hurt if the *tefillos* are not answered. And if one hundred people daven, so now there are one hundred people who say that they care about this individual, and if something bad happens, it is going to bother all of them, and that is not fair. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* therefore won't let that happen.

The idea of saying Tehillim and davening for somebody else is that you care. You care about what happens to that person. In my situation, I believe that whatever happened to me when I had the stroke was something that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gave me because I deserved it for whatever the reason. We don't usually know why He does what He does, but we have to be *matzduk es ha-din*, we have to accept His judgment. As for my recovery, I don't know if I did or did not deserve on my own to have the kind of recovery that I had, *baruch Hashem*. But I do know that when I have hundreds of *talmidim* learning and davening for me and saying, “I care too! Don't let this happen to him because it is going to hurt me too!” – that makes a big difference. And the same is true if an *adam gadol*, or a *tzaddik*, or *talmidei chachamim* daven for somebody, they too are saying to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, “I care. So maybe he deserves whatever you wanted to do to him, but don't do it to me!” And *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* takes this into account.

And it is for that reason that I believe with every fiber of my being that all of the *tefillos* and all of the Tehillim and all of the learning that you guys did were so very helpful. Of course we know that it doesn't always work out the way we want. It's not magic. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has His plans, and as we said, He plumbs to the depths. But very often, *baruch Hashem*, we know, we know quite well, that our *tefillos* do work the way we want them to. *Tefillos* do help. Saying Tehillim does help. The learning does help. And in my particular case, I am extraordinarily, extraordinarily grateful to everyone here who learned and who took on other *kabbalos*. Some of the *rebbeim* contacted me and told me that different *shiurim* were doing different things, and people should keep on doing whatever they are doing. But to me, I believe that all this played a major role in my personal recovery. And again, I still have a little bit of a way to go, but *baruch Hashem, baruch Hashem* is all I can say.

We should all be glad that we have opportunities to help other people. And not just me. When you daven for somebody else, whoever it may be, daven because you care – daven because it means something to you. It may make a difference. Again, it doesn't always work the way we hope it will, but a lot of times it does work. And I am extremely grateful that in my particular instance, *baruch Hashem*, it did work and it is continuing to work.

I again want to use this occasion to thank each and every one of you, literally from the bottom of my heart, with my fullest feelings, because I think you have made a difference in my ability to be back here today and, *b'ezras Hashem*, to be back as regular for the second semester – to be back in the

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The Voting Rights Bill: Equitable and Overdue or Precarious and Destabilizing?

By MA'AYAN TZUR

Much has been made of the virtue or danger of the new voting rights legislation Democrats are trying to pass in the United States Senate. While it includes many promising details, due to its expansiveness, I worry it may do more harm than good. While the bill would increase access to voting by establishing an early voting period of at least 15 days pre-election and allow everyone to vote by mail upon request without needing to provide reasoning as part of the Freedom to Vote Act, some of the bill's provisions are rather concerning.

For example, the bill would require all states to adopt weaker voter ID laws, also as part of the Freedom to Vote Act, allowing voters to merely display a debit card, utility bill, bank statement or a state or federal issued document in their name. In addition, if people don't have any of those documents, they can procure a written statement verifying their identity from someone who has known them for more than six months and provide that instead, in which case the person who wrote it could be prosecuted for perjury should the statement be proven false. While this increases access to voting, which is great, it also opens the doors more widely to voter fraud. In addition, the new bill would allow previously convicted felons to vote upon being released from jail, which is still a highly contested issue in many states.

Another component of the bill permits distributing food and water to voters on election lines, as long as they are distributed to everyone, regardless of political affiliation. This component still allows states to prohibit the distributors from campaigning, and the overall idea of it seems benign, although I could see how this can be used as a part of possibly unfair campaign strategy.

The bill would also reinstate a vital part of the 1956 Voting Rights Acts, which held that states and jurisdictions which had previously had discriminatory voting habits needed "preclearance," or agreement from the Department of Justice, before changing voting legislation. While the 1956 Act's

lot of different, charged ideas and I don't think they should have been put all together in one bill. By doing so, it makes it almost impossible for Senators who agree on some of the sections and disagree on others to allow the bill to pass. Instead, while it might be more tedious, I think the bill should be

Republicans, this controversial legislation has not been passed. However, Democrats have proposed changing the filibuster rule to require only a simple majority in order to pass such legislation, instead of 60 according to current rules. This proposal has also faced a lot of backlash, and it seems unlikely that the Senate will override the filibuster rule anytime soon. It might be tempting to change the rule because it would prevent a lot of standstills the Senate currently faces with partisan issues, but the status quo also protects Democracy and ensures vital consensus in our upper chamber in order to pass far-reaching legislation. While changing the filibuster rule might get their deeply coveted Voting Rights Bill passed, I think it puts too much on the line and it isn't worth the risk, even in the face of this Senate's highly progressive agenda.

It might be tempting to change the rule ... but the status quo also protects Democracy and ensures vital consensus in our upper chamber in order to pass far-reaching legislation.

way of determining which state or jurisdiction had discriminatory voting habits in the past was since deemed unconstitutional, the provision in this new bill, called the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, would reinstate the notion of preclearance using different factors. As a part of the Freedom to Vote Act, election day would also become a national holiday, which would make it easier for people to get to vote. The bill would also make it illegal for states to set up congressional boundaries in a way that would aid a specific political party, known as a partisan gerrymander. Also, according to the new bill, if group donors give over 10,000 dollars toward a campaign, they would need to disclose themselves to the public, promoting transparency. In theory, these provisions sound well-meaning and only fair, but with all these new regulations, I foresee a lot of political strife. Instead of using them to further just voting practices, I'm afraid they will be used instead to drive political agendas as the lines between equitable and inequitable get entangled due to the ambiguity of these new standards.

The voting rights bill, an amalgamation of the Freedom to Vote Act and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (Montellaro, 2022, section 1), combines a

divided into many separate issues and that each group should be voted on alone.

In order for this bill to pass, 60 out of 100 Senators need to vote for it. Since the Senate is roughly split between Democrats and



Florida voter holding a sticker saying that they voted

UNSPASH/MICK HAUPT

BIDEN

Continued from Page 14

Biden's, and the solution is simple. Change your legislative priorities. 63% of people said that their opinion of Biden would improve if he got inflation down, compared to only 24% (likely those who already ardently support him) who said their opinion of him would improve if he passed Build Back Better, a multi-trillion dollar bill that would, under realistic circumstances, create additional inflation.

This strategy of shifting focus works. Bill

Clinton changed his agenda and strategy significantly after similar disapproval and managed to win re-election despite massive Republican wins in the midterms. He listened to the voters, stopped trying to be transformational and got reelected. More recently, Glen Youngkin shifted his campaign to focus on education when that became the central focus of the Virginia gubernatorial race, and it pushed him over the finish line.

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that

Biden will be able to make similar transformations. Instead of focusing his messaging on his legislative successes such as the relatively popular bipartisan infrastructure bill, he continues to focus on the utterly doomed Build Back Better bill and the now-collapsed John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which was never likely to make it through the Senate.

However, it seems unlikely that any of these changes will be made anytime soon. At his recent press conference, when confronted with his unpopularity in the polls, Biden responded that "I don't believe the polls." Furthermore, when asked if he would "do anything differently in the second year of [his] term," Biden gave three answers, none of which involved an actual change in course from his unpopular first year.

First, he said that he would make his case to the public more. Given that his agenda is not so popular, this may be necessary, but it seems a bit backward to respond to a public that has adamantly opposed your agenda by telling them that really they should want it. Instead of simply discarding the failed Build Back Better, Biden claimed that he could split it up into smaller bills, while Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi added they might rename the bill. Instead of moving away from the Voting Rights Act, Biden claimed that without it, future elections "easily could be ... illegitimate," a follow-up to his recent statement that those who voted against the bill were on the side of Bull Conner, George

Wallace and Jefferson Davis. Instead of changing the agenda to fit the will of the people, Biden is insisting on name changes, repackaging the same agenda or simply calling anyone who opposes him racist and being done with it.

Second, Biden claimed that he would "seek more advice from experts ... from academia to editorial writers to think tanks." This kind of thinking was precisely what got Biden in trouble in the first place; besides, by his own admission, not actually being a change from what he did in his first year. He took advice from historians early on, resulting in receiving advice to be a transformative president like FDR or LBJ. As the polls are now showing, that was never what his evenly split Senate or five-seat House advantage were a mandate for, but instead of walking back his error, Biden plans to double down. Instead of starting to listen more to the voters than editorial writers, he intends to do precisely the opposite.

Third, Biden said that he would get involved in the midterm elections. Besides the obvious point that someone with approval ratings as low as Biden's is unlikely to be a great help to anyone on the campaign trail, this, just like the previous two "changes," is not an agenda change in any way, shape or form.

Maybe Biden will wake up to the realities of his situation if stung by midterm losses similar to Democrats' in 1994. Until then, don't expect anything to change.



President Biden's approval rating is falling.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

YU's Booster Mandate Is Illogical

By NAOMI ROSE

On Dec. 30, Provost Selma Botman sent an email to the Yeshiva University community with information regarding the upcoming spring semester. In addition to keeping masking and testing policies in place, YU is now mandating COVID booster shots as well. Provost Botman wrote, "It is for this reason that we will be requiring each member of the YU community to receive a booster as soon as they are eligible ... Omicron is being transmitted rapidly in vaccinated individuals and booster vaccination is an important tool in protecting those at high risk for serious disease."

Ever heard the expression, "Give them an inch and they'll take a mile?" That is precisely the case here. The vast majority of the YU community complied with the first vaccine mandate. Now, YU is trying to institute yet

another mandate.

The reasons that Provost Botman used to justify this coercive mandate are ridiculous. She said that the Omicron variant is highly transmissible and therefore booster

than those with other variants to require hospitalization.

Additionally, the Omicron variant was first identified on Nov. 11. More than a month later, on Dec. 13, U.K. Prime Minister Boris

20,000 deaths from the flu. This just illustrates how low the Omicron mortality rate is.

Not only is the Omicron variant not at all dangerous, but a study published on MSN shows that it is resistant to vaccines and boosters as well. The study says, "We found [Omicron] to be markedly resistant to neutralization by serum not only from convalescent patients, but also from individuals vaccinated with one of the four widely used COVID-19 vaccines. Even serum from persons vaccinated and boosted with mRNA-based vaccines exhibited substantially diminished neutralizing activity against B. 1. 1. 529 (Omicron)." In preprint study, cited in a Wall Street Journal article, Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were proven to not only have no statistically significant effect against Omicron, but to actually cause the vaccinated to be more susceptible to catching Omicron.

Continued on Page 18

How many more boosters will we allow to be forcefully injected into our bodies before we fight back?

mandates are necessary. Omicron may be contagious, but is it really dangerous enough to warrant mandates? NBC News lists the symptoms of Omicron to be a cough, runny nose and fatigue. Not only are these symptoms highly similar to the common cold, but Omicron's mortality rate seems to be extremely low as well. A study published by South Africa's National Institute of Communicable Diseases found that people with Omicron were 80% less likely

Johnson said that only "one patient has been confirmed to have died with Omicron." Notice the Prime Minister's language here; the victim did not die of Omicron, but with it. Furthermore, according to more recent reports published about Omicron-related deaths, there have been only 14 in the U.K., and one (in a man with underlying health conditions) in the U.S.. More people die from the flu than from Omicron! In the 2019-2020 flu season, there had been an estimated

Misrepresenting Information is Illogical, Not the Booster Mandate

By KOBI KARP

On Dec. 30, Provost Selma Botman sent an email to the YU student body, and announced that YU had made the decision to mandate the COVID-19 booster. On Jan. 19, The Commentator published an article in which the author labeled the mandate "illogical" because, according to her, "getting vaccinated or 'boosted' will not protect you from the common cold (aka the Omicron variant)." Now, this bold claim runs contrary to the information that I am sure many of us have heard. However, the author provided links to studies and articles that she claimed support her opinions. So let us look through some of her claims, and the evidence she used to support them. Perhaps by retracing her steps we too can uncover the real truth about COVID-19 and join the fight against the apparently tyrannical institution that is YU.

A quick examination of the author's first source immediately reveals a pattern that is pervasive in her article. The author seems to have not fully read the sources she used, as even a cursory read of her sources quickly reveals. While it is true that the first article she quotes from NBC News does list the "prominent symptoms" of Omicron as being just a "cough, runny nose, and fatigue," Dr. Poehling, the doctor who provided that list of symptoms, immediately caveats this statement by saying it is "based on early reports" and is not backed by "scientific studies." But that's not all the article says. Just a few sentences later, that very article states, "It is clear that if you're vaccinated, particularly if you've had a booster, Omicron tends to produce milder infections." Just a few lines later, this point is hammered home. Having only two doses is helpful, but when compared with having a booster, the symptoms following only two doses typically "include more coughing, more fever and more fatigue than those who have received an extra dose." It is clear that Omicron clearly has the potential to be much worse than a common cold, and it is clear that the booster can help prevent that. As the author apparently trusts the article enough to use it as a source, then all she needs to do is scroll down and read more of it.

In her next paragraph, the author seeks to prove that Omicron is not dangerous by citing Boris Johnson's Dec. 13 statement that only "one patient has been confirmed to have died with Omicron." The mortality figures she offers for deaths in the UK and US from

her more "recent reports" are no longer accurate. Let's take a look at the most recent numbers, not ones published on Dec. 22 or Dec. 21. According to a Jan. 9 Reuters article, deaths in the UK are once again on the rise, right as Omicron cases are on the rise and

that the boosters are pointless. The conclusion states that "our study contributes to emerging evidence that BNT162b2 (Pfizer) or mRNA-1273 (Moderna) primary vaccine protection against Omicron decreases quickly over time, with booster vaccination

"negative" efficacy rate has to do with other factors, including changes in lifestyles by the vaccinated versus the unvaccinated, such as being allowed into public places with many other people where the unvaccinated are barred entry. In a Reuters article specifically addressing this piece of misinformation, Dr. Christian Hansen, one of the paper's authors, explains that the inability to control for other conflicting variables is a "common" problem with observational studies, and goes on to mention a few other potential interfering variables before concluding that "it is reasonable to expect that the vaccine effectiveness estimates presented in our study are too low." What is certainly clear is that it has not been proven that vaccines increase the risk of infection, as she suggests in her article.

It is highly suspicious that the author not only failed to bring the proper studies to defend her argument, but that time and time again she misrepresented data, misinterpreted figures and drew wild and incorrect conclusions from studies. In truth, the COVID vaccines and boosters are helpful. As cases rise around the country, it falls on every one of us to do as much as we can to help fight this virus. For now, that means getting this booster. That way we can continue to go about our lives as normal just like we did last semester and enjoy our time at YU. Now, this is an opinion piece, so here is an opinion: I believe that the more people on campus the better, and I believe this semester will be a great one.

As cases rise around the country, it falls on every one of us to do as much as we can to help fight this virus. For now, that means getting this booster.

after the well-documented sharp decline of the Delta Variant in the UK. The US is not doing any better. Hospitalizations and deaths are once again on the rise. According to data organized by the New York Times, in cities that were hit early by Omicron, deaths are once again beginning to spike. According to The New York Times, while it is true that "deaths have followed cases at a slightly reduced scale than in previous peaks," but "because of the extraordinarily high case count, even a proportionally lower death toll from the current case curve in the United States could be devastating." Contrary to what the author writes, Omicron does seem to be much more dangerous than the common cold. This does appear grim, and by "this" I mean not only the disease that may continue to rock this country in the coming months, but also the credibility of the author's article. Perhaps the article can be redeemed in the following paragraph where evidence for the complete ineffectiveness of the vaccine is offered.

The first study the author quotes in this paragraph says exactly what she says it does. According to this study, the Omicron variant is more resistant to the vaccine. However, this does not mean it is completely ineffective or pointless. Even limited protection would make the vaccines and boosters worthwhile, but the point of the vaccines is not just prevention. Time and time again, the vaccines have been shown to limit the severity of the disease, and as mentioned above that is true for the Omicron variant as well. Contrary to the author's report, the vaccines and boosters are worthwhile as they greatly reduce your chances of getting a serious illness should you catch COVID.

While the above source was misrepresented by the author as proof that vaccines are pointless, the study she used did in fact say that the vaccines have a waning effectiveness. However, the next study she brings directly contradicts her claim

offering a significant increase in protection." The findings of this study state that the VE (Vaccine Effectiveness) does wane quickly against Omicron, but that the booster offers a "significant increase in protection." The study itself is actually pretty short and worth the easy read. I think the most generous act we can do here would be to assume that the author did not read the study, and instead relied on the word of a disgraced virologist and suspended law professor. I am truly disturbed by the article's next claim. The claim, one that is currently making the rounds in the anti-vax side of the internet, is that the study says the vaccinated are "more susceptible to catching Omicron" than the unvaccinated or unboosted. This conclusion is not at all supported by the authors of the paper, as they go out of their way to address why it might appear to be true. They say it probable that the so-called



COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) vaccine booster dose

UNSPASH

The Good Ol' Days

By SHUIE BERGER

There was an unspoken panic among the students, especially those on my floor: someone had tested positive for a strange new “coronavirus.” Two additional students were being tested and we had heard that we might all have to test for it. Being in its infant stage, COVID-19 was a novel virus that had just entered the U.S. and was reportedly more deadly than the flu. The doctors didn’t know exactly how it spread, its side effects, its symptoms, really anything. The lack of knowledge of the virus meant the testing was not perfect, and to me, the invasive procedure sounded harrowing. As I reached out to the two students about their experiences being tested, my fear grew. I hate anything being stuck deep up my nose, and their descriptions of the test’s nasal probing admittedly worried me. Ultimately, we were “let go” the next day after the two students tested negative, making my quarantine experience short but still anxiety-filled. I was extremely relieved to have avoided the testing. I remember thinking how I had gotten over the hump and how it was all smooth sailing from here. Little did I know what the following weeks and months had in store.

The world went crazy pretty quickly. I flew home to Atlanta after Purim, and spent the next two weeks quarantining in my own house. I finished up the spring semester on a program called Zoom, trying my best to adapt to the new platform for my studies. The teachers were also trying to adjust, and everyone had a hard time since none of us had ever experienced anything like this. Personally, I despised online schooling, left unable to see my friends or hang out with anyone while I was cooped up in my room over 600 miles from campus. There was no shul, no traffic and no one was in the streets. The spontaneous ghost towns across America made for a very chilling experience. As the summer came and COVID cases went down, some shuls started reopening, masked and socially distanced, bringing about a semblance of normalcy. There was still worry and confusion around the whole ordeal, though, and to my chagrin, school was still online.

In the summer of 2020, before the vaccines, the university notified us that after the *chagim*, we would be back in person for

a select few classes, as well as for *seeder* and *shiur*. A student was only able to return once they sent in proof of a negative test to the COVID Monitoring Team. I put off getting tested for almost a month because I was still so afraid. Finally convinced I could not put it off anymore, I worked up the courage and went to a testing center in the Heights, nervously waiting in line for the ability to return to YU (thank G-d my wife was there to keep

much as I did, as it did have many benefits that were desirable for a wide variety of reasons. However, I also know I wasn’t alone in desperately wishing to return to in-person instruction. This sentiment united most of the student body, and I happily prepared to go back to campus and sit in classes with friends, attentively listening to the teacher, without the lingering threat of the distraction that is my phone.

Although we plan for in-person learning, anything can happen in this crazy world, and I smile when I think of what we were able to experience this semester, glad to have had at least that.

me sane). After the friendly nurse swabbed my nose, I thought to myself, “Wow, I am such a wuss. That wasn’t so bad!” Leaving the testing center I was proud of myself and I told myself that I could do this twice a week. As the university patched the system and tweaked the process, testing, nasal swabs and a general feeling of living under the umbrella of COVID became a part of my life.

Fast forward to this past summer: The school informed us that vaccinated students could return in person, without masks. I was elated, just jumping for joy. Not only would I enjoy the learning style that I can actually function in, but I would also get to see people I hadn’t seen in over a year, and hang out with them in and out of class. I know not everyone hated online school as

When they announced that there would be a mask mandate after only a few days, I was a bit bummed, but I was still happy they hadn’t moved online. I could tolerate wearing a mask on campus. At least we didn’t have to social distance or test twice a week like in Spring 2021. When they added biweekly testing due to case numbers, I was still optimistic. At least we didn’t have to social distance. They did eventually revert the testing to once a week, which was convenient, but I didn’t mind either way. I was just glad to have in-person classes and see my friends. That once daunting and petrifying nasal swab was now just another aspect of my weekly routine. It always made me tear up, but it was worth it. I had what I wanted and needed: in-person classes.

On Dec. 20, then, when I got an email informing us that the remainder of classes and finals were moving online, my heart sank. For a moment, I even thought the email was fake. I couldn’t believe it. At the time, I had not heard of new cases on campus, and I thought it was premature to shut down the school because the city had high positivity rates. I did not want to let go of one of the most important aspects of my schooling experience, the ability to speak face to face with a teacher and take classes in an academic setting without all the distraction of my newsfeed. After having some time to think about it and to see the situation develop, while I wish we were still in person, I still look back at the semester that was the most normal out of the last four and appreciate what it was. Even leaving on a sad note, I can still be grateful for the school’s enabling us to have in-person classes at all. And while YU is planning, as of now, to be in person next semester, we know that could change with the click of a send button. So, although we plan for in-person learning, anything can happen in this crazy world, and I smile when I think of what we were able to experience this semester, glad to have had at least that. While cases continue to rise, I implore everyone to try to cherish our experiences while we have them in person, in school and out of it. As Andy Bernard once wisely said, “I wish there was a way to know you’re in the good old days before you’ve actually left them.”



Students learning in Wilf Campus

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

BOOSTER MANDATE Continued from Page 17

Studies from Denmark and Ontario confirm these results by showing that the vaccinated had higher rates of COVID-19 infection than the unvaccinated.

Well, there you have it. Getting vaccinated or boosted will not help “protect” you from the common cold (aka the Omicron variant). In fact, according to an article on CNBC, which quotes a South African study, catching Omicron actually helps develop antibodies, which increases protection against Delta by more than 400%.

It is clear that this vaccine is doing nothing to prevent transmission of the virus, as we all know vaccinated people who have gotten COVID. Even Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, acknowledged that “what the vaccines can’t do anymore is prevent transmission.” So essentially there is absolutely no reason for YU to mandate boosters.

YU students have had enough of these

mandates as well. Many students feel coerced — as they previously were — into vaccinating themselves against their will. Injecting an unknown substance into one’s body is not a decision that anyone should take lightly. Least of all, it is not a decision that anyone other than the individual should make. Yet, YU has made this decision for all members of its community.

A petition started by YU student Yishai Kornwasser, in an attempt to repeal this mandate, has garnered over 1,300 signatures in just one week. Kornwasser writes, “We recognize that if we comply yet again, the administration will never stop with the mandates. It is time to say ‘enough is enough.’” These mandates will never stop until we speak up and fight back against it. Israel is already giving people their fourth boosters, and I am sure that given the opportunity, YU will be soon to follow. In fact, during a

meeting on Jan. 6 discussing the new Spring 2022 protocols, YU’s medical expert, Dr. Robert Van Amerongen, was asked whether YU will be requiring booster shots every four-six months. Not surprisingly, he said that although he is not anticipating it, “a lot depends on what the future will hold.” Clearly, YU is going to endlessly institute more mandates as soon as they are able to. How many more boosters will we allow to be forcefully injected into our bodies before we fight back?

In an LA public school district, the administration was forced to delay their vaccine mandate for an entire year because of 30,000 students who would not comply. If we do the same, Yeshiva University might have no choice but to repeal the mandate as well.

DAVENING Continued from Page 15

Yeshiva. One of the *roshei yeshiva* in the college, Rav Yitzchak Cohen, *shlita*, said to me on the phone a few weeks ago that my place is in the Yeshiva — that’s my *makom*. Not in the hospital, not in the rehab center. That’s true. I feel that this is indeed my *makom*; this is my home.

And together with you, I feel so privileged and so pleased to be able to be part of this yeshiva and to be partners with you and your growth in Torah and *yiras shamayim*. My *berachah* to each of you is certainly that no one here should ever have to undergo what I underwent, but if you ever have whatever *tzarah*, whatever trying situation you may confront in life, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* should bless you with people who care about you, who will *daven* for you, and who will help you. Again, I thank you all very, very much. I wish you tremendous *hatzlachah* on all your *bechinot* and a wonderful vacation, and we will all continue *beEzras Hashem* to grow in Torah and *yiras shamayim* together.

Is Working From Home Actually Working?

By SHOSHANAH GHANOONI

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most jobs moved online and people began to work from home. As a result, many employers gave their employees funds to set up a home office. Twitter and Shopify were amongst the first companies to do so in March 2020.

Many people have enjoyed and are productive working from home, with a whopping 54% of people claiming they want to continue working from home after the pandemic ends. This won't be an issue considering that over 85% of those working from home have adequate equipment to do so. Furthermore, one study suggests that by the year 2025, 22% of the American workforce will be remote. This is an 87% increase of workers working at home compared to pre-COVID-19 numbers.

Because many employees are opting to remain remote as different pandemic variants emerge, companies aren't forcing employees to return to the office.

Because many employees are opting to remain remote as different pandemic variants emerge, companies aren't forcing employees to return to the office. In fact, some companies are giving employees additional stipends for home offices, with Apple being one such example. The company recently

announced that it does not have a return to office date set, and is therefore giving employees a \$1,000 stipend to furnish their home offices.

Despite the incentives, not all employees are thrilled with the idea of remote work. The New York Times explained that while working from home gives people more flexibility and allows them to save money because they are not commuting, it can be

difficult for employees to meet over Zoom when dealing with background distractions at home. Women in particular have found it difficult to get a word in during meetings dominated by men, and there is a lack of creativity and problem solving in general since employees cannot discuss new ideas as easily as they could in the office. Although remote work allows employees to save time without spending long hours commuting, they now

are working longer hours from home.

Interestingly, PWC recently released an article noting that 83% of employers say the shift to remote work is successful in their companies, and that people prefer to work from home. It may be worthwhile for firms to ensure their employees have the necessary ability and equipment to work from home even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.



A home office

PIXABAY

How Wall Street Reacts to Its Biggest Scandals

By SHMUEL METZ

On Jan. 18, Microsoft announced that it will be making its biggest acquisition yet. For \$75 billion, Microsoft looks to acquire Activision Blizzard, a huge leader in video game development, making this the biggest cash-funded takeover since the start of the pandemic. This deal will make Microsoft the world's third-largest gaming company and will allow them to move forward in the rollout of Game Pass, Microsoft's video game subscription streaming platform aimed at being "the Netflix for gaming." Activision

has some of the biggest intellectual properties in gaming such as Call of Duty, Guitar Hero, and World of Warcraft. Microsoft had previously approached Activision regarding a sale but the CEO of Activision, Bobby Kodak, had not been interested in selling. But in November 2021, things changed.

Reports came out documenting allegations that long-time CEO of Activision, Bobby Kodak, was aware of sexual misconduct allegations within the organization but had failed to report them to the company's board of directors. For years, Kodak had known of sexual harassment within Activision and

instead of informing the board, he settled out of court when Activision was faced with the charges. Following reports in the news, Activision's stock fell and Microsoft saw its opportunity. They approached Activision a second time regarding a sale and Activision was receptive. Although the board of directors supported Kodak regarding the allegations publicly, privately, some were worried about Kodak's leadership ability. With backlash from the board and many of Activision's shareholders, selling the company seemed to provide a solution.

Bobby Kodak had not been interested in selling. But in November 2021, things changed.

This is not the first time a company decided to sell itself to repair the damage in wake of its misconduct. Most notably, after investing in the subprime mortgage market starting in 2003, Bear Stearns misled its investors about the financial state of the firm's two largest hedge funds and their exposure to subprime mortgage-backed securities. The business collapsed as more people could not meet their mortgage obligations and was bought by JP Morgan on March 16, 2008. Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JP Morgan Chase, would later regret the decision, as it cost several billion to close out failing trades and settle litigation against Bear Stearns.

Another example of scandalous activity

resulting in a buyout is the case of WorldCom, a telecommunications company that used accounting methods to boost the stock price - the scandal is the largest accounting fraud to this day. When the tech boom went bust and companies stopped spending as much on telecom services and equipment, WorldCom used accounting tricks to appear as if they had increasing profitability. Bernie Ebbers, then-CEO of WorldCom, had borrowed \$408 million from Bank of America to cover margin calls, using his WorldCom shares as collateral. Ebbers, forced to step down as CEO, was later convicted of securities fraud and sentenced to 25 years in prison. After emerging from bankruptcy and rebranding as MCI, Verizon bought its assets in 2004.

There are many other ways in which misconduct has shaped the future of organizations and impacted market trajectory. In 2010, there were 14 confirmed suicides at giant consumer electronics company, Foxconn. This drew attention to the poor labor conditions of the factory, the long hours required, and the little food that employees received. This scandal threatened to tarnish the reputations of some of Foxconn's largest US customers, including Apple and Hewlett-Packard.

Although an organization's financial stability, ability to grow, and captured market share are all key factors in determining a company's success, many of those may fly by the wayside in light of its leaders' decisions to misbehave.



Activision's recent acquisition by Microsoft raises questions to its renewed receptivity

PIXABAY

HELLER LETTER, CONT'D
Continued from Page 10

her that it was “up to” her alleged rapist if he “wanted to give me space on campus or not.” Let that sink in for a minute.

Obviously, the administration’s actions — and inaction — should be completely unacceptable to us as a school community. Dean Bacon assured students shortly after the article’s publication that steps were being taken to improve the school’s procedures, including administrators meeting with students to receive input on what they want to see be part of the process. It took four months and the case’s becoming the talk of campus again for them to finally announce those changes.

The changes themselves — that the Title IX office be restructured and that the rules and process for reporting sexual assault are conveyed to students in a more clear manner — though long overdue, are certainly a

step in the right direction. Yet Dean Bacon’s months-long review of the system contained two findings that were dismantled in short order by this article and the complaining student — that YU “follows all federal Title IX and NYS guidelines and procedures pertaining to sexual harassment and assault,” and that it “has security protocols in place to protect the involved parties.” If this is truly the case, why hasn’t the administration issued a statement stating that the student in this case was in fact provided with the necessary security measures which she requested? Now that it is clear that they blatantly violated a Title IX regulation, will they issue a statement explaining how that is somehow not true? Forgive me for not holding my breath.

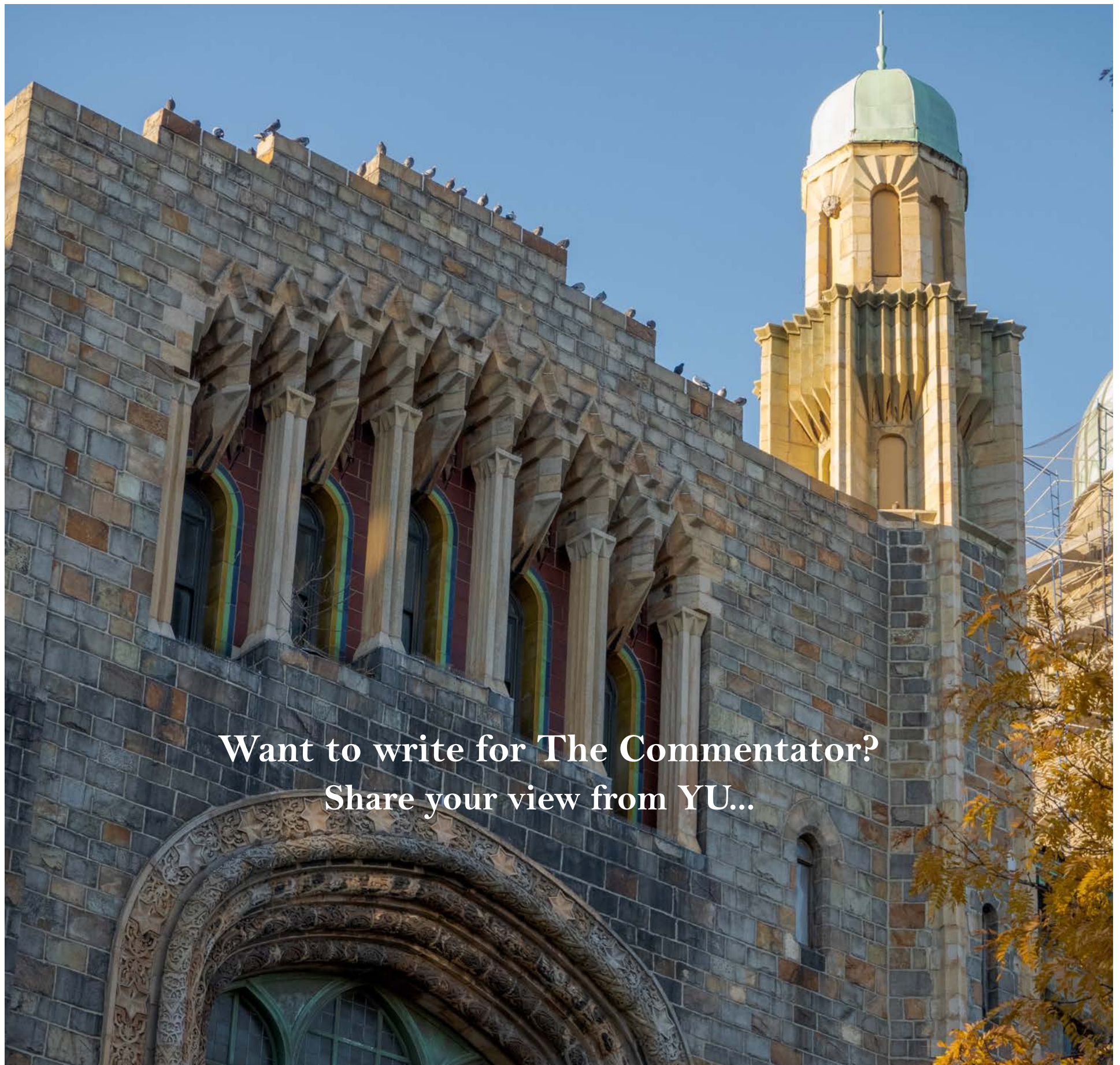
While not defending itself against the student’s claims, the school has also not issued an apology for its gross mishandling

of the case. And the school still refuses to request access to the rape kit, simply telling the student that the “case is closed” every time she would bring it up. In the midst of all of this, YU continues to brazenly make the basketball team a centerpiece of its marketing and recruitment efforts, hoping that it can sweep this under the rug like it did in August until we all forget about it again. We don’t have to let that happen.

The proper way to deal with this is not to boycott the basketball team but to demand answers from the administration regarding its inexplicable actions in this case. To demand that it re-open the case, review the alleged victim’s rape kit and release her from its bogus NDA. A Change.org petition. A mass protest outside of Rubin or Belfer — perhaps on a big fundraising day. Students have been vocal in speaking up

against YU’s past cover-ups of sexual abuse by staff members and have turned up in the hundreds to protest its discrimination against LGBTQ students. The response was not to boycott the high school (where the past abuse occurred) or to refuse to participate in all clubs — but to stage protests, conduct a public pressure campaign and demand that the administration do right by its students. The response here should be no different. Pirkei Avot tells us that “in the place where there is no person, strive to be one.” Let us do that, and bring the change that is so desperately needed.

Elliot Heller (SSSB '19) is a graduate student studying public administration and is a counselor for individuals with special needs.



Want to write for The Commentator?
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