

# The Yeshiva University OBSERVER



ISSUE 65 VOLUME VI

FEBRUARY 2022

ADAR ALEPH 5782

## PRIDE ALLIANCE LAWSUIT AGAINST YESHIVA UNIVERSITY CONTINUES IN COURT HEARING



### NEWS

BY MARCELA HOMSANY AND  
BLUMA GROSS, NEWS EDITORS

*Danielle Lane contributed to this article.*

On February 10, 2022, the YU Pride Alliance, an unofficial YU club for LGBTQ+ students and allies, and Yeshiva University went before a judge to discuss whether YU has a legal obligation to allow its students to form a club for the LGBTQ+ community.

During the hearing, Yeshiva University's legal representation, Eric Baxter, and the Pride Alliance's legal representation, Katherine Rosenfeld, convened in front of Judge Lynn Kotler.

Though bound by New York City

Human Rights Law (NYCHRL) as an educational and academic corporation (one that receives state and federal aid), Baxter objected to the plaintiff's discrimination complaint, citing that the University is not a public accommodation and that "it would be a perversion of the law to say YU has to stop being Jewish." For context, Yeshiva University changed their status from a religious institution to a public accommodation, meaning "it will provide and not discriminate against others in regards to bathrooms, dorming, and so much so forth based on their gender, faith, or sexuality, in order to receive more funding."

Following the defense, attorney Rosenfeld contended that under New York law, the University

would have to be registered as a religious corporation or as a temple to use this defense. Since YU is registered as an academic corporation and not as a religious one, however, the university is not at liberty to enforce such rules. In other words, the argument stems from the allowance to impose faith "based rules at an institution that is not considered or registered as a religious corporation."

In response, Baxter stated that the University is a religious institution and claimed that "it is an American right for corporations to be religious." In addition, Baxter voiced that religious organizations cannot be denied funding based on faith.

Rosenfeld rebutted with an ar-

gument stating that "YU is a complex university that serves many people for many different purposes." Therefore, with the addition of the secular registration in the NYCHRL, the university cannot discriminate individuals based on their sexual orientation.

After listening to each attorney speak, Judge Kotler adjourned the court with the parting message of a decision in the future.

The YU Pride Alliance filed a complaint on April 26, 2021, in the New York County Supreme Court. On the grounds of discriminatory action taken against LGBTQ+ students, the complaint noted more than three instances when the Pride Alliance applied for recogni-

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## EDITORIAL

ONE OF TWO INDEPENDENT, UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPERS OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY'S  
STERN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, YESHIVA COLLEGE AND SY SYMS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

The Yeshiva University  
**OBSERVER**

## COMMUNITY AND UNITY: WILL THE OFFICIAL PAPER OF YU PLEASE STAND UP

BY SHOSHANAH MARCUS,  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

As I was thinking of an idea for my monthly editorial, I began to look through the *YU Observer's* archive. As I scrolled through previous editions of this beloved paper, I was surprised to find that many of the concerns from past YU students are the same as those of students today, including complaints of a lack of diversity, rising cafeteria prices, and even infrastructure issues with the YU buildings.

For me, the thing that initially attracted me to the *YU Observer* was the paper's ability to ignite change. Many times, the administration takes students' thoughts into consideration and, on occasion, even changes policies as a result of students voicing their thoughts in the paper. This became apparent to me when YU attempted to restructure the dining plan and students spoke their mind in the *YU Observer* to the point where the proposed remodel was actually revoked. The paper instigates conversations not only amongst students, but between the student body and the administration as well. From conversations regarding the LGBTQ+ community to neurodiversity to the definition of frumkeit, it is clear that important issues have been the center of conversations in the student newspapers.

If the same conversations are still going on, it begs the question: has any change really occurred? Does the paper really

ignite any change at all? And if not, what is the real purpose of a student newspaper?

One of the most rewarding experiences I've had during my time as Editor in Chief of the *Observer* was honestly quite unexpected. I was interviewing one of my peers to fill the role of an editor, and at the end of the interview she sighed a breath of relief as if she had been holding her breath for the duration of our conversation. After she accepted my offer as an editor, I jokingly said to her, "See? I told you that the interview wouldn't be too bad" to which she responded, "No it's not that." Seeing my confusion, she continued to explain that she had never felt so instantly accepted or so inspired to use her talents to build a greater community at YU.

Perhaps that is the purpose of the paper: to unite us and to build a community.

I am a strong believer that students should fight for the changes they wish to see, and I think that the student newspapers at YU are the perfect place for that advocacy. Still, though, there is much more to the paper than just that. After beginning this year as mostly strangers, I now consider the *YU Observer* staff as a sort of family that has far exceeded my expectations. And, as an extension of this team, I consider our staff writers, contributing writers, and readers to be integral parts of the conversations that we hope to spark as a newspaper.

Whether by reading it or working on it behind the scenes, all of the contributors to the paper work to build and strengthen bonds between the students in YU. Although there are many different sub-groups at YU: the in-towners, the out-of-towners, the various different yeshivas and seminaries, we have one thing in common: all of us made the decision to come to YU. Together we make up a part of a larger community that we are inherently members of. As undergraduate students at YU, our similar experiences both in and out of the academic setting essentially bind us together into a larger group. This community is reflected in the various Facebook groups and Whatsapp chats that allows students to stay connected and lean on each other for support.

The function of the papers at YU is not to make one paper "the independent student newspaper of Yeshiva University" but rather to recognize that the *YU Observer* is "one of two student-run newspapers of Yeshiva University." By failing to acknowledge the fact that the school has not one, but two student-run newspapers that both consist of YU undergraduates who work incredibly hard to produce top-tier papers, we are missing a huge opportunity to fulfill the true function of student papers: to build a united community.



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Founded by the women of Yeshiva University's Stern College in 1958, The *YU Observer* is the independent newspaper of Stern College for Women, Sy Syms School of Business, and Yeshiva University.

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# RISE UP CAMPAIGN SUCCESS: BELZ FAMILY DONATES \$20 MILLION



BY BLUMA GROSS,  
NEWS EDITOR

On January 31, 2022, President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman announced that the Belz family has donated \$20 million including a private collection of fine Judaica and artwork valued at approximately \$6 million to Yeshiva University. The donation will go towards modernizing and renovating classrooms and administrative offices on Wilf Campus's Furst Hall in Washington Heights.

The donation will fund renovations in Yeshiva University's bedrock academic building in the Wilf campus. The building, known currently as Furst Hall, will be renamed the Belz Building. The Belz family's gift includes Jack and his wife Marilyn's, z"l, lifetime collection of Judaica and artwork. The collection will be displayed for the student body and will be open to the public on perma-

nent display on the first floor of the Belz Building.

Dr. Berman expressed gratitude to the Belz family saying, "[the Belz family's] lifelong dedication to educating our students, the leaders of tomorrow, reflects the multigenerational partnership between the Belz family and Yeshiva University. I am deeply grateful for our personal friendship and for this extraordinary gift which will profoundly elevate and enhance the YU experience for our students, faculty and entire community."

This is not the first time the Belz family has contributed to the structural and academic growth of Yeshiva University. In 1984, Philip Belz, the Memphis based philanthropic patriarch of the Belz family, established the Belz School of Jewish Music and was an active member of Yeshiva's Board of Trustees until his passing in 2000. Now, 38 years later, his son Jack, a Trustee Emeritus on

Yeshiva's board, has continued in his father's philanthropic footsteps.

The Belz family's gift is part of YU's "Rise Up: The Campaign for 613" initiative. Initiated by President Berman in December of 2021, the Rise Up campaign has already raised \$256 million according to the campaign's website. According to the December 2021 press release, the donations "will fund scholarships, facilities and faculty/programs to position the University for continued success."

Some students on the Beren campus have expressed their desire for increased funding as crucial facilities, like the elevators, have been seriously malfunctioning for years. SCW Freshman Racheli Jian (SCW '25) shared with the Observer, "as grateful as I am to the Belz family, as a SCW student I wonder why the women of YU seem to be ignored. On the other hand, if this donation was meant to be allocated to both campuses, why was

it advertised as only funding the Wilf campus?"

Students on the Wilf Campus are reasonably thrilled with the news of the Belz gift. An anonymous student (YC '23) told the *YU Observer* that "to see people willing to donate so much towards the education of the next generation of Jews is truly awe inspiring."

Jack Belz concluded in the blog post expressing, "We have always recognized and admired Yeshiva University and its national and international reputation as the flagship Jewish university that provides a remarkable multifaceted education for its men and women students in their pursuit of excellence in both Jewish education and general education as they pursue such varied careers as rabbinics, law, medicine, psychology, science, finance and other areas."

**WANT TO SHARE YOUR OPINION?**

***WRITE FOR THE YU OBSERVER!***

EMAIL [THEYUOBSERVER@GMAIL.COM](mailto:THEYUOBSERVER@GMAIL.COM)

## CAFETERIA PRICES INCREASE FOLLOWING WINTER BREAK



BY ELI SAPERSTEIN,  
OPINIONS EDITOR

Upon returning to campus from winter break on January 24, 2022, students noticed significant price increases for food in the cafeterias compared to the prices prior to the cafeteria's closing for winter break.

In a statement to the YU Observer, Dining Services relayed, "[a]s prices of everyday items continue to increase both nationally and locally, stemming largely from the pandemic, Yeshiva University Dining Services continues to explore options to insulate students and faculty from absorbing these costs. However, the reality is these prices are only forecasted to rise." Dining Services continued to explain, "Unfortunately, it has become necessary to make price adjustments on certain cafeteria items to account for these dramatic national increases. Of course, should the cost of food and supplies decrease to pre-pandemic prices, our prices will equally reflect those trends." Their statement concluded by saying, "Importantly, we will continue to subsidize the price of the Shabbat meals for students, as we have always done."

Additionally, Randy Apfelbaum, Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer at Yeshiva University, sent a statement to the YU Observer detailing some of the many initiatives they

have accomplished over the break and ones that will begin being instituted. Apfelbaum outlined the increased hours of some Wilf campus commissaries, saying, "[Nagel Bagels], in addition to its regular hours, is now going to be open at night [on] Sunday-Thursday [from] 7:45 p.m.-11:30 p.m." and the "Sky Café is re-opening [on] Monday-Thursday from 11:30 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. with grab n' go food."

In continuing to describe the initiatives, Apfelbaum described that the YU caf card will have increased functions as "[t]he vending machines on all campuses will be accepting the YU one-card in the next few weeks" and "[b]oth Golan and Grandma's have decided to join as a participating vendor. Students can now purchase food there tax-free, using their FLEX dollars." Apfelbaum concluded, "[m]ore initiatives will be forthcoming in the near future."

Some students reacted strongly to the increase in prices. David Price (SSSB '24) told the YU Observer that "[w]henver anyone complains about the Caf prices, the standard answer is that YU doesn't make a profit off of the Caf. If that is the case, the question is, who is? If students are required to put thousands of dollars a year into their account, there should be more transparency as to why it costs more to buy food in the basement of Rubin than in the Upper Westside. It's cheaper to go to a restaurant than eat in the Caf. The only reason why stu-

dents use the Caf card is because YU mandates it."

Many students expressed their frustration with how the prices were increased and what these changes mean for their semester. An anonymous student (SCW '24) explained to the YU Observer, "YU seems to be insensitive to students' financial needs as they raise caf prices knowing that the students need to eat. It's disrespectful and insensitive to those who depend on the caf for food."

Students who do not live within the close vicinity of campus, out-of-towners, pointed out that they have been impacted more than their in-town counterparts. As an out-of-towner, it may be more difficult to make the cafeteria money last the duration of the semester compared to an in-towner due to the increased amount of time spent on-campus, eating in campus facilities. As a result of this, the price increase has made a tough situation even more financially difficult. One out-of-town student (SCW '23) expressed, "I'm an out-of-towner who stays in almost every Shabbat, so last semester, I ran out of money on my caf card. I'm scared I'll run out faster this semester because of the price increase. The student also pointed out the different situations for the Wilf students and the Beren students with the Caf card which is further reflected in the apparent focus of the new initiatives that primarily benefit the Wilf campus while ignoring the Beren campus,

"It's a bit frustrating that there are so many outside options uptown while downtown we only have two options, one being extremely overpriced. Yet we still have to deal with the [same] insane price increase in the caf."

Other students were more understanding but wished that there was more transparency when making the changes to the meal plan. One anonymous student (SCW '23) shared, "If the caf price increase is [proportional] to the rise in prices everywhere, I get it. But I wish they would just let us know before things like this happen. I know students would have complained, but now not only are we complaining, but we are also resentful that we didn't have advance warning."

This is not the first time YU has made changes to the meal plan. In 2019, the meal plan's distribution method changed and was retracted after the student body's subsequent outrage. The current changes to the cafeteria meal plan appear to simply be price increases on many items, but the result is the same as students are once again forced to pay more money for less food.

The YU Observer asked for a list of items that had price changes as well as if there have been any attempts to contact students informing them of the price increases but as of publication the YU Observer has received no response from the administration.

Photo Credit: Cayla Muschel

## PRIDE ALLIANCE

FROM PAGE 1

tion as an official club and were denied by the defendants Vice Provost Dr. Chaim Nissel and President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman.

Between the Fall of 2018 to the Fall of 2020, members of the Pride Alliance applied each semester to be recognized as an official club to enjoy the same benefits as other campus clubs, including access to campus facilities, funds for club activities, and the ability to advertise for student events.

With every attempt, the student and faculty members of the Pride Alliance were met with resistance. After three rejections, YU's current policy holds that the university does not recognize any clubs specifically for students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Post lawsuit, the resistance of the school towards the club was replaced with radio silence and despite two additional club applications from September 2021 to January 2022, they have been ignored by the university.

In defense, YU argues that due to the fact that they are a reli-

gious institution, they are at liberty to accept or deny any on-campus activity that does not align with its values. The university argues that a pro-LGBTQ+ club is in direct violation of the religious Jewish values for which YU stands.

In 1995, an internal memo advised lawyers representing Yeshiva University that they "cannot ban gay student clubs" and are obligated, under the NYCHRL, to sponsor provisions as they would to any other student run clubs.

According to the Pride Alliance's lead attorney Katherine Rosenfeld, "There is no exemption that shields [YU's] conduct." Rosenfeld continued to explain, saying that "[the university] operates on paper with all the benefits of nonsectarian status, and now it must operate that way in reality by treating its students equally."

One of the plaintiffs and previous co-President of the Pride Alliance (SCW '22) told the YU Observer, "[w]atching the hearing today made me feel really proud to see how

far we've come with all the hard work we put into this. I was so proud of our lawyers, I think they did an incredible job portraying the emotion in the case and the law. We know the law is on our side and we are confident the verdict will determine that as well."

A student (SSSB '23) who participated in the virtual hearing expressed to the YU Observer, "[w]atching the hearing, it was fascinating for me to see that the foundational question of whether Yeshiva University is a Yeshiva or University is not what is being argued about here. Despite what most people on campus seem to believe, it appears that, at least legally speaking, the question is whether or not Yeshiva University is a place of solely divine worship or literally anything else."

The student continued to say, "It is fascinating for me to see how so many Jews in the YU community feel they deserve to have their cake and eat it too: have Hillel's across the country operate on hostile campuses in order to provide a safe space for its Jewish students but when it

comes to a Jewish university all of a sudden these same Jews who understand how students need a community with others like themselves in order to thrive and to truly reach their potential on a hostile campus suddenly can't seem to understand that LGBTQ+ Jews need a safe space on a hostile campus well. To suggest otherwise very much implies a double standard."

As of publication the YU Observer has not been notified of any final decisions regarding the case.

## DON'T SAY GAY

BY YAFFA GOLDKIN

The newly dubbed 'Don't Say Gay' bill, formally termed Bill HB 1557, in Florida is effectively banning any discussions of sexual orientation or gender identity in schools with young children. The bill is heading to another House Committee and then to the floor of the House for a final vote. Most people may think it is impossible to pass a bill like this. In New York City, maybe that's true. But in Florida—where the majority of the House is Republicans who support this bill—well, that's a different story. In fact, Governor DeSantis already voiced his favor of the bill passing.

The bill will seek to erase all conversations about anything

within the LGBTQ+ realm in schools. The proposal states that administrations "may not encourage classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students." This inherently vague bill is unclear about what these discussions could mean, which children they are referring to, what 'encouraging' means, and much more.

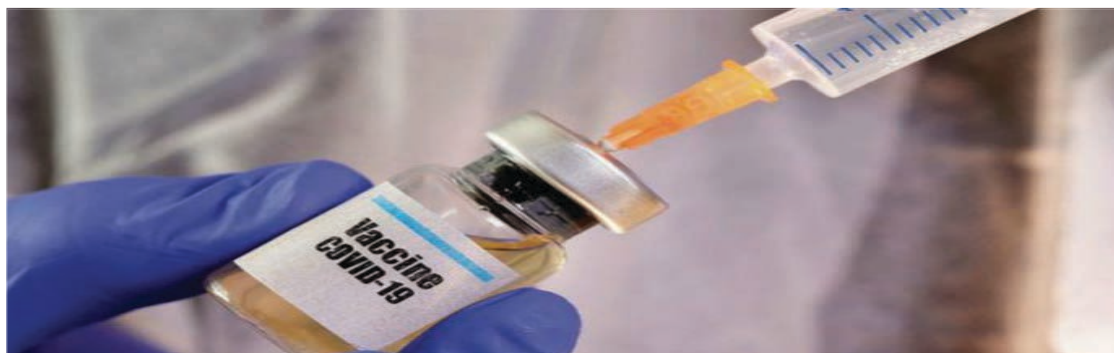
The press secretary of Equality Florida, Brandon Wolf, has questioned the obscurity of the proposal. He asks: "Does it mean that school districts could no longer host Women's History Month conversations

in classrooms because being a woman is a gender identity? If school districts allow teachers to put pictures of their partners on their desks—is that encouraging students to ask questions about sexual orientation based on the gender identity of their partner?" While it may seem extreme, Wolf has a valid point about how gender identity and sexual orientation are two casual things to speak about, though normally in a heteronormative context.

The implications of this bill suggest that the simple topic of LGBTQ+ people is inappropriate for the classroom. This idea stems from a long history of homophobia and transphobia that says queer-ness is perverted and inappropriate. Taking away the ability

for students to be able to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity with teachers can lead to a serious mental health decline in students. The Trevor Project, a nonprofit organization that works on suicide prevention in LGBTQ+ teens, says that queer youth who had discussions about LGBTQ+ identities in a classroom have a 23% less chance of a reported suicide attempt. Equality Florida, which advocates for ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, says that "this legislation is meant to stigmatize LGBTQ people, isolate LGBTQ kids, and make teachers fearful of providing a safe,

## COVID-19 BOOSTER REQUIRED FOR SPRING 2022 SEMESTER



BY DANIELLE LANE,  
MANAGING EDITOR

In an email sent to students, faculty, and staff on December 30, 2021, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Selma Botman, informed the YU community of the school's updated COVID-19 policies for the Spring 2022 semester. The policies include a requirement for all eligible students to receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, the continuation of the mask mandate, and continued weekly COVID-19 testing.

According to the email, in order to ensure safe in-person undergraduate campus life, all students who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 booster shot are required to do so. The email explained that recent "[s]tudies have shown that neutralizing antibodies to COVID-19 begin to diminish six months after vaccination with the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine, and two

months after vaccination with the J&J vaccination, and booster vaccinations have proven to provide a significantly higher immune response...we will be requiring each member of the YU community to receive a booster as soon as they are eligible."

The announcement went on to state that the spring semester will follow the same protocols regarding mask wearing on campus and testing requirements. Students will be "required [to wear masks] indoors on campus except if alone in a closed space" and will be "required to test once per week during the Spring semester."

Additionally, faculty and staff were informed that in order "[t]o reduce density on campus, managers will work with employees to follow a remote work schedule, wherever possible, during the first two weeks of January."

Some students have voiced concern regarding the necessity of requiring students to receive the booster shot. Raquel Giliniski (SSSB '23) told the YU Observer "[p]retending that getting the booster makes a massive difference in how we respond to Omicron and transmit it to others is intellectually dishonest, and especially for college students, an age group that historically tends to react less harshly to COVID than older ones, and for Omicron, a variant statistically far less lethal than the rest, it feels ridiculous to require it."

Another student (YC '23) who wishes to remain anonymous also expressed their doubts over the stringency of YU's COVID requirements. "While YU's booster requirement does speak towards the institution's focus on student safety, it does seem to go beyond what many are asking for. Even public sports arenas like MSG (Madison Square Garden) are only requiring full vaccination status to be without masks but YU is past that in asking for

boosters, masks, and constant testing," expressed the student. "This has left me torn since I appreciate the concern, but how much is too much for YU to ask?"

Other students are pleased with YU's commitment to minimizing the spread of the virus. Mili Chizhik (SCW '22) told the YU Observer that "[a]s someone who is overall healthy and young, I was truly affected by getting COVID-19. It put a strain on my physical, academic, and psychological capabilities. The virus, disease, and pandemic are all unpredictable and I believe that YU updating the requirements to try and minimize the spread is perfectly sensible and puts the safety of the students, staff, and their families first."

Students who test positive for COVID-19 over winter break should email their test results to CovidStudentLine@yu.edu.

## THE LONG AWAITED SEFORIM SALE IS BACK!

BY MELISSA DRESNER

The Seforim Sale is back! Many may think that the Seforim Sale is simply a place where seforim [Jewish books] are available for purchase; that was my initial perception of it as well. However, I have come to realize that it is so much more than that. Many students on both the Beren and Wilf campuses, as well as people who are not students of YU, volunteer many hours of their time in order for each sefer [singular of seforim] to be put in the correct spot so that everyone is able to come and find what they're looking for. As one of the students working at the Seforim Sale, I know that my fellow volunteers spend hours working for the sale.

When I first applied to be a part of The Seforim Sale staff I was honestly unaware of what I was getting myself into. After only hours of being a part of The Seforim Sale staff I couldn't be happier that I applied. Being around people who are devoted to what they're doing and going above and beyond for customers

is inspiring.

There was one customer who asked me where a particular sefer was. After searching through all the seforim, we still couldn't find it. Without being asked, all of the other staff members pitched in to help, and we found the Sefer she was looking for. It was apparent that there is no limit to how far the Seforim Sale staff will go for our customers.

As staff, we are not only guiding people in their seforim endeavors, but we are also able to learn and gain from our customers as well. Whether it be someone telling us what kind of Sefer they think would be beneficial for them to learn, or them showing us a new vantage point from which to look at a sefer, the customers bring the seforim and the sale to life. A fellow staff member told me that a customer wanted to learn more about tefillah



[prayer] but was struggling to connect to his davening [praying]. After showing the customer books on tefillah, the staff member felt moved by his ability to be so transparent to someone he just met. Being a part of the Seforim Sale staff or coming to the sale to buy Seforim is something you won't regret. The connections you can make and the new appreciation for learning Torah you may gain can not be replaced.

Volunteering together with fellow students to accomplish a meaningful yet strenuous task is something I am proud to be a part of. I strongly encourage

everyone to get involved in the seforim sale next year, because of the overwhelming feeling of achdus [unity] you will feel and the tremendous act of chesed [kindness] you will be contributing to.

Editor's Note: The Seforim Sale will be held from Sunday, February 6 to Thursday, February 24, 2022. Hours are as follows:  
Sundays: 10am - 10pm  
Mondays - Thursdays: 6:30pm - 10:30pm  
Fridays: Closed  
Saturday Night: 8pm - 11pm

Photo Credit: Seforim Sale Website

## YU No Longer Considered a “High Research” Institution According to 2021 Carnegie Classification Report



BY RINA SHAMILOV,  
NEWS EDITOR

In a recently published 2021 report in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, YU's ranking has been demoted to no longer having an R status, which is the ranking for higher education institutions with “very high research” activity. YU would have to award at least 20 individuals with doctoral degrees annually to be considered an R status-institution.

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, Yeshiva University's ranking as a research institution has fluctuated severely over the last few decades. YU was ranked as an R1 institution in 2001, meaning that it had been a reportedly “high research” institution. In 2018, the ranking dropped to R2, making it a high research institution though to a lesser extent.

Currently, YU has not met the qualification outlined by the Carnegie Classifications, resulting in the university losing its national recognition as a higher institution that propagates high academic research and scholarship.

Despite not qualifying for Carnegie's high research classification, Yeshiva University is recognized as among the top 60 Jewish Schools, according to Hillel's College Guide, and among the top

five lack of diversity institutions according to reports conducted by USA Today. Likewise, YU's recognition mainly lay as a leading marketing university and as a “top law school feeder.”

In other rankings, such as the one put forth by US News, YU is currently ranked as #68 in national universities and #33 in best value schools. Its ranking oscillated between being in the 45th percentile from 1997- 2015

## NYPD CALLED TO WILF CAMPUS TO INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL THREAT



BY DANIELLE LANE,  
MANAGING EDITOR

Students were alerted at 8:40 am on January 31, 2022, that the New York Police Department (NYPD) were active on Wilf campus investigating “a[n] unsubstantiated phone call threat.” Students were told to “stay indoors, if possible, or use extra caution if outside” and to “[r]eport anything suspicious to security.”

An hour after the original message was sent out, students received an all-clear message that informed students that the school had “just received the

ALL CLEAR from the NYPD. Campus can return to normal activity.” The message concluded by thanking the NYPD for their aid and reassured students saying, “Our security team will continue to monitor our campuses.”

Students shared their concerns regarding the possible connection between this incident and the rise in acts of anti-semitism throughout the country. One student (SSSB '23) who wishes to remain anonymous told the YU Observer “[s]eeing cops swarming the YU campus and then receiving

an email and subsequently more WhatsApp notifications from the many YU chats about an “unsubstantiated threat” were unnerving. While at this point hearing about bomb threats is almost a weekly occurrence and a certain numbness builds it strikes deeper when you can't get to class and are told if you decide to go to class be careful because once again someone is targeting you because you are a Jew.”

Other students expressed their gratitude for the NYPD's swift response to the situation. One student (YC '23) who wishes to remain anonymous shared, “waking up to a large security presence

outside my window this morning was definitely concerning at first. However, once I realized the situation I stood in awe of the amount of police response even to just a threat of violence. It really shows me just how much YU and the NYPD care about a student body which can be more at risk because of their open religious sentiments.”

## OPINION

## BIOHAZARD: THE TOXIC PRE-MED CULTURE AT SCW

BY SOPHIE  
FRANKENTHAL

The pre-medical, or pre-med, experience is notorious throughout America for its toxic, cut-throat culture, and unfortunately, Stern College for Women is no exception to this phenomenon. Despite being an institution that prides itself on its commitment to Torah values, in my experience YU's pre-medical program is fraught with competition, elitism, and an overall disregard for others. The way in which such behavior directly contradicts our deepest moral convictions as students of a religious institution is, in my opinion, pathetic, and honestly, quite sad. Not only that, but it represents the antithesis of the profession that we aspire to undertake.

I believe that at the root of this toxic environment is a widespread belief amongst the pre-health students that their success is defined by their superiority over their peers. It is as if they delude themselves into thinking that success is a limited entity, and so if it belongs to their fellow student, it cannot simultaneously belong to them, or at least not at maximal value. And so, students resort to a variety of ruthless behaviors to secure an advantage for themselves, even if it comes at the expense of their friends.

I have personally witnessed students refusing to share their notes under any circumstances because they can't stomach the thought that their work might enable their friend to succeed. I've even heard stories of labs (the "hands-on" component of science courses in which students conduct various experiments and investigations as a means of application of lecture material) would guard the results of their experiments from those who were seeking direction in achieving their own (even in classes where professors encouraged teamwork). G-d forbid they provide help to the competition. Worst of all though, is that those students who are morally inclined, and are willing to share all these resources at the advice of their conscience, are resented by their classmates for "ruining

the curve," or, in actuality, for leveling the playing field.

I can't blame the students for creating such harmful competition. In all honesty, I believe we all feel threatened by the inevitable pressure that comes along with the highly selective process of medical school admissions. The pressure we face isn't only a passive product of the process, though. It's a product of the entire system, and it starts in the very first year of pre-med studies.

A student's first year on the pre-med track typically consists of introductory-level science courses, which students have termed "weed-out courses" because of the significant rate of students who struggle with the course material to an extent that forces them to question (and sometimes abandon) their medical aspirations. However, this reality is unfortunately perpetuated by various professors and members of the administration who feel that it is their responsibility to determine which students are capable of advancing in the medical field and which are not. I have heard accounts of professors insisting that only the top third of the class is entitled to an A (also known as the Bell Curve Method). This conveys the message that an A should be a measure of superiority rather than knowledge of material and its proper application. Many students have shared experiences of professors encouraging them to drop their course in response to one poor test grade or a simple request for extra help, rather than provide them with the tools to help them do better. One student revealed to me that she was advised by a faculty member to consider an alternative field of study, lest she tarnish the near-perfect acceptance rate of SCW students to medical school. All these instances demonstrate the faculty's role in reinforcing (even if inadvertently) the toxic message that a student who is not at the top of her class cannot possibly be successful. If this is the case, it is no wonder that such an attitude has trickled down to the students.

This issue is further exacerbated by the prevalence of private tutoring groups. The existence

of this service, while incredibly beneficial to the students who use it, fosters an air of elitism and exclusivity due to its lack of affordability. These tutoring sessions essentially act as an entire additional course in which material is reviewed, old and generally inaccessible tests are compiled and disseminated for practice, and a variety of tools and tricks are shared from personal experience. In addition to the clear disadvantage that such a situation creates for those students which aren't privy to such



a resource, the existence of such an exclusive service creates significant division within the premedical cohort. One student, who wishes to remain anonymous, described the in-group versus out-group mentality that is generated by this divide: "My fellow classmates, people I would have expected to help me, instead refuse to answer my questions, quickly shut their notebooks as I am walking by, and just make me feel unwelcome overall" (SCW '23). Now, the hesitancy of the students who participate in private tutoring to share the materials they receive is understandable, given that they do pay for it. However, the environment it inspires is devoid of cohesion which makes it more difficult for students to relate to their peers and which makes them less inclined to help them out. In my view, our inability to support each other—the fact that we view our classmates as enemies rather than teammates—especially given the extent to which we, as Jewish students, value unity and prioritize giving, is absolutely heartbreaking.

Perhaps though one of the saddest elements of this predicament is the fact that we accept these conditions as status quo. We regard competition as a necessary and inescapable aspect of the medical path, and while it may sadden us, we fail to challenge its necessity. Our indifference to the horror of this reality is frightening and our normalization of such behaviors is the most toxic element of all. What is so telling of this indifference is

the feedback I received from students who are pursuing a scientific career other than one in medicine. One such student, who wishes to remain anonymous, explained that "it was such a culture shock for me to transition from science classes in which everyone wanted only to help their friends and to ensure one another's success, into classes in which the students are so competitive, that rather than trying to help their friends, some of them even hope that their friends might fail so that they can rise to the top" (SCW '23).

We need to realize that such malicious competition is not normal, and that it is in fact unacceptable. We need to recognize that in achieving success, we need not compete with our peers, but

rather we need only to focus on our own achievements. Our worth and potential as students, as candidates for graduate school, and as future healthcare providers is defined only by ourselves, not by how we measure up against others. If only we understood this, perhaps everything could change.

By definition, a healthcare provider must be an individual who demonstrates qualities such as empathy and compassion, as the entire essence of the job requires selfless dedication to the needs of others. Moreover, I am ready to guarantee that nearly every student in the pre-health track would say that their career goals are inspired by a desire to give to others and to positively impact lives. But we don't need to be practicing doctors to fulfill these goals—qualities such as selflessness and empathy are applicable in everyday life, and that starts now. As the future medical professionals of this world, we need to start prioritizing the success of our peers in addition to our own. We need to recognize that we are all playing on the same team, that the success of others does not remove from our own, and that we all share a common goal. And the truth is, by helping our peers to succeed alongside us, we have a higher chance of succeeding in the long run—as compassionate professionals who are genuinely dedicated to the care of others.



## HOLOCAUST NOVEL BANNED IN TENNESSEE: THE DELIGITIMAZATION OF JEWISH PAIN

BY RINA SHAMILOV,  
NEWS EDITOR

On January 26, 2022, the Tennessee school board banned *Maus*, a graphic novel that details the lives of Polish Jews during the Holocaust. It was reportedly banned for expressing “nudity and profanity,” though I think these categorizations are mere platitudes that delegitimize the Holocaust.

I heard about this for the first time in my American Jewish Literature class, where the course objective is to better understand the trials and tribulations of immigrant Jews at the turn of the 21st century. Much of what we will be exploring in this course will relate to the Holocaust because the Holocaust illuminates a detailed and poignant tale of what Jews endured throughout history. Even more terrifying is that the Holocaust bears a constant reminder to the fact that Jews will never truly be safe, despite living in modern times.

*Maus*, for its retelling of the Holocaust in a relatable and universal way, has a vital role in the American educational system when providing non-Jewish children (many of whom are the same age Spiegelman was when he experienced the Holocaust) with a flavor of what others went through. *Maus* grapples with complex themes like abuse and suicide, but it maintains an almost childlike frailty by superimposing mice with human beings.

But banning this novel is not a stand-alone action, rather, it seems to be concomitant with Holocaust denial. According to the Anti-Defamation League, only 33% of the world is aware of the Holocaust and believes

that it’s been accurately described through history.

The main point of contention seemed to be about the nude portrayal of Polish women, which, in my opinion, comes across as absolutely ludicrous because the characters in question are mice! Likewise, there appeared to be a concern about vulgarity, though there were only eight swear words. A book that is commonly accepted in American public schools is *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, a historical fiction novel that details the lives of African Americans in Flint, Michigan. This book, too, contains swear words though it is not banned. So, why is a Jewish novel barred?

Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*, analogized the Tennessee ban to

“Orwellianism,” and Neil Geiman tweeted that “[t]here’s only one kind of people who would vote to ban *Maus*, whatever they are calling themselves these days.” Both prominent authors are implying that the ban is indicative of deep-rooted antisemitism that is seldom addressed in the American political arena. Jews have a target on their backs and it seems to be starting with the ban of an important piece of literature that reflects one of the most important events of their history.

I think that this ban will only help further the erasure of Jewish pain instead of underscoring the significance of the history we want to never forget.



### DON'T SAY

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inclusive classroom.”

In 2021, there was a record number of seventeen anti-LGBTQ+ laws enacted. This was the most anti-LGBTQ+ legislation passed in a year since 2015. If this bill is passed in Florida, it will continue to add to the regularity of homophobia and transphobia in our nation. Even President Biden, tweeting from the White House, said, “I want every member of the LGBTQI+ community—especially the kids who will be impacted by this hateful bill— to know that you are loved and accepted just as you are. I have your back, and my Administration will continue to fight for the protections and safety you deserve.” Chasten Buttigieg, husband of transportation secretary Pete Buttigieg, says, “This will kill kids. You are purposely making your state a harder place for LGBTQ+ kids to live.”

The idea of this bill, more or

less, is to erase queer identities at school. The bill is so vague that the fear of possibly breaking it will have teachers be silent on LGBTQ+ discussions, in fear of retribution. A parent could possibly sue a school for district violations, and this could lead to an unnecessary lawsuit. Simply put, if this bill is to pass, teachers and administrations in schools will be forced to stop acknowledging that queer people exist. The bill is already hurting children in classrooms without yet being passed. In one case, a boy was told he could not present a family history project since his uncle was gay.

The erasure of queer identities is not something that is new to the LGBTQ+ community, especially in the Jewish community and at Yeshiva University. In my experience at YU, LGBTQ+ people are rarely spoken about, rarely acknowledged, and rarely given platforms to speak about their experiences. In Yeshiva University, LGBTQ+ clubs and organizations are not permitted to exist because the administration refuses to allow them. The YU Pride Alliance,



an existing organization, is suing the school over the lack of their official club status despite the multiple times trying to apply for it.

The mission statement of the YU Pride Alliance is to provide a safe space for all students to feel comfortable and supported, regardless of their sexual and gender identity, as well as to seek to educate the wider YU community on the Jewish LGBTQ+ world. Queer presence in classrooms in YU are not spoken about, and the Pride Alliance strives to make the opposite happen. With an administration that is unable to support the LGBTQ+ club, it is hard for queer people and allies to voice their support without retribution. Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community shouldn’t be something people are ashamed of, and people should be proud of their identity.

We ‘don’t say gay’ here at Yeshiva University. At least, that is what the administration is seemingly striving

for. However, everyday the LGBTQ+ community will stand up and stand their ground in this fight. No matter if it is anonymous or not, everyone aims to one day have an equal and accepting community at this university. One day, we can speak about being gay, and our personal experiences.

In Florida, they are taking this opportunity away from children in secular schools. They are taking away the freedom for children to be able to express and talk about their identities. Here, in our university ranging from teenagers to adults, we have the ability to change that. We at Yeshiva University have the ability to be proud, speak up, and create an open queer community.

## THE CASE AGAINST MEMBERS OF CONGRESS PARTICIPATING IN THE STOCK MARKET

BY DANIELLE LANE,  
MANAGING EDITOR

The past few years have highlighted the stark inequalities that exist in our country. While some families spent the early days of the pandemic comfortably enjoying unexpected family time, learning how to make bread, and doing home improvement projects, others spent it battling poverty and food insecurity. The discrepancy between the “haves” and the “have nots” became even more apparent and well defined. This divide was not exclusively between families of various socioeconomic statuses, it was also evident between those with power and those without.

For years, the debate over whether members of congress (MOC) should be allowed to invest and participate in the stock market has been a contentious topic. There are those who believe that all people should be allowed to trade in the stock market due to the fact that the stock market is a part of our open economy and should be available to everyone. While this is understandable and may seem like a good rule of thumb, it's not as simple as it seems. MOC have an extremely unfair insight into the future ebbs and flows of the market as well as an unequal dependence and interest in the stock market doing well. MOC's reelection is often influenced by how well the stock market is doing and by extension the economy. Additionally decisions made by MOC impact the stock market.

There are many examples throughout history of MOC's using their unfair insight into the stock market for their advantage.

According to research done by Serkan Karadas, MOC receive abnormally high returns on their stock investments. This is due to a few reasons. The main reason being the insider information MOC's are privy to regarding future policies that would influence the economy. While this practice of unfair insider information being used in MOC's portfolio has been going on since the creation of the stock market, in recent years it has grown to an unacceptable level and must be dealt with.

In his January 2022 New York Times article, David Leonhardt highlights a few of the larger examples of the unfair advantage MOC have in the stock

market. A few of the more notable examples are: Republican congressman, Tom Price, bought health care stock that only he was able to access. In the months leading up to

the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many high ranking senators sold various stocks in their portfolio after being briefed on the predicted toll the pandemic would take on the economy. Republican senator, David Perdue, bought stock in companies that saw huge gains during the pandemic such as Netflix and Pfizer.

While some MOC have been vocal about their desire to see more restrictions placed on MOC regarding their participation in the stock market, many high ranking MOC's have been outspoken in their desire for the stock market to remain open and accessible to everyone. House speaker Nancy Pelosi, a democrat whose husband works in venture capital, has publicly said many times that she feels that “[w]e are a free-market economy... [and we] should be able to participate in that.” It is important to note that as a result of congresswoman Pelosi's position and her husband's job, her family receives massive financial advantages from the stock market that are not available to anyone else in the country.

The good news is that in the past few months there has been a large push to introduce new legislation that would limit MOC's ability to participate in the stock market. Some suggestions that have been floated include a total ban on MOC and their close family members ability to trade in the stock market or the requirement that MOCs place all their investments in a blind trust that would be moni-



tored by a third party.

The idea that our elected officials and their families are able to benefit financially in such a dramatic way as a result of the privy knowledge they are given in their role is deeply troubling and unethical. How can we ensure

that they are making the decisions that are best for the country and their constituents when a simple vote could result in a massive payday?

The last few years have seen some of the largest socio-economic divide in American history. The continued growth between those who are barely getting by and those who are swimming in excess is an embarrassment. Luckily, small steps are being taken to address this issue. Recently, on February 9, 2022, Pelosi finally relented and removed her opposition from legislation that would regulate MOC's activity in the stock market.

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## THE CASE FOR PURSUING A SHAPED MAJOR



BY AARON SHAYKEVICH,  
OPINIONS EDITOR

For many students, the goal of college is to get good grades and major in a subject that directly pertains to the profession that they are interested in. For a pre-medical student, this typically means majoring in biology or chemistry. A person interested in social work may choose to major in psychology. For pre-law students, many tend to major in political science or English. While a general major may be enough for most students to satisfy their intellectual desires, as they feel the plan of study of their major covers what they are interested in, it certainly is not true for all.

To those students looking for something more out of what they choose to dedicate their time and major in or those who feel their academic interests aren't adequately represented, there is another way. You have a chance to focus your studies in a more particular field specified to your interests. There is a path that allows you to major in what interests

you, even if it is not a major currently offered at YU. All that's necessary is to shape your major.

A shaped major is a course of study that you work with academic advising and the dean's office to create based on your interests. For example, a student interested in becoming a psychologist who also enjoys biology can double major or major in psychology and (maybe) minor in biology or vice versa. Or, instead, the student can choose to shape a major in psychobiology (or something else!). The former traditional route permits the student a clear path toward graduating college, and it may be simpler to achieve. However, the latter shaped major allows the student to follow their interests and stand out among the many psychology majors when applying for the same positions at graduate schools or jobs. Like everything else in college, the more work you are willing to put in, the more possibilities you have to stand out.

While shaped majors may make one more competitive

for applying to jobs or graduate schools, that is not the only (or primary) benefit. Pursuing a shaped major will allow one to study what they are most passionate about. College doesn't need to be just a necessary evil to achieve one's future goals. It is actually possible to enjoy one's academic studies! Furthermore, a shaped major doesn't need to be a derivative of current departmental majors. If one is passionate, driven, and works with the university, their interests can become a reality. Sarit Perl, a former SCW student, majored in Theater and shared her experience saying that "not only should you pursue your passion — you can pursue it here. If YU is the right place for you, don't transfer just because there's no established department in your field."

I am not implying that pursuing a shaped major doesn't require a lot of work. To apply for a shaped major requires lots of time and effort. The shaped major packet for Yeshiva College requires a 500-750 word narrative, at least 12 courses in your major (although the more the better), and a letter of support from a faculty member. For instance, for my major in Economics of Health and Science, it took me about a month to work out everything with my Economics professor and write a narrative

I was proud of. At the end of the day, however, these requirements are beneficial as they allow one to be reflective and think on whether they genuinely want this shaped major.

Of course, a shaped major is not for everyone. A student who is interested in chemistry does not need to make a fancy major in Neurochemistry just for fun. But, for those who are interested in a unique course of study, this is a realistic option to at least consider. The shaped major packet emphasizes that "like departmental majors at the College, the shaped major is meant to move beyond the shared 'general' education experience of the Core, and to provide students with in-depth, intensive work in a particular area of intellectual interest." If this statement resonates with you, even just a little, then you may want to consider shaping your major. While it is a lot of work, and you will need to make a lot of effort to get it approved, it most certainly will be worth it.

## MY MECHINA EXPERIENCE



BY MILA KRUGMAN

One of the greatest and most unique components of Yeshiva University is, undoubtedly, its dual curriculum allowing students to learn advanced Judaic Studies alongside their secular classes. While the expansive list of levels and classes offered is quite the feat, I believe that YU's greatest and most notable aspect of Jewish education is the Mechina Program. Coming from a completely non-religious background, I arrived at YU nervous about my lack of Jewish knowledge and exposure to the Jewish community. Even after a year in seminary, I still felt a drastic difference between other YU students and myself.

When I was contacted by Dean Shoshana Schechter and informed about the Mechina Program, which allows students from public school to learn Torah together at an introductory level, I was relieved. Being in a class with girls like me and learning from incredible teachers like Dean Schechter made me feel like part of a very tight-knit community. In fact, Dean Schechter often says that while YU is your family, the Mechina Program is your immediate family. That sentence could not be truer.

Part of being in the Mechina

Program, besides the classes and Shabbatons, is a newly added Chavruta Program in which Mechina and non-Mechina girls are paired up to learn a sefer or Jewish topic of their choice. At first, I was hesitant about the idea, as I worried that I wouldn't have as much to contribute to the learning as my chavruta [Torah studies learning partner] would. After meeting with my chavruta, I realized that I couldn't have been more wrong.

I was paired up with Lieba Weiss, and after discussing our interests, we decided to learn

Shemirat HaLashon [guarding one's words] by the Chofetz Chaim. Throughout the semester, we would meet weekly in the Beit Midrash [Torah learning space] and work our way through the book. As time went on, my worries about a solely "teacher-student" dynamic faded, and I could feel a mutual desire to learn and gain inspiration. Our weekly chavruta certainly brought us closer together, and I always looked forward to meeting, catching up, and continuing to make progress in our book. I

SEE MECHINA  
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## STAFF WRITER PROFILE: NAOMI FRIED

BY RU BENHAMOU,  
FEATURES EDITOR, ON  
BEHALF OF THE *YU OBSERVER*

Each month, the *YU Observer* aims to highlight some of the YU undergraduate students who have written articles for us over the course of the semester. For the February 2022 edition, the *YU Observer* is highlighting Naomi Fried

**Name:** Naomi Fried  
**College:** Stern College for Women  
**Major:** Biology  
**Year:** Third Year  
**Favorite part of being on (or back on) campus?** Clubs and Shiurim [Jewish lectures] being in person with an oppor-

**tunity to make friends and network.**  
**What do you miss most about Zoom school? Focus. It was just me and my computer. No distractions.**  
**Currently Reading:** *Exodus* by Leon Uris  
**Currently watching:** Khan Academy orgo videos :)  
**Coke or Pepsi? Coke**  
**Android or Apple? Android!**  
**What's a quote/thought/or piece of advice you have for your fellow students?** "Don't prioritize your schedule, schedule your priorities" from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

See some of Naomi's past articles here:

<https://yuobserver.org/2021/12/swoop-the-portable-mri/>  
<https://yuobserver.org/2021/11/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-telehealth/>  
<https://yuobserver.org/2021/10/is-raels-first-cranial-joined-twin-separation/>

Photo Credit: Naomi Fried



# CLUB PROFILE: VENTURE CAPITAL CLUB (VCC)

BY ELI LEVI, BUSINESS  
EDITOR, AND AVI KLAR

Each month, the *YU Observer* aims to highlight one club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the February 2022 edition, the *YU Observer* is highlighting the Venture Capital Club (VCC).

**Club Name:** Venture Capital Club (VCC)

**Heads:** Eli Khaldar, Avi Klar, Eli Levi

**Relevant Campus(es):** Beren, Wilf  
**What is your club's mission statement?**

Bridging business and the future. The goal of the Venture Capital Club is to educate, share experiences, and encourage people to partake in the next era of technological innovation.

**Why is this club important?**  
For anyone that is interested in Venture Capital (VC) or pursuing it as a career, this club will be an invaluable resource for gaining a basic understanding of the industry and continuing to learn about new developments in the industry. Behind every new technological advancement, there will always be a business providing both the structure and the means for innovative technology. These businesses will inevitably need funding, which will lead to flourishing and growth in the Venture Capital industry. The other corporate finance occupations will not be obsolete, but venture capital is

the future of business as it mixes finance with technology.

**What was your pull to get involved in/start the club?**

Eli Levi: I am fascinated by venture capital and anything that is involved in building and understanding what drives companies.  
Avi Klar: I was looking at different business industries and venture capital caught my eye, so I learned about the industry. I am starting the club because I want to share and learn alongside other people what venture capital is and what it has to offer.

Eli Khaldar did not submit a quote at the time of publication. He is a fellow co-founder and is currently working at a VC firm and as evidenced by starting VCC. He is excited to learn more about the industry and to bring in speakers who will educate individuals about venture capital.

**What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?:**

The club will consist of speakers, group discussions, and think tank projects. We will

hear from current leaders about what venture capital is, how to pursue a career in venture capital, and finally to dissect ideas and investments while analyzing why they might be wise investments. We also plan to publish a newsletter on all things VC that anyone can read or contribute to.

**What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?:**

We hope to have several events

that anyone can participate in. You can apply to be on the board or to become a writer for the newsletter.

**Anything else to say about your club:**

We believe that venture capital is the future and would love for anyone and everyone to join in our adventure! If you are interested, join our group chat.

*Photo Credit: Venture Capital Club*



The logo for the Venture Capital Club (VCC) features the letters 'VCC' in a large, bold, blue font. Below the letters, the full name 'Venture Capital Club' is written in a smaller, dark blue font.

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## MECHINA

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quickly began seeing my partner as a role model and friend. This semester, Lieba and I have decided to study a new topic. Because of our mutual hope of being from women in business, we will begin learning a new book called *Making it All Work* by Ari and Miryam Was-

serman, which offers insight to hashkafa [outlook] and halacha [Jewish law] surrounding women in the workplace.

Coming to Beren for the first time, I feared that I wouldn't be able to befriend—let alone learn with—students from reli-

gious backgrounds. I worried that we would find nothing in common and that my learning as a Mechina student would never come close to theirs. Needless to say, my experience with my chavruta has shown me quite the opposite. In my opinion, the Mechina Chavru-

ta Program is an incredible means of bringing girls from various backgrounds together to learn from each other, exchange ideas, and form lasting relationships. I highly recommend participating to anyone—Mechina student or not.

# YU FACULTY PROFILE: DR. MARISSA A. BARRERA

BY RAQUEL LEIFER,  
FEATURES EDITOR, ON  
BEHALF OF THE  
YU OBSERVER

Each month, the *YU Observer* aims to highlight a YU faculty member. For the February 2022 edition, the *YU Observer* is highlighting Dr. Marissa A. Barrera, PhD, MSCS, CCC-SLP.

**Raquel Leifer (RL):** Hello Dr. Barrera. Please introduce yourself.

**Dr. Marissa Barrera (MB):** I am currently working as the Assistant Dean of Health Sciences and Program Director for the Graduate Program of speech-language pathology at The Katz School of Science and Health. I am also the interim Program Director for speech-language pathology and audiology at Stern College for Women.

**RL:** How long have you worked at YU?

**MB:** I came to Yeshiva University in 2016, and I was one of the founding faculty members that were hired to develop and to ultimately execute the graduate program in speech-language pathology. It was a brand-new program and we had so much support from the provost, president, and Dean Paul Russo of the Katz School to help us launch the SLP program. Just prior to coming to YU, I was finishing my PhD, working at my alma mater, Columbia University. I have worked at many New York higher education institutions, but Yeshiva University was instantly my home.

**RL:** What do you like about working at YU?:

**MB:** When women graduate from Stern, they have the opportunity to continue their education within Yeshiva Uni-

versity should they choose to, and this is really important to me. The Katz School of Science and Health offers pathway programs for speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and physician assistant studies. As the Assistant Dean of Health Sciences at the Katz School, I have to let you know that all three of these rewarding careers are available to Stern women. All of our pathway programs are at your fingertips. With the YU Pathways program, at the conclusion of your junior year, you can submit an application for early assurance, and you may have the opportunity to have your seat already "locked and loaded" before you start your senior year. This is a privilege only for Stern women. We love it when the Stern women continue on to Katz, and we get to see them grow from a freshman to a young woman earning her white coat. It brings a tear to my eye!

**RL:** What got you passionate about your field?:

**MB:** I went to high school in Long Island and I had a lot of access to AP classes in my junior year. One of the classes I took was AP Psychology. In that class, we met a family who came to speak with us about their child who was born deaf and received a cochlear implant. This was in 1998 and cochlear implants were not common practice as they are considered now. It was very revolutionary and interesting to me. They talked about this "doctor" they went to every week to help their child begin to piece together communication, language, and hearing. I was curious as to what

type of doctor this was. My mother is an infectious disease clinician, so health care was always on my horizon, I just wasn't sure what route I wanted to take. I learned that the "doctor" they were speaking with was a PhD trained speech-language pathologist and a doctor of audiology. I thought to myself, "Woah! You can be a doctor of something that will enable you to see your patients two to three times a week and really be a part of their daily journey." That was it. I was in love. I did not take anytime off, I went consecutively through my entire course of studies. I began my undergraduate work in 1999 and I finished my PhD in November 2016.

**RL:** If you could bring in any guest lecturer, alive or deceased, who would it be, and what would he/she speak about?:

**MB:** Oliver Sacks. He was one of the greatest neurologists to walk the face of the earth. He brought such a unique perspective to the human side of neurology. He brought the stories of his patients and their loved ones to life. I think health care providers need to always remember that we are working with real humans who are facing challenges. We are there to tell their story and to advocate for them. He embodied that. Oliver Sacks was a great mind.

**RL:** Do you have any advice for students interested in a career in your field?:

**MB:** To be a speech-language pathologist (SLP) or audiologist, you have to care more about your patients than you do about yourself. We are a service driven profession. For everyone who comes to see us, we are there to work with

them as a team to accomplish their goals. To be a SLP is to be empathic and goal driven.

**RL:** What makes your field special?

**MB:** In the 2022 U.S. News Report, speech-language pathology is listed as the tenth best job in the country, across all disciplines. It is also listed as the third best healthcare job, and audiology is listed as the twenty-second best healthcare job. Speech and audiology are in demand jobs. In my opinion, this is an incredible career for modern women. I am a modern woman, I am a woman of science, I am a working woman, and I am also proud to be a wife and a mom. With a career in speech-language pathology, there are so many opportunities. You can work per diem, part time, or full time. It's a very "ala carte" profession. You can be robust or laid back in how often you want to work. This is such an amazing, natural, and organic benefit to this field. The world is your oyster in speech-language pathology and audiology. I just want every young woman to know, you can be a career woman, a mom, a wife, a best friend, a great daughter, a community member, and still have a lucrative, highly flexible and rewarding career.

**RL:** What is one thing you want students to know about you?

**MB:** I am a very proud healthcare provider. That is what I want the women of Stern to

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# ‘THE FAB FOUR’ REINVENT THEMSELVES IN THIS 1965 CLASSIC

BY SOLLY SUSSMAN

For as long as I can remember, The Beatles have always been a part of my life. Growing up with my grandparents who were Beatles fanatics, it seemed like destiny for me to at least like The Beatles. From a very young age, whenever my grandma and I were driving in the car, she would put in the CD “1”, a compilation of every number 1 hit from The Beatles. Over the next few years, however, I would go on to forget about the band and why their music was so impactful on my life. After downloading Spotify in my first year of yeshiva in Israel, I decided to try to get back into The Beatles. I closed my eyes to pick a random album in their catalog and landed on Rubber Soul.

Rubber Soul is the sixth studio album by The Beatles. The Beatles consisted of John Lennon (Lead Vocals, Rhythm Guitar),

Paul McCartney (Lead Vocals, Bass Guitar), George Harrison (Lead Guitar, Vocals), and Ringo Starr (Drums, Percussion). Their previous album Help had received a different kind of attention from the public. Sales were high as usual, but the album also received a lot of highbrow critical acclaim.

The same month as Help’s release, the band kicked off yet another tour, beginning at Shea Stadium in New York. This concert was a turning point for the band. After two years of playing, The Beatles began to lose interest in touring as a whole. Screaming girls prevented them from hearing their own instruments. When they got back into the studio, their goal for the album was not to recreate their previous records, but to compose a complete artistic expression. They didn’t have much time however, their record deal with EMI up to

that point required two albums per year. With Help coming out in August, the band needed to act quickly.

In the lead up to this next album, the band produced two non-album singles: “Day Tripper” and “We Can Work It Out.” Those two singles, along with the rest of the album, were recorded and finished in less than a month, and, in December 1965, Rubber Soul was released.

Right off the bat with the opener, “Drive My Car,” something feels different. I’m thinking that there must have been something in the air while they were recording this, and, truth be told, it was probably the marijuana. In fact, bandmate John would go on to say that Rubber Soul is “The Pot Album.” While the boys weren’t actually smoking while recording, they would smoke between sessions. Despite being under the influence, the

recording process was actually more focused this time as the band was determined to use the studio as an instrument more than ever.

In my opinion, the determination paid off. This is the most full-sounding album The Beatles had made up until that point. The greater presence of low end emphasizes that full sound, which gives way to stellar tracks. Take for example the second track “Norwegian Wood,” which shows the band experimenting with Indian music by adding sitar, helping add to the environment the song creates. There are even intimate ballads with songs like “Michelle” or “Girl,” the excellent vocal harmonies on “Nowhere Man” or “The Word.” Although John and Paul wrote

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## Hunger, Death, and Propaganda in Yeonmi Park’s In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom

BY ELIZABETH KERSHTEYN

Throughout her childhood she was starving. At 9 years old, her father was sent to a reeducation labor camp. At 13 years old, she escaped her country and was sold into slavery. At 16 years old, she finally reached freedom. These are only a few facts from the incredible life of Yeonmi Park, a North Korean defector and human rights activist.

After living for some time in South Korea and the United States, Yeonmi decided to shed some light on the lives of people in North Korea and her struggle and sacrifice-filled journey to freedom. In her book *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom*, Yeonmi attempts to answer the questions

that a lot of Westerners have about North Korea: how bad is life there? What do North Koreans know about the outside world? Why are they obsessed with the Supreme Leader? Why do they not rebel? Why don’t they just escape?

Foreign media and entertainment, which we Americans are so used to watching all the time, is banned in North Korea. However, not even the strictest dictatorship can oversee everything, and so a lot of Western movies and TV shows are smuggled into North Korea. Yeonmi claims that the movie that changed her worldview was *Titanic* (directed by James Cameron). She writes: “... I couldn’t believe

how someone could make a movie out of such a shameful love story. In North Korea, the filmmakers would have been executed. No real human stories were allowed, nothing but propaganda about the Leader. But in *Titanic*, the characters talked about love and humanity. I was amazed that Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet were willing to die for love, not just for the regime, as we were. The idea that people could choose their own destinies fascinated me. This pirated Hollywood movie gave me my first small taste of freedom.”

Yeonmi claims that the word “love” in North Korea is only

used in regards to the leader. It’s not possible to love your family, neighbor, or friend. Love can only be expressed towards the dear leader. One might think that having access to the foreign media would open North Korean’s eyes to their horrible conditions by giving them something to compare their life to. However, Yeonmi claims that North Koreans think in a special way. She calls such phenomenon “doublethink,” a term she borrowed from George Orwell’s book 1984. She writes, “It is

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how you can recite the motto 'Children Are King' in school, then walk home past the orphanage where children with bloated bellies stare at you with hungry eyes."

According to Yeonmi, life for the majority of North Koreans is a constant struggle against starvation. When the Soviet Union collapsed, North Korea lost its major ally and supporter. As a result, there was a huge famine in the 1990s. Yeonmi describes the extremely disturbing reality: "The frozen babies that starving mothers abandoned in the alleys did not fit into my worldview, so I couldn't process what I saw. It was normal to see bodies in the trash heaps, bodies floating in the river, normal to just walk by and do nothing when a stranger cried for help." Yeonmi and her family had to use anything to survive, and surprisingly, the hardest time of the year for them was spring. She was shocked to find out that in the West, spring is considered the time of life and reborn. In North Korea spring is the time of death: "It is the time of year when our stores of food are gone, but the farms produce nothing to eat because new crops are just being planted. Spring is when most people died of starvation. My sister and I often heard the adults who saw dead bodies on the street make clucking noises and say, "It's too bad they couldn't hold until summer."

Another life changing moment in Yeonmi's life happened when the government allowed people

to sell their products at the marketplace called jangmadang. At 11 years old, Yeonmi had to help her parents to earn money. She would bribe the guard of the state-owned orchard with a rice vodka and then sell the fruits she picked at one of the markets. Yeonmi explains how the private market helped her



develop a sense of freedom: "Once you start trading for yourself, you start thinking for yourself. Before the public distribution system collapsed, the government alone decided who would survive and who would starve. The markets took away the government's control. My small market transactions made me realize that I had some control over my own fate. It gave me another taste of freedom."

With all the poverty and desperation taking place, some North Koreans are willing to risk their lives and flee their homeland. Most of them are either trying to escape hunger or political persecution. On

March 31, 2007, Yeonmi Park and her mother crossed the frozen Yalu river and got to China. But they didn't reach their freedom. For most North Koreans, escaping to China means living in fear that they will be captured and sent back home to face death and torture.

The defectors are not the only ones getting punished: up to three generations of family members will be chastised for the sins of their relatives including a lower social status, labor camp sentence, or even death. Upon arrival to China, Yeonmi and her mother were sold into slavery. Her mother was sold to Chinese farmers. According to Yeonmi, there is a huge shortage of brides in China due to a one-child policy whereby parents were only allowed to have one child due to overpopulation concerns. Many parents opted to abort their unborn daughters for a chance to have a boy resulting in a huge

deficit in females. Thus, North Korean brides, though illegal, are in high demand because they are unable to run away in fear of getting arrested.

In the book, Yeonmi describes her experiences in China and shares the struggles she and her mother had to go through to achieve freedom. Eventually they came across Christian mercenary groups that helped them to get to South Korea, where she decided to write her book: "It's an odd thing for someone who has just turned twenty-one to be writing the story of her life, especially someone with a secret she has been trying to hide for years. But as soon as I began writing my memories down, I knew that I could no longer hold anything back. How could I ask people to face the truth about North Korea, to face the truth about what happens to the women who escape into China and fall into the hands of brokers and rapists, if I couldn't face it myself?"

Yeonmi Park's story gives us only a glimpse of one of many stories of North Koreans who are desperate for a decent life. With all that she had to go through, Yeonmi considers herself to be very lucky. According to her, most North Koreans who try to escape simply don't make it. Her journey is filled with miracles and a determination to live; she kept going *In Order to Live*.

To learn more about Yeonmi Park's activism and the situation in North Korea, you can visit her YouTube channel - Voice of North Korea by Yeonmi Park: <https://www.youtube.com/c/YeonmiParkOfficial>

## DR. MARISSA A. BARRERA

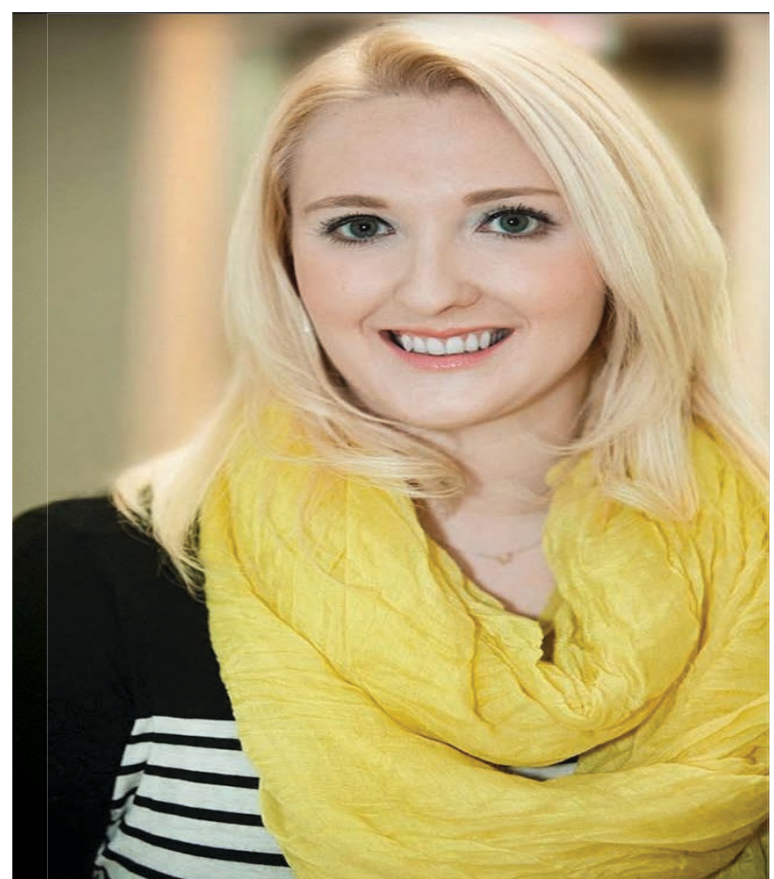
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know. Whether you are working in a school, in early intervention, a private practice, or in a hospital, speech-language pathologists and audiologists are always wearing the hat of a healthcare provider. That is really an amazing thing! We are allied health professionals, with the rights and privileges to diagnose, evaluate, treat and manage many conditions across the lifespan, from infancy and neonates, to adults and geriatrics, it falls within our scope of practice. This is what drives me everyday.

Myself and my colleagues are friendly and accessible. I will do anything for any of my students

across any of the programs I am a part of. Don't be afraid to reach out! Ask a question! We are here to be your partners. I believe that good higher education is led through modeling success and we want to support your dreams.

I love helping my Stern students along their pathway. From choosing the right graduate school, to choosing what they want to specialize in. It is such an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to be that catalyst from freshman year, to white coat ceremony with that Masters of Science in hand. I couldn't ask for a better place to work. I'm a "YU for life!" This is my home.





## FAB FOUR

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the majority of the songs, George got a chance to shine with his two tracks "Think For Yourself" and "If I Needed Someone."

My favorite track on the album has to be "In My Life," which I believe to be a perfect song. It's a remarkable encapsulation of nostalgia, with just the right balance between wistfulness and heartache as well as one of the band's most emotional songs in my opinion. Compared to the rest of the record, the closer, "Run For Your Life," is pretty lackluster. Musically the song is okay, but the lyrics read like it's about a murderer chasing someone. It's a weirdly maudlin note on which to end an otherwise beautiful and introspective album. Rub-



ber Soul, in my opinion, is the first truly great Beatles album. The albums before this are fine in their own right, but Rubber Soul is the first to feel truly cohesive.

You may think that an experimental album like Rubber Soul might

not do as well as the other previous records. Thankfully, the album not only sold millions, but it also earned the band a newfound level of critical and artistic respect. The record inspired Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys to make the album

Pet Sounds, which many consider to be one of the greatest albums ever made. It made Mick Jagger from The Rolling Stones to start writing his own material, and it gave John Cale and Lou Reed the idea to form The Velvet Underground. The album was a milestone achievement for The Beatles and is one of the most important records of the 1960's.

**WANT TO SHARE YOUR OPINION?**

***WRITE FOR THE YU OBSERVER!***

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# NYC EATS: TIBERIAS

BY HANNAH POUPKO

Located in midtown Manhattan at 45 E 34th Street, right across from Brookdale Residence Hall, Tiberias is just as delicious as it is convenient.

Tiberias, which opened in 2011, has become popular in the world of kosher dairy cuisine. With its balance of comfort foods and healthy options, Tiberias is definitely a fan favorite among Yeshiva University students and midtown foodies. The restaurant's name, Tiberias, is inspired by the city in Israel, but its cuisine is unlike the traditional middle-eastern cuisine.

Tiberias caters to people of all ages and backgrounds with its extensive menu offering an array of options and cuisines. Tiberias also has a bar that offers mixed drinks, wine, and beer in addition to their nonalcoholic beverages and shakes. Customers can choose from a range of fresh fish, flavorful pasta, delicious pizza, tasty salad, and sushi while sipping on refreshing beverages. Appetizers include trendy yet flavorful dishes such as chestnut portobello

mushroom risotto, broccoli nuggets, and fish tacos. My personal favorite dishes are the baked ziti and the grilled halloumi salad.

With beautiful decor and a whimsical ambience, Tiberias is truly a pleasurable eating experience.

The restaurant plays music at all hours into the night and features warm lighting giving off a relaxed feeling. Tiberias offers seating at the bar and tables in the back for customers to enjoy.

A higher-end dairy restaurant with dishes ranging from around fifteen to thirty five dollars, Tiberias is great for an afternoon lunch or a night out with friends.

Tiberias, unlike many midtown restaurants, is open seven days a week from mid afternoon until late into the night (excluding Shabbat). The restaurant is open on Saturday night one hour after Shabbat until six o'clock Sunday morning. Whether

customers eat in or order to go, they are guaranteed a delicious and mouthwatering meal.

*Yeshiva University students can purchase food using their flex dollars by giving the server their student ID number.*



## THINGS TO DO IN NYC: BRYANT PARK, 9/11 MEMORIAL, AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL

BY DINA ABRAHIM

Yeshiva University is located in New York City, one of the most exciting cities in the world, where there are many different places to explore. Below is a list of a few interesting attractions NYC has to offer.

**Bryant Park**  
Bryant Park is a beautiful public park in Midtown Manhattan. This park attracts visitors from all over the world and even offers free ice skating during the winter months. If you want to go ice skating be sure to make a reservation! When the weather is nice Bryant Park is a great place to have a picnic.



**Where:** Between 40th St and 42nd St, and 5th Ave and 6th Ave, New York, NY 10018  
**Price:** Free  
**To find out more:** <https://bryant-park.org>  
**9/11 Memorial**

While visiting the 9/11 Memorial is definitely an emotional experience, it remembers those who lost their lives on 9/11 and is a must-see for visitors of New York. The memorial has the names of everyone who died on 9/11 engraved in gold panels surrounding the two pools.  
**Where:** 180 Greenwich St, New York, NY 10007  
**Price:** The 9/11 Memorial is free. The 9/11 Museum is \$20 for college students. Don't forget to bring your student ID.  
**To find out more:** <https://www.911memorial.org>

**American Museum of Natural History**  
The American Museum of Natural

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# THE REMOVAL OF THE THEODORE ROOSEVELT MONUMENT



BY RONI LEIDER

After much controversy, the Theodore Roosevelt statue has been removed from the Museum of Natural History in New York City. It is a hugely important historical monument that has changed the meaning for many in recent years. As time has evolved, people have become increasingly aware of racism, and how it is glorified by history. While some believe history should be embraced, others believe the portrayal of history needs to be adapted to modern times.

Last June, the New York City Public Design Commission voted to remove the state, which was said to have cost around \$2 million. Once it is dismantled, the

monument will be taken to the new Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, located in Medora, North Dakota. It is expected to be shipped and moved to the library in the coming weeks.

For decades opposition to the statue has been voiced. Former governor and 26th United States president Theodore Roosevelt has been associated with colonialism and racism, which many believe has no place at the museum. The monument portrays former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt riding a horse, while two unidentified men stand next to him. One of these figures is of African descent, while the other is Native American. Over the years, activists have physically targeted the monument, attempting

to deface it or cover it with a parachute.

According to the museum, the killing of George Floyd led to the ultimate decision to remove the statue. The killing served as a reminder that racism and colonialism still loomed large in the American background. Historically Roosevelt has been considered to be a racist by many, removing the statue seemed like the appropriate action to take. Former New York mayor, Bill de Blasio has stated, “the right decision and the right time to remove this problematic statue.” On the other hand, former president Donald Trump has disagreed stating “Ridicu-

lous, don’t do it”.

The infamous bronze monument has been in the Museum since 1940. The process of removing the statue began in mid-January, and the current plan, which involves the statue being taken apart and removed incrementally throughout the week, has been approved by various city agencies.

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History is a museum on the Upper West Side in Manhattan. Nearly 5 million people visit this museum every year, making it one of the most-visited museums in the country. The museum includes the Hayden Planetarium and the Space Theater. Where: 200 Central Park West,

New York, NY 10024-5102  
Price: Varies. Free for residents of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut and \$18 for students. You must make a reservation.  
To find out more: <https://www.amnh.org>

Strand Book Store  
Strand Book Store is a must-see for book lovers. It is the largest independent book-

store in NYC and sells new, used, and rare books. They claim to have 18 miles worth of books.  
Where: 828 Broadway, New York, NY 10003  
Price: Free  
To find out more: <https://www.strandbooks.com>

Free walking tours  
Walking tours are a great way to get to know a new city. Many walking tours are offered every day in New York and some are

even free. One tour offered by Free Tours by Foot visits Soho, Little Italy, and Chinatown.  
Where: Wherever you want  
Price: Free  
To find out more: <https://freetours-byfoot.com>

## PAYPAL'S ORIGINS AND THE MODERN SILICON VALLEY

BY ELI LEVI,  
BUSINESS EDITOR

In December of 1998, Peter Thiel founded Confinity (a combination of confidence and infinity), which quickly transitioned into a money transfer company in 1999. Around the same time, Elon Musk was selling his company Zip2 and founded a new company called X.com, which was an online financial service and email payment company. Ex.com and Confinity eventually merged with Musk as CEO. Over the next few years, the company experienced multiple struggles and the board members decided to remove Musk from his position as CEO. Interestingly, even though Musk was not CEO anymore he was very invested in the company succeeding due to the fact that he was the largest shareholder in the company. In October 2000, Peter Thiel took over for Musk as CEO and during his time the name was changed from Ex.com to Paypal.

In February 2002, PayPal went public. During this time, eBay recognized that Paypal had tremendous potential as a market fit for their business model and acquired PayPal in an all-stock deal for about 1.5 billion dollars. When eBay acquired PayPal, eBay attempted to integrate PayPal into its existing product. This

caused friction between the PayPal employees and eBay management and resulted in many PayPal employees deciding to quit. PayPal remained part of eBay for about thirteen years before Carl Icahn, an American activist shareholder with his own conglomerate holding company, pushed for it to be spun off into its own company again. In July 2015, PayPal became once again its own company ultimately being a great decision for PayPal.

Other than the creation of the company PayPal itself, there were other more important second-order effects resulting from the founding and eBay's acquisition of PayPal. When PayPal was originally bought by eBay, it gave liquidity and capital to some of the world's most influential and successful businessmen who would lead the future forward like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel.

The former employees, who quit after Paypal was acquired by eBay, were arguably the core of Silicon Valley and the whole startup ecosystem. Some examples of companies that were founded by former employees of PayPal include LinkedIn, Palantir,



SpaceX, Yammer, Yelp, Tesla, and YouTube. Not to mention all of the companies that these former employees were either large investors or the earliest investors in such as Facebook, Uber, Airbnb, Pinterest, Square, and Stripe.

PayPal was integral to the startup ecosystem and was influential in creating some of the core principles used by startup companies. One example of such a principle is viral acquisition; Paypal was the first company to award money for users onboarding more users to the platform. Another principle is having one's success be

completely tied to the success of his or her startup. One of the things that tend to make startups successful is when the founders are completely dependent on their startup succeeding. The PayPal founders were all in on their company, so if the company failed the founders failed.

PayPal set the stage for the modern Silicon Valley startup. Through studying PayPal's history, so many of the core pieces of founding a startup can be found. So much of our modern technology arguably came about because of the early employees of PayPal.

## MARIJUANA MARKET AND ITS INEVITABLE LEGALIZATION

BY ELI LEVI,  
BUSINESS EDITOR

While doing some research into the United States' cannabis industry, I noticed a few interesting things. The first is with regards to the U.S.'s federal regulations on marijuana. Marijuana legalization is one of very few issues today which has bipartisan support but has not been legalized. Many argue that the primary reason the plant has not been legalized yet is that the core demographic which opposes legalization are the "silent generation" conservatives, which constitutes enough of the Repub-

lican party to prevent its legalization. As the silent generation conservatives leave office, many think U.S. marijuana legalization is inevitable. Based on this premise, some think the cannabis industry is undervalued for a couple of reasons. One reason the industry is arguably underrated is because marijuana is currently illegal in the U.S. at the federal level (as a "Schedule 1" drug, marijuana is illegal in basically every scenario except for the purposes of research), many

brokerages do not allow investors to buy U.S. cannabis securities (however, all brokerages allow the trading of Canadian cannabis securities). Whenever there is a restriction of access to a security, it can be a sign of an opportunity for many. Interestingly, Canadian cannabis securities tend to be listed on American exchanges (like the NYSE and Nasdaq) because cannabis is legal in Canada. Whereas American exchanges do not allow American can-

nabis securities to be listed because it is illegal at the federal level. This forces American cannabis securities to list on Canadian exchanges. One challenge that the marijuana industry may face is that there is already a very large illegal market for marijuana and there is no guarantee that it will shift legal. But assuming Marijuana does become legal and there are low tax rates on cannabis (unlike in California) the extremely large (illegal) demand for cannabis should shift

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legal. If the tax rates are not over the top then demand should shift legal because the prices should come down for legal marijuana as the industry innovates and scales.

Another reason that the cannabis industry is severely undervalued is that because it is illegal at the federal level, companies need to build completely new infrastructure in every state they want to do business in because they cannot currently cross state borders with cannabis. Once cannabis is legal, shipping and production costs should decrease significantly because budding cannabis companies can develop cheaper ways to produce, distribute, and market their products.

As a newer industry, there is plenty of room for innovation in products and medical-use cases which some believe will yield the

greatest return. Instead of drinking alcohol and waking up with a hangover, there will be THC or CBD filled drinks

marijuana companies. The primary argument against marijuana as an



that can cause similar intoxication effects without the painful aftermath of drinking as evidenced by the partnership between beer and

investment opportunity is that once it is completely legalized, it will be treated like any other commodity, which may remove

all pricing power (the ability to sell a product for more than the cost of the underlying commodities which go into creating it). For example, an iPhone costs more than the metal and plastic required to make an iPhone. Apple's brand, their specialized labor, and the machines required to make the computing chips, the sophisticated software, are all examples of components of Apple's pricing power. Marijuana is a plant and even though it is difficult to grow the fear is that cannabis gains the status of all other commodities, and is subject to the same underlying concepts and demand structures. Since there is a longer growing season in Mexico, the plant will most likely be grown there due to the capability of producing more,

likely for cheaper, and therefore boast a significantly higher profit margin. The marijuana industry is only beginning. The room for innovation is boundless, and there are so many cannabinoids in marijuana that have yet to be explored.

## BUSINESS BASICS: MANAGING A BUDGET

BY AMALYA

TEITELBAUM, BUSINESS  
EDITOR & MANAGER

A budget can be defined as an estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time. A budget can be a complicated term with an even more complicated definition. When broken down, however, it is not nearly as complex as it seems.

Budgets can be established for company purposes or an individual can establish a budget to save and utilize money wisely. In any case, there are several important factors to maintaining a responsible and well-prioritized budget. From the onset of establishing a budget, it's important to be realistic about your budget and your budget goals. Perhaps you're creating a budget to save, to invest, or to plan a vacation. Perhaps you wish to start paying off your tuition debt or are planning a retirement fund. Being realistic and recognizing your ultimate goal will assist you plan your budget.

Next, you must determine your income and expenses. Income is money received from work

or through investments and can be anything from a biweekly paycheck to a monthly allowance you receive from your parents. Once you determine your income, you then have to break down your expenses, or



necessities. Expenses can fluctuate depending on your stage of life and current situation. For a university student, for instance, expenses may consist of textbooks, dorming, etc. After university, it may be rent, food, clothing, etc. An integral part of establishing your expenses is distinguishing between your needs and your wants.

After establishing your budget goals, income, expenses, needs, and wants, the next step is to apply the 50/30/20 rule. The 50/30/20 rule breaks down one's budget

so that they are spending 50% on necessities, 30% on luxuries, and 20% on savings or debt. The 50/30/20 rule is a great tool for those who wish to work within the realms of a simple budget or for those just getting started. However, it's important to note that while this is an excellent rule of thumb, it does not apply to every individual. For those with higher expenses,

the 70/20/10 rule— 70% on necessities, 20% on savings or investments, and 10% on university or other potential debt— may be more appropriate.

Once an individual or company designs its budget, it's time to put it into action. Make sure your spending matches your income, your payments are completed in advance, and that you have money set aside for unexpected expenses. A budget is a living breathing model, it never will exist as a stagnant idea. It is essential for a budget executive to perpetually check-in to make sure the budget is organized. Lastly, it is important to always look towards the future, you can not just hit the ground running when it comes to budgets.

Have you prepared your budget?  
Have you analyzed your budget?  
Have you executed your budget?  
Have you evaluated your budget?  
It is only after one answers these questions can they truly establish a functional budget.

# MARK CUBAN'S ONLINE PHARMACY

BY SIMA GREENBERG

On Monday, January 24, 2022, Mark Cuban launched his online pharmacy, which offers generic prescription drugs at very low prices. The company is called the Mark Cuban Cost Plus Drug Company (MCCD-PC).

Cuban's goal is to combat the high markups in the pharmaceutical industry and make sure people receive the medications they need at an affordable price. MCCPDC's website cites Mark Cuban outlining the company's goal, saying, "Everyone should have safe, affordable medicines with transparent prices." Following this motto, each drug has the same 15% markup from the manufacturer price plus a \$3 pharmacist fee.

The startup sells affordable versions of expensive medica-

tions. As of now, they offer over 100 drugs treating a variety of serious health conditions including leukemia, diabetes, and heart conditions.

In order to demonstrate the lower cost of MCCPDC's drugs the website shows the regular retail price and the amount the customer is saving by purchasing through MCCPDC.

If this initiative becomes the new method in which medications are purchased, how will this

affect pharmacies? Forbes wrote an article on how this might affect the pharmaceutical industry as a



whole. One major limitation is that only generic drugs are included. Since MCCPDC doesn't accept any insurance, these costs don't count towards a deductible. The new system is only helpful for those without health insurance, giving

the unfortunate a chance to receive the medical treatments they deserve.

An article in the Washington Post cited a study conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services that revealed that 3.5 million Medicare recipients struggle to pay their bills for prescription medications. Making these drugs and treatments accessible is lifesaving.

Mark Cuban's online pharmacy is just one aspect in which American healthcare has been being revolutionized in recent years. Beginning with Telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, people were able to get appointments with a doctor through their insurance company all from the comfort of their home. These changes are breaking the barriers one step at a time and making medical treatment available to all.

# MICROSOFT WINS BIG WITH ACQUISITION OF ACTIVISION BLIZZARD

BY YOSEF SCHER

Microsoft announced on January 18, 2022 their acquisition of Activision Blizzard, a prominent video gaming company, for \$68.7 billion. Although Microsoft will not technically own Activision Blizzard until this July (2022) at the earliest and by the summer of 2023 at the latest, Microsoft's decision to buy Activision Blizzard is "the largest acquisition in the gaming industry ever." Not only that, but this deal will make Microsoft "the world's third-largest gaming company by revenue," falling only behind Tencent and Sony. In an age where gaming is so ubiquitous, it is not surprising for Microsoft to make this deal with Activision in order to help their gaming market grow.

In addition to all the

video games that Microsoft has already created, including numerous best-selling games like Age of Empires and Halo, Microsoft now has the rights to extremely popular video games like Overwatch, Warcraft, Diablo, Candy Crush, and Call of Duty. The hope is that these games and future games which Microsoft and Activision will co-produce will generate plenty of revenue for Microsoft.

While Activision is being acquired, Microsoft still wants Activision's staff to continue creating new games and game content for them. As such, the

Activision staff will continue to create playable content and receive additional help from Microsoft's employees and tech experts.

Although some may argue



that Activision Blizzard's CEO, Bobby Kotick, made this deal hastily to avoid being removed from the board after he failed "to make the company's board aware of allegations of rape and other serious misconduct,"

Kotick claims otherwise. While talking to a local news reporter, Kotick said: "[t]he combination of Activision Blizzard's world-class talent and extraordinary franchises with Microsoft's technology, distribution, access to talent, ambitious vision and shared commitment to gaming and inclusion will help ensure our continued success in an increasingly competitive industry."

Like Kotick, Microsoft Gaming CEO, Phil Spencer, is thrilled to have made this deal believing that Activision and Microsoft can "build a future where

people can play the games they want, virtually anywhere they want." To elaborate on this last point, Microsoft wants to expand its gaming presence on mobile devices, since "nearly 95% of all players globally enjoy gaming on mobile" devices, where people can "enjoy the most-immersive franchises, like Halo and Warcraft, virtually anywhere they want."

Although obtaining the rights to all of Activision's games benefits Microsoft immensely, Microsoft believes that Activision can help them become the top contender in the gaming industry by developing Microsoft's Game Pass. Currently, Microsoft offers two Game Pass subscription services: Xbox Game Pass and PC Game Pass. Both passes allow subscribers to play various games that get updated every month. Before acquiring

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Activision, Microsoft already had over “25 million subscribers” between Xbox Game Pass and PC Game Pass. However, with “Activision Blizzard’s nearly 400

million monthly active players in 190 countries and three billion-dollar franchise,” Microsoft hopes that “Game Pass [will become] one of

the most compelling and diverse lineups of gaming content in the industry.”

As one looks to the future of gaming, one must wonder what Microsoft and Ac-

tivision may develop next. Rumor has it that the acquisition of Activision Blizzard may give Microsoft the necessary tools to expand and advance within the metaverse

beyond our imagination. In the meantime, we’ll just have to wait and see what the future of the gaming industry brings.

## 3 STOCK HIGHLIGHT: FEBRUARY 2022 EDITION

BY JAKE SHECKTER,  
BUSINESS EDITOR

Each month’s edition of the *YU Observer* this year will include a “3-Stock Highlight” on a few stocks that have been in the news lately, have fascinating stories, or provide for an interesting read. On behalf of the *YU Observer*, we’d like to remind everyone that these stock picks are for educational purposes only and are not to be taken as financial advice or used for investing any real cash. This month, we will be highlighting Microsoft (MSFT) & Activision Blizzard (ATVI) together, Peloton Interactive (PTON), and Spotify Technology (SPOT).

Microsoft (MSFT)/Activision (ATVI)

Now, here’s one for all the gamers. On January 18, 2022, a technology company and stock we all know, Microsoft, announced the acquisition of video gaming company Activision Blizzard. This acquisition bumps Microsoft up to third place in terms of the world’s largest video game company leaderboard (with regards to revenue). The acquisition, according to Newsweek, which is expected to finalize between July 2022 and the summer of 2023, has set Microsoft down a gaming path on which they will generate higher revenues than even Windows for the company. The purchase totals up to a whopping \$68.7 billion, far more expensive than the \$7.5 billion they paid for ZeniMax in 2020. But this introduces the question we may be wondering: Why is Microsoft doing this? What are they truly getting out of this deal? Two words: Intellectual Property (IP).

As media companies and their respective streaming services have indicated (Disney, Marvel, Amazon Prime, HBO, etc.), intellectual property has been the name of the game for quite some time now. With this acquisition, Microsoft will be obtaining IPs such as World of Warcraft, the Overwatch series, and the absolute mammoth of modern FPS (first person shooter) games, Call of Duty. Not only this, but Microsoft will also acquire Activision Blizzard’s respective subsidiaries which include Raven Software, Treyarch, Infinity Ward, and Candy Crush developer king. Stock wise, Activision jumped from roughly \$64 per share to

\$80 as soon as Microsoft’s announcement. Microsoft’s stock showed some growth but nothing substantial yet.

In addition to their new IP, Microsoft’s strategy also focuses on the actual gamer market share with their Game Pass and subscription programs. Microsoft offers two Game Pass subscription services: Xbox Game Pass and PC

Game Pass. Game passes enable subscribers to play various games which get updated every month. Before the acquisition, Microsoft already maintained over 25 million subscribers between the Xbox Game Pass and PC Game Pass. But now, with Activision Blizzard’s nearly 400 million monthly active players in 190 countries and a three billion-dollar franchise, Microsoft and Activision have really been stepping up their “game”.

To learn more about Microsoft’s acquisition of Activision Blizzard, feel free to check out the *YU Observer* article on the topic: <https://yuobserver.org/2022/02/microsoft-wins-big-with-acquisition-of-activision-blizzard/>

Peloton Interactive (PTON)

There are few stocks that have managed to consistently infuriate investors throughout the pandemic due to its extreme volatility and many thinking it’s overvalued. Peloton has been in the news lately for one main reason, and that’s their recent decline. As with most of the stock market over the last

while. But all things must come to an end, and as governments rolled out vaccinations and eased up on COVID-19 mandates, Peloton’s stock price and the market sentiment started slipping fast.

At their pandemic peak, shares of Peloton reached a staggering \$162, especially dramatized when compared to their \$34.45 share price currently. As people now flock back to gyms and health centers, and find themselves torn between their newfound gym freedom and their Peloton-turned-laundry-rack back

home, the future of Peloton is unstable. But on the bright side, this drastically lower stock price allows for better reasonability or understanding with regards to current stock market valuations. In light of these recent stock price blunders, Peloton has now chosen a new company CEO, Barry

McCarthy, who has already had a rough start when his first all-hands meeting was crashed by laid-off workers. Good luck Barry!

Spotify Technology (SPOT)

Honestly, I’ve been wanting to highlight Spotify for months now. Why haven’t I? Because there was always something more pressing or disrupting in the stock market news. But now, Spotify is lit up in the spotlight of controversy and I finally get to write this highlight. Controversy aside for the moment, many investors have latched on to Spotify as the one, somewhat consistent and reasonable stock throughout the pandemic of absurd volatility and beyond outrageous company valuations. As with countless tech companies at the start of the pandemic, Spotify began its gradual climb from a roughly



2-3 months, there is a lot of blood in the water. Peloton riled up the stock market community back in the summer of 2020 when they passed the auto company Ford in terms of market capitalization. This makes sense when you consider the fact that, at the time, Ford, has been one of the leading car manufacturers in America for 100 years while Peloton was selling iPads taped to an exercise bike for 8 months? Of course, this was a joke and is in no way meant to be a shot at Peloton, but the more unfunny and important side of this joke lies in what this says about the condition of the market over the pandemic.

Peloton’s immense displays of strength and capturing of market share were largely fueled by pandemic-related restrictions and quarantine, causing millions to stay at home with no access to gyms or health centers. Following these changes, Peloton surged (along with thousands of other overvalued stocks) and became the talk of the year for a long

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# THE DANGERS OF VAPING

BY NAVA ISRAEL

I have a vivid memory of watching one of my high school classmates getting caught red handed with a JUUL in his mouth in the science wing hallway of our academy's building. When the administrator questioned why he thought it was okay to be smoking on school grounds, he responded, "it's only a vape, they're not even bad for you." Though his view was immature and a direct attempt to dodge being held accountable for the accusation the teacher was making against him, this opinion is not an unpopular one. Many people are under the impression that smoking e-cigarettes are "not even bad for you," and this mindset is not limited to teenagers.

Vaping is an umbrella term for a type of electronic smoking and includes e-cigarettes, e-hookahs, JUULs, and others. It is the inhalation of a vapor which is created by the e-cigarette device, and the process of exhaling it as visible smoke. An e-cigarette device is a battery-powered smoking machine which has a cartridge filled with a liquid that contains nicotine, flavorings, and chemicals. The liquid is heated and vaporized, and the user inhales the vapor directly into their lungs. The vapor contains harmful chemicals, and the device is made of metal components which can release arsenals when heated. The use of e-cigarettes was originally intended to be used as a transitional stage for quitting mainstream smoking. How-

ever, many first-time smokers have picked up smoking vape or electronic cigarettes because of their rising popularity. Smoking e-cigarettes is not without health risks; the dangers of vaping are vast and serious, yet barely publicized.

Some of the many risks associated with vaping are: metal exposure which can increase the risk of cancer and damage lung tissue, increased risk of gum disease and deterioration of dental health due to tooth decay and weakened enamel, and exposed cells have increased rates of apoptosis, destruction of the cell, and reduced cell viability. According to Penzes's research, 40 percent of e-cigarette users experience extreme side effects of vaping. Some of those side effects include: burning and dry feeling in mouth, lips, and throat, cough, dizziness, headaches, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, sleepiness, and weakened taste. These symptoms are not minimal side effects; they are seriously harmful health risks and can be life threatening.

The reason that e-cigarettes can be so detrimental to health is because of the design of the machine and the chemicals it contains. Nicotine, a highly addictive liquid that blocks the actions of autonomic nerve and skeletal muscle cells, is one of the top toxins in e-cigarettes, but this is not the only chemical they contain. E-cigarettes contain carcinogens, or cancer causing chemicals, propylene glycol, diacetyl, cadmium, and acro-



lein. Most of these chemicals are small enough to be inhaled into the lungs, and aerosol from inhalation can be toxic to lung functionality as well. The metals of the device, including nickel, tin, and lead, can release toxins, and the flavoring usually contains diacetyl which has been directly linked to lung disease.

Additionally, an experiment performed on mice in 2018 revealed that nicotine nitrosation, a cancer causing organic process, occurs in mice and that the mutational susceptibility and potential tumor development is increased by the exposure to nicotine. E-cigarette smoke was found to be carcinogenic and damaging to the lungs, bladder, and heart of the mice, and assumed to have the same risks in humans.

The health risks associated with chemicals found in standard cigarettes are reported to appear

almost just as frequently in users of e-cigarettes. The risks of smoking vape are detrimental on a cellular level just as much as on an external level. The safety of e-cigarette devices and liquids needs to be improved, and education around the adverse health risks of e-cigarettes needs to be reformed in order to prevent long term illness and even fatality in users worldwide.

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# WHY YOU SHOULD EAT ORGANIC PRODUCE

BY OLIVIA ZAGO

While it may not seem obvious, pesticides are something that we encounter everyday. There are many different types of pesticides that are used as herbicides (used to kill weeds), insecticides (used to kill insects), fungicides (used to kill fungi), and rodenticides (used to kill rodents). Pesticides are used in many aspects of our lives: from the produce we eat that was sprayed with an insecticide to our apartments that were treated with rodenticides.

Most crops are sprayed with a group of pesticides called

organophosphates. According to a report of the USDA (US Department of Agriculture), 81 percent of conventionally grown crops are sprayed with this group of pesticides. The CDC lists a few ways that a person can come in contact with organophosphates: eating or drinking them, touching contaminated soils, and/or working as a producer or applicator of organophosphates.

Many studies on pesticides, and especially organophosphates, have shown that being exposed to pesticides makes them more likely to suffer from genetic damage and the diseases that result from genetic

damage. In a study looking at the effects of pesticides on farmers, blood samples were taken from 50 farm workers and results showed that the farmers exposed to pesticides had more DNA damage than those who were not exposed. In addition, farmers exposed to organophosphates reported that they experienced nausea, dizziness, anxiety, confusion, and abdominal cramps. While farmers are exposed to larger amounts than the average



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\$130 pre-pandemic share price to over \$260 within a few months and now standing at \$162 today. However, comparatively, they've been respectfully consistent, and consistency is key. For most of us, Spotify has become synonymous with music in general. But to call Spotify a standard music streaming service just doesn't do it justice. Because of Spotify's other offerings which include podcasts, audiobooks, and self-help guides ranging from public speaking, photography, and time management, among others, a more appropriate definition to capture the essence of their business would be "streaming audio on demand".

The two most important drivers for Spotify's business (and basically their stock) are its Monthly Active Users (MAU) and Average Revenue Per User (ARPU). As per its latest annual report, Spotify was available in 93 countries. However, Spotify has decided this wasn't enough exposure as it is expected to launch in 85 more countries, almost doubling its presence in terms of the number of countries. Spotify's MAU increased from 124 million in 2016, to 345 million in 2020, to

an incredible 406 million by the end of 2021. MAU is a leading indicator for Premium subscribers as well. Approximately 45% of Spotify's MAU were premium subscribers to its product, and it has largely been around 44-46% of MAU since 2017. Again, talk about consistency. Spotify's strategy involves tailoring its prices for premium products depending on its affordability to the general population and therefore, the penetration of premium subscribers (within MAU) has been largely stable. Premium subscribers grew at 34.1% during 2016-2020. What drives MAU? Probably global smartphone penetration and adoption. Given Spotify's product is streaming audio, Spotify cannot make further progress in a market unless the new market has a smartphone and internet. Smartphone penetration increased from about 30% in 2016 to 50% in 2020.

To summarize the buzz and controversy around Spotify, a whole lot of Spotify's customers, as well as artists with their music published on Spotify are upset about Joe Rogan's podcast experience, which many are claiming spreads misinformation. After musical legend, Neil Young introduced the "it's Rogan or me" ultimatum, and after Spotify responded basically saying they don't

respond to threats in an extremely polite manner, Young removed his music from the streaming platform and several other artists have followed suit. The arguments being made are that Joe Rogan's podcast doesn't only spread false information regarding Covid-19 and the pandemic mandates but may even cause real harm to certain groups and individuals. Joe Rogan responded saying that he is just trying to spark conversation and hear out different opinions. "Many of the things that we thought of as misinformation just a short while ago are now accepted as fact," Rogan claimed. Let's hope Spotify can stay as strong as they have been and continue displaying their greatest strength, consistency.

## SNOWBOARDING: HEALTHY FORM OF EXERCISE OR DANGEROUSLY TOXIC?

BY ETA GOLDSTEIN

Paving through the crystal snow up at the peak of the mountain sparks one's competitive instinct to be the first one to get down the trail. The proper mindset is equally as crucial as a snowboard prepped with wax to winning the race. Snowboarding, a fun form of physical activity which developed within the last hundred years, can possibly cause more harm than one might think.

Although it is not the typical day on the beach where many roast in the sun yearning for that golden skin tone, a day on the slopes is proven to be a danger in terms of ultraviolet (UV) radiation as well. The radiation given off from the sun and then amplified by the snow can be deemed genotoxic. Research by the World Health Organization shows that snow reflects up to eighty percent of UV radiation. This compares with the average emission from the sun on most surfaces, which is as low as ten percent. On top of the reflec-

tion off the snow, UV radiation increases by ten percent for every one thousand foot increase in elevation.

The UV rays emanating from the sun are not strong enough to emit more than one percent of solar energy, yet the rays induce adverse effects. One effect of exposure to UV radiation is malfunctions caused by damage to proteins, carbohydrates, and lipids in the body. To test this hypothesis, cells were exposed to high levels of UV radiation and then the DNA was extracted. The DNA was found to contain breaks which can lead to the potential growth of skin cancer. 90% of nonmelanoma skin cancers were found to be associated with exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. A study conducted found that women in their teenage years spend much time in the sun. A correlation was found between these women, specifically those under the age of twenty, and the diagnosis of lower limb melanoma. This is probably due to those women opting for over-

exposure to the sun, which would have otherwise been preventable for excessive periods of time.

Furthermore, when participating in competitive boarding, there is often an audience of onlookers, coaches, and judges who are experiencing extended UV radiation exposure as well, both from the direct sun, as well as from the reflection of the snow, who also are at risk to these genotoxic effects.

If limited sun exposure is unlikely, studies suggest that in order to sustain from significant radiation avoid skin exposure to the sun. Additionally, darker colors of clothing are found to absorb more rays, which prevent the harmful radiation from reaching the surface of the skin, compared with that of lighter colored garments. Sunscreen should also be applied to reduce the risk of skin damage.

Another potential negative outcome involved in snowboarding is that competition may cause competitors to reach high-stress levels and some turn towards the use of perfor-

mance-enhancing drugs (PED), many of which are labeled as toxic. In one survey, 98% of elite athletes reported that they would use performance enhancing drugs if they knew they would not get caught. With the caveat that the athlete would die within 5 years, 61% still reported they would use the PED. Steroids, however, can be composed of artificial elements, and studies prove this leads to carcinogenic effects.

Although not illegal like steroids, marijuana was also found to emanate genotoxicity. In snowboarding culture, it is not uncommon to smoke marijuana. The substance helps to both focus on internal and external aspects of riding down the mountain. Internal experiences are characterized by physicality and perceptiveness in the body: a heightened self-consciousness. External states of mind are classified as the immersion in the immediate terrain: a loss of self-consciousness, and intuitive creativity in moving downslope. These experiences are united by a sense of presentness and are thus the reason it is not uncommon for a snowboarder to

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be found to be in possession or intoxicated with marijuana. Even Ross Rebagliati, an Olympic gold medalist in snowboarding, was found to have been previously using marijuana in practices when it was not deemed an illegal substance. However, in more mutagenic ways than one, marijuana has been found to be genotoxic. Genetic damage and cytotoxicity in oral and peripheral blood cells were induced by marijuana use. Marijuana was also found to stop the normal cell-death cycle of damaged cells which leads to pulmonary toxicity by inducing genotoxic effects.

The final aspect analyzed of genotoxic mutagens related to snowboarding is attributed to the wax used to smooth the bottom of the snowboard to improve speed, momentum, and control. Perfluorooctanoic acid, PFOA, commonly used in large quantities as the sealing material, has been the culprit causing much health concern in recent years including neurotoxicity, nephrotoxicity, epigenetic toxicity, immunotoxicity, reproductive toxicity, and hepatotoxicity. With the increased understanding of the dangers of perfluorooctanoic acid, it has become banned in competitions. Many companies have therefore created alternate forms of wax for boards that are much safer to use.

Snowboarding is a thrilling, adventurous, and fun sport which makes for a great expe-

rience. However, many activities throughout daily life pose the risk of causing more genotoxic effects than realized when exposed in high quantities for large durations of time. By studying the different



aspects that can be harmful, and by carefully reading warning labels, one can apply these concepts and take precautions in other genotoxic situations. Steroid and marijuana usage can be eliminated altogether, while UV radiation can be limited in exposure, and laws can be enforced against harmful chemical agents, such as perfluorooctanoic acid. By being aware and cautious of the world around you, you can continue to enjoy the many different forms of physical activity, including snowboarding.

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## DON'T BREATHE IN: THE GENOTOXICITY OF WOOD DUST TO EXPOSED WORKERS

By Rebecca Cohen

Wooden furniture surrounds us everywhere in our homes, in our classrooms, and in our workspaces. We sit at our wooden desks, eat on our wooden tables, keep our clothes in our wooden drawers, all without thinking twice about it. However, even if we assembled it ourselves from IKEA, we did not actually make the furniture. Before buying our big wooden armoire in stores, someone had to

have potentially risked their lives to make it. It may seem hard to believe, but the wood dust produced in sawmills, furniture-making, cabinet-making, and carpentry industries is highly correlated to cancer and can leave workers with DNA damage.

Wood dust is not just like the dust that collects under our beds. It is created when machines or tools are used to cut or shape wood materials. When one inhales wood dust, the dust particles are deposited in the nose, throat, and other airways.

In 1968, the first investigation linking cancer and wood dust was published. The investigation indicated that workers in the furniture industry have increased rates of nasal cancer. These findings were confirmed in several subsequent studies and finally led to the classification of wood dust as a human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Research has shown that sinonasal cancer has been associated with hardwood dust. How-

ever, softwood dust can potentially be a problem as well. A recent study found that sinonasal cancer risk was increased among workers that were exclusively exposed to softwood dust. The main difference between hardwood and softwood is that hardwood is derived from the deciduous broad-leaved flowering species of trees. Softwoods include the coniferous species that do not shed their leaves in the winter. Additionally, studies have

proven that there is a carcinogenic risk with composite wood. Composite wood is a mixture of several components that may include wood, plastic, and straw. In a study involving woodworkers in Switzerland, it was disclosed that DNA damage was greater in the group exposed to composite wood products compared to the group exposed to natural

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woods and controls. In this same study, nasal and buccal cells were extracted from the woodworkers to identify micronuclei frequency. Micronuclei assays determine the level of exposure and health risk. The cell samples showed that the micronuclei frequency in nasal cells and buccal cells in exposed workers was significantly higher. Moreover, composite wood is also known to emit formaldehyde which can cause adverse health effects. The carcinogenic activity of formaldehyde is supposed to be oxidative stress-mediated. Oxidative stress is caused by an imbalance between the producing and storing oxygen reactive species in cells and tissues as well as the power of a biological system to detoxify these reactive products. In a study involving woodworkers from four different factories, the results showed that woodworkers were exposed to significantly higher amounts of wood dust and formaldehyde as compared to controls. The study confirms that wood dust and formaldehyde may induce oxidative stress in woodworkers and highlights that even compliance with occupational exposure limits

can result in measurable biological outcomes.

The clear link between DNA damage and sinonasal cancer begs us

to ask the question: what can be done to make sure woodworkers are not exposed to the detrimental effects of wood dust? Effective February 10, 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) issued a final rule to implement the Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Products Act. This final rule included formaldehyde emission standards applicable to all wood-containing products that are sold, supplied, or manufactured in the United States. Furthermore, the exhaust hood's poor design is oftentimes the reason for higher levels of dust concentration near woodworking machines. The level of air dust depends on the setup of the dust extraction system. The upper hood is a crucial element



of the local exhaust ventilation system, and proper construction and connection is necessary

to maximize safety. The care for the proper operation of the dust exhaust system is critical because it removes the primary cause of dustiness.

Finally, the United States Department of Labor stated that protective equipment is necessary to reduce exposure to wood dust. However, personal protective equipment is less effective because it eliminates the effects of dust dispersion. It is therefore necessary to educate on the principles of design and operation of dust exhaust systems in the wood industry to properly use their capabilities.

Although wood dust exposure is dangerous, it is also limited to intense exposure such as in factories. Woodworkers still need to be kept safe and, to do so, they need proper ventilation. Hopefully, factories, sawmills, and other wood furniture-producing facilities, will implement better safety practices, and when new studies will be conducted, they will reveal little to no risk of genotoxicity.

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consumer, there is still a residue of pesticides that remain on produce when it reaches the consumer. The pesticides then have a way to enter one's body because one can consume produce with a residue of pesticide.

Some people claim that pesticide residue is no longer left when a person eats the produce that was sprayed. However, this is not true. A study performed by the NIH took two groups of children: one group was fed a non-organic diet and the other group was fed an organic diet. It was found that the children on the non-organic diet had residues of organophosphates in their urine, which shows that residues still do remain on the produce even after it is purchased from the store.

The health effects of pesticides are not always visibly seen, though the effects on the environment are clear. Pesticides

can contaminate soil, water, and other vegetation. Since pesticides are designed to kill insects and weeds they also are toxic to other organisms such as birds, fish, and beneficial insects and plants. When pesticides are applied, the runoff can reach water systems contaminating them. In a study by the Department of Agricultural Chemicals which tested various streams, 90 percent of the tested water and fish samples contained one or more pesticides. Soil contamination causes soil microorganisms to decline, which in turn causes soil to degrade and become non-farmable. A study by the University of Sidney suggested that 64 percent of the world's arable land is at risk of pesticide pollution. Drift from insecticides can land on other plants which are essential for the ecosystem. Perhaps the most important and concerning effect is that of pesticides on bees. Bees are crucial for life on this planet and one of the contributing factors to the endangerment of bees is pesticides. The United Nations Environment Program states that out of the 100 crop varieties that provide 90% of the world's food, 71 are pollinated

by bees. By decreasing the use of pesticides, the chances of the survival of bees is increased.

In contrast to produce sprayed with pesticides, organic crops are produced on farms that must have not used pesticides or fertilizers in the previous three years and are far enough not to be contaminated from nearby fields. Organic farmers use biological control, crop rotations, and other techniques to manage weeds, insects, and diseases.

Buying organic produce is beneficial for health and the environment. For example, chlorpyrifos was once the most used pesticide in the U.S. After 56 years in use, in August of 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned chlorpyrifos because they were not able to confirm that there was no harm from exposure. Buying organic food protects against the harmful effects of pesticides which are not always publicized. Aside from the health effects that are caused by pesticides, the environmental effects on our planet are a reason to be concerned. To limit

exposure to residues of pesticides care should be taken to wash produce well and to buy organic when possible. Organic produce is usually more expensive than non-organic produce though by buying organic even periodically, you are supporting a farming industry designed to be less harmful for the environment and helping keep organic farmers in business.

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# SHOULD I BE BUYING BPA-FREE PRODUCTS?




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BY RACHEL GOLDMAN

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In today's day and age, plastic products are everywhere and are used constantly. Whether it's water bottles, toiletries, or coffees, we all know just how useful and easy plastic products can be. However, what is less known, is that plastic contains chemicals called bisphenol A (BPA), that can have dangerous effects on the body. Because of the dangers that BPA poses, many plastic companies have been making products without the addition of BPA. While this seems like the healthier and safer option, is investing in only "BPA free" products worth it?

BPA is a white, colorless, crystalline solid and is one of the most widely used synthetic chemicals on the planet. BPA has many excellent physical and chemical properties, such as strength, thermal stability, hardness, and resistance to oils. Due to this, BPA is commonly added to many commercial products such as plastic containers, canned goods, thermal paper, sports equipment,

and toiletries. With more than 8 billion pounds being produced annually worldwide, BPA has received much attention due to the health risks it poses.

While BPA is found in plastic, it can enter the body through the digestive, respiratory, and dermal tracts. This is due to the fact that BPA can leach out from the food and drink containers contaminating foods that are then eaten. Due to the fact that canned foods and plastic wrappings are so common, BPA is ubiquitous in the environment, and its presence has been reported in 95% of the urine samples obtained from a reference population in the United States.

One of the main reasons BPA exposure is so dangerous is because BPA is considered an endocrine disruptor, meaning it can affect endocrine functions by mimicking natural hormone activity. In men, BPA exposure has been associated with decreased fertility, increased risk of testicular or prostate cancer. In women, BPA exposure has been associated with an increased risk of endometriosis, reproductive cancers, impaired oocyte

competence, ovarian function, or irregular menstrual cycle. In addition to being classified as an endocrine disruptor chemical, there have been many studies regarding the genotoxicity of BPA. Genotoxicity refers to the ability of BPA to damage genetic information in cells and is tested using several assays, such as a micronucleus assay and a comet assay.

Using genotoxic assays, studies revealed that BPA has the potential to induce genotoxicity in a dose-dependent manner. To ensure that people are not being exposed to high concentrations of BPA, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) has set a reference dose (RD) for BPA oral exposure of 0.05mg/kg body weight/ day. Although the US EPA has set 0.05mg/kg body weight/ day as a healthy dosage, a recent in-vitro study was conducted that found that even a dose lower than the reference dose caused DNA damage to cells.

Due to the fact that BPA has been proven to have adverse health effects, many countries, such as North America and Europe, have begun increasing the use of alternative bisphenols such as bisphenol S and bisphenol F. Plastic products that use

these substitutes of BPA brand themselves as "BPA free", however, it is important to note that studies show these substitutes tend to have potential health risks similar to BPA and can also cause DNA damage. Plastic products that are branded as "BPA free" can be as harmful as BPA products because what they use as a replacement can be just as dangerous. While more research is being conducted, for now, the safest way to limit BPA exposure is to use glass and stainless steel containers. It's always important to be an educated consumer and know what materials are going into the products you are buying!

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# THE EFFECTS OF THE FAKE MEAT INDUSTRY

BY REBECCA COUZENS

Through the years, humanity has become more educated and cognizant of the potential risk factors when it comes to the meat industry and consuming meat in general. As a result, the fake meat industry has grown rapidly in recent years, with popular brands such as Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods Inc. A set of 2020 Gallup polls showed that 23 percent of Americans report cutting back on their meat consumption in the past year, with health, the environment, and animal welfare all cited as major reasons. However the question still remains as to whether or not the benefits of fake meat are significant enough to completely replace real meat.

Many animal-product alternatives are made using synthetic biology, which is “an emerging science that applies principles of genetic engineering to create life forms from scratch.” Within these processes, biologists identify the gene sequences that are necessary to imitate certain characteristics of food. Often, this includes plant protein or animal cells to achieve the desired outcome. An example, a product that involves this method is The Impossible Burger, but many of the companies using synthetic biology are still in the startup phase. While there is a strong desire for these companies to succeed, there seems to be a lack of information granted to the public regarding the process of many of these companies. This leaves many questions unanswered regarding safety and environmental health, how it will affect the economy, and how sustainable these products are.

According to the peer-reviewed article, “Considering Plant-Based Meat Substitutes and Cell-Based Meats: A Public Health and Food Systems Perspec-

tive”, “[g]rowing scientific consensus has established that substantial shifts toward plant-forward diets, particularly in high meat-consuming countries, are essential for meeting climate change mitigation targets.” Meaning, studies found that reducing meat consumption will also reduce the severity of climate change.

There have also been growing concerns within public health and animal rights advocacy surrounding industrial food animal production. There is evidence that supports the idea that processed meat consumption can be linked to certain chronic diseases and early mortality. For these reasons, there has been a growing incentive to find ways to reduce meat intake and find alternatives.

Some critics are concerned that synthetic biology will allow gene-edited organisms to be released into the wild and disrupt agricultural communities, if engineered foods replace natural products. However, Larry Feinberg, the CEO of Knipbio, which creates environmentally responsible fish feed alternatives for sustainable global aquacultures, says that the microorganisms in synthetic biology are dead before release. He also notes that modified bacteria tends to return to its “wild type” if it is no longer being maintained in specific conditions within a lab. It is also claimed that often there is a challenge for the modified traits to last past a few generations which typically lasts days or weeks.

There are additionally many risks within the meat industry that would be avoided with fake meat. Epidemiologic studies have found links between red and processed meat consumption that lead to risks of heart disease, Type II diabetes, stroke, or certain cancers. There are also additional risks of exposure to and transmission of bacterial pathogens and airborne haz-

ards from raw meat. Even communities that are located near industrial food animal production operations are at elevated risks of respiratory outcomes, stress, negative moods, and infection with zoonotic pathogens. The production of meat alternatives do not involve such risks. While there is still the concern of it affecting farmers and employment, the up-and-coming industry would create new opportunities and areas for employment

though the emissions statistics of fake meat are significantly better when compared to beef, they still produce the same amount of emissions as chicken, showing that there is still progress to be made within this sphere of production.

When it comes to economics, alternative meat products are still more expensive than regular meat. There is

industry. Furthermore, the plant-based substitutes have comparable amounts of the essential nutrients they are intended to replace. However, these benefits will only occur if the demand for meat alternatives offsets a share of farmed meat production. Simply adding the fake meat products to the market does not make a significant impact. These products can help the society lower their meat intake, which can ultimately

lead to a higher demand for meat alternatives, but each person must decide for him/herself if they



as it becomes more mainstream, though different areas of employment would be needed. The industry would go from largely relying on farmers, farmworkers, meat processors, and veterinarians, to depending on chemists, cell-biologists, engineers, and factory workers.

While fake meat can help the environment, it would require the collective population to significantly change their diets. “The Beyond Meat burger uses 99 percent less water, 93 percent less land and 90 percent less fossil fuel emissions; the Impossible Burger uses 87 percent less water, 96 percent less land, and 89 percent less fossil fuel emissions than a quarter pound of regular ground beef.” If everyone turned to fake meat the global impact would be extremely positive and beneficial. However, even

a small market for fake meat but there is high demand, making the products only financially available for a small sector of the world. However, Brandon Friedrich, co-founder and executive director of the Good Food Institute, a nonprofit think tank for the creation of meat alternatives, believes “Once the infrastructure has been created and once the volume goes up these products will be less expensive than their animal counterparts.”

Meat alternatives are gaining popularity, especially within an age where people are becoming more conscious of the health and environmental risks, along with the animal and worker injustices that take place within the meat production in-

find these reasons valid enough to take the switch from real to fake meat.

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CLASS OF 2022

## UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY CHECKLIST

Graduating This Year? Mazel Tov!

Be sure to complete all the items below to participate in your Commencement Ceremony.

### STEP 1

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](https://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](https://yu.edu/registrar/graduation) for additional information.

### STEP 3

Apply for Graduation by your degree's deadline:

**February 15th**  
(May Degrees)

**March 1st**  
(September Degrees)

The Application for Graduation—Undergraduate Degree can be found here: [yu.edu/registrar/forms](https://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.

If you would like to request additional tickets, please fill out the request form by visiting [yu.edu/commencement](https://yu.edu/commencement)

### QUESTIONS?

Visit [yu.edu/commencement](https://yu.edu/commencement) for updates closer to the ceremony, or email [commencement@yu.edu](mailto:commencement@yu.edu)

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TO CELEBRATE  
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