



# The Yeshiva University OBSERVER

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## FROM THE EDITORS' DESK:

### EDITORIAL On YU's Face-to-Face Course Offerings

BY FRUMA LANDA

As students began to plan their Spring 2021 course schedule, they were surprised to see face-to-face courses offered. Since not all students plan to be on campus for the Spring 2021 semester, the ability to attend class in-person is now a factor students need to consider while planning their course schedule. In an email sent to the undergraduate student body via email, President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman explained that face-to-face course listings in the Spring 2021 course catalogs will require students and faculty to be on campus and will not accommodate remote students. While face-to-face courses may not cause any inconvenience for students who are able to take courses offered on campus, they can severely impact the courses remote students can register for.

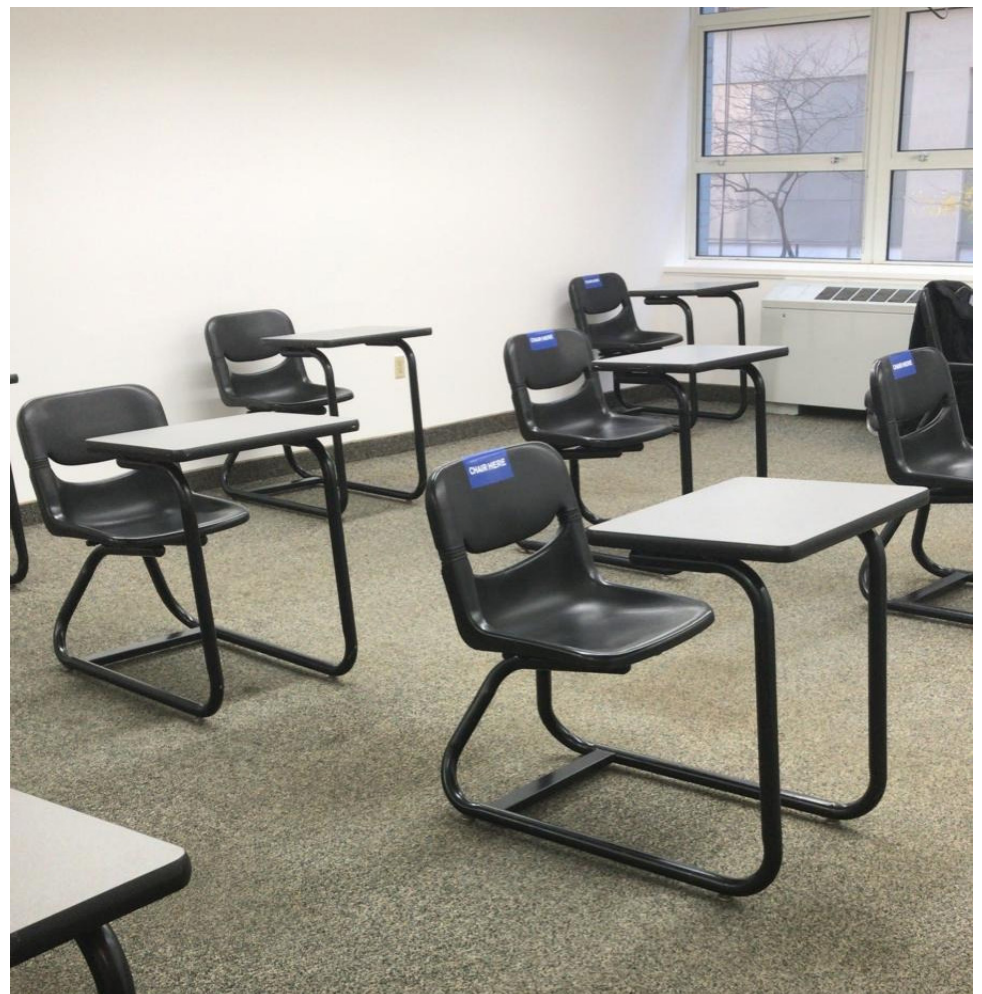
Cases are on the rise in New York and Yeshiva University, and many students don't feel safe taking face-to-face courses. It is shocking that YU would offer courses that require students to be on campus. Why has YU chosen now to be the time to ease up on the initial remote learning accommodations we utilized during the Spring and Fall 2020 respective semesters? Currently, YU's NYS Department of Health (DOH) Dashboard records 24 new positive cases between December 5 and December 18, following the 17 cases between November 21 and December 4 with "... nine students in isolation and 25 in quarantine," as reported by the YU Observer. Considering the current rise of cases, and the possibility of a rise post winter-break as students return to campus, learning in-person is a risk that many students do not feel prepared to take.

In an effort to accommodate remote students, all Sy Syms School of Business courses which are offered face-to-face are additionally offered online, in another time slot. Regrettably, only a portion of the YC and SCW Spring 2021 face-to-face courses are also offered online. These courses include, but are not limited to, the YC "Intermediate Hebrew I" and the "General Chem-

istry Lab" as well as the SCW "Bio Principles Lab," "Cell Biology Lab" and "Principles of Marketing."

Offering an identical virtual class for in-person classes allows students who are on campus to learn in a classroom setting, something that many students miss, and remote students to learn online, seemingly satisfying both the online and remote students. Alas, in addition to the fact that not every in-person class has an online option, there are also remote students who have scheduling conflicts which could be resolved if the face-to-face courses had an online accommodation. Additionally, if students who are registered for a face-to-face course need to quarantine or isolate, the YU Observer reported that the faculty member and quarantined/isolated student will devise a plan not unlike plans students made when they were sick pre-pandemic. Unlike developing a plan to make up coursework pre-COVID-19, the current 14 day CDC recommended quarantine/isolation period is significantly longer than the few days a student would miss class if they were sick. It is irresponsible to not have the protocol in place to ensure that a quarantined student's coursework does not suffer due to their inability to attend class.

Not offering a virtual course option for a face-to-face course during a global pandemic is unconscionable. Aside from creating unequal opportunities for students living on campus and students who are not, students may need to take these face-to-face courses to fulfill their major, minor, or general education requirements. Examples of SCW courses only offered face-to-face include "Molecular Biology," "Analytical Chemistry," "Biochemistry Lab," "Essentials of Writing," and "History of Jerusalem." Similarly, YC courses only offered face-to-face include "Biochemistry Lab"



and "Family & Gender in the Talmud." "Molecular Biology" is a necessary course to fulfill the SCW molecular and cellular biology major track, "Analytical Chemistry" is a required course for an SCW chemistry major, "Essentials of Writing," a course described in the catalog as an "introduction to basic writing skills," is required on an assigned individual basis, and "Biochemistry Lab" is a required course for the YC biochemistry major. Students are now forced to make an impossible decision — to choose between their education and their health. It is not ethical to trap students in a situation where they must choose to either compromise their health by taking an in-person course, or to miss out on the course, sacrifice a major, a minor, or extend their graduation date.

Requiring students to be on campus for various courses is a financial strain not every student can bear. Due to the pandemic, not every student can afford to live on campus or in commuting distance, especially with the recent rise in tuition. It is unethical to structure an educational

environment which puts our peers who are not on campus at a disadvantage, particularly when the disadvantage can be removed by accommodating remote learners in all courses. While it is important to have in-person courses for those who can attend, it should not come at the expense of students who cannot live on campus.

The spring course structure appears to only take the needs of on-campus students into account. By requiring on campus attendance for various courses, YU indicates that they do not care about the educational experience, health, and safety, of students who cannot attend class on campus. As a university, YU has an obligation to safely accommodate students during this global pandemic, and sadly, they seem to be prioritizing their on-campus students while ignoring the needs of their remote students.



## NEWS

## YU Introduces New Class Formats for Spring 2021

BY ALIZA WEISS

With the Spring 2021 semester rapidly approaching, President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman has announced in a December 9 email that classes for the upcoming semester will take place via four different formats: face-to-face, blended, online-synchronous, and online-asynchronous.

As Dr. Karen Bacon, Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz dean of undergraduate faculty of arts and sciences, addressed in a December 7 email to the YU Observer, “Face-to-face courses will be those in which the faculty member and all the students are on campus-F2F.” These classes will take place in person, with each student placed six feet from one another, all requiring to wear masks and abide by YU’s COVID-19 protocol. Blended courses offer the option to either be in person, or to learn remotely from any desired location. Synchronous classes will be entirely live over Zoom, and asynchronous classes will take place via pre-recorded lectures that students can listen to on their own time. These formats were later emailed to the YU undergraduate student body via Berman’s email.

Requiring students to attend classes solely in person during a global pandemic raises numerous questions and concerns. When asked what would happen if a student in a face-to-face class needed to quarantine or was

denied entry to campus buildings as per the daily COVID-19 survey, Bacon shared with the YU Observer that “similar to when a student is sick during a regular semester, the faculty member and the student will work out a plan.”

Requiring some courses to be face-to-face limits the amount of course options for remote students. Dean of Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) Noam Wasserman addressed this issue clarifying that unlike YC and SCW, all SSSB “... courses that have a ‘face to face’ section (which is fully in person for both students and professors) also have at least one remote section in which students who are unable to be in person can enroll.”

On the Beren Campus, some examples of SCW courses only offered face-to-face, according to the My YU Spring 2021 course catalog are Molecular Biology, Essentials of Writing and Analytical Chemistry. However, courses such as Bio Principles Lab are offered online and in person. Some examples of SCW blended courses are Microbiology Lab, Dead Sea Scrolls and Speech Communication. On the Wilf Campus, there are some YC courses only offered face-to-face, such as Biochemistry Lab as well as courses offered twice, face-to-face and online, like Intermediate Hebrew I. Examples of blended YC courses are Biochemistry Lecture, Calculus II and Engineering Foundations.

The blended option for courses this Spring 2021 semester, as Bacon

clarified in an email with the YU Observer, “will be those that have both on-campus and remote instruction.” Blended courses have limited space, as each student must be seated six feet apart from one another. This form of learning will have the teacher in the front of the classroom, with the camera facing them as they teach the students in the classroom while simultaneously teaching on Zoom. An example of this is Dr. Wisse’s Art History courses, which this coming spring semester will be switching from a fully online-synchronous course to a blended course.

The most common forms of learning for the Spring 2021 semester are online courses — synchronous, which will consist of live classes over Zoom, and asynchronous, which will consist of pre-recorded lectures and assignments. Many teachers have chosen to combine these forms of learning, offering pre recorded lectures and shortened live Zoom class time to prevent Zoom fatigue.

Students are advised by Bacon to verify with the professor of the course they are interested in to confirm the course format. If a student has a question of whether or not their class is live or pre-recorded, Bacon suggested that “they should reach out to the professor for clarification.” Additionally, students can view the teaching modalities, and find them listed as attributes on the online schedule.



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NEWS

# Panel “Being LGBTQ+ in an Orthodox World” Sponsored by Yeshiva University

BY ADINA BRUCE

Yeshiva University will sponsor a panel titled “Being LGBTQ+ in an Orthodox World”, on December 20 over Zoom. This event was inspired by the influential and controversial “Being Gay in the Orthodox World” panel held 11 years ago.

As advertised on the event Facebook page, and in an email sent to the Yeshiva University student body, the panel will feature four current students and alumni of Yeshiva University who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. These speakers will share their personal stories and experiences in relation to their identity and the Orthodox Jewish community. Dr Jenny Isaacs, associate professor of psychology at Yeshiva College, will moderate the event. According to the anonymous event organizers, there will also be a Q&A of chosen pre-submitted questions for the panelists.

The goal of the panel as stated in the email sent to students is “to provide our community with the chance to hear and learn from the experiences of current and former undergraduate YU students to foster empathy, sensitivity, and compassion.” Also stated in the email is that the panel will not feature discussion of the perspective of halacha (Judaic Law), nor YU’s position on LGBTQ+ individuals. While inspired by the 2009 “Being Gay in the Orthodox World” panel, this panel will feature students representing a wider spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community.

Although open to the public, Yeshiva University students and alumni have been given priority in registration. The main advertising for this event has been done through a Facebook page and Facebook event, that — as of the time that this article was written — has over 500 respondents. Eli Saperstein (SSSB ‘23) who plans to attend the event expressed his excitement because “I have never experienced anything like this ... especially since I was not here for the 2009 panel.” He explained further that: “[i]t feels like a beginning step of creating permanent change by eliminating stigma.”

Discussion around the place of LGBTQ+ students at Yeshiva University has been heated in

the past few years. Within the last year a protest, numerous editorials, opinion pieces, and open letters have argued for the need for acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ students within Yeshiva University. The increase demands for acceptance has also been met with counter arguments, citing the halachic (religious legal) incompatibility of condoning homosexuality. Despite the increased conversation, the panelist organizers explained to the YU Observer, that there has been “very limited opportunities or instances of LGBTQ+ individuals, themselves, sharing their personal stories and experiences.”

Progress has also been made this past year with an email sent out to the student body by Dean Chaim Nissel titled “Fos-

tering an Inclusive Community.” In this email, Yeshiva University faculty com-

mitted to concrete initiatives and policies in regards to LGBTQ+ students. However, the approval of a club aimed at specifically servicing the LGBTQ+ and ally student community was explicitly rejected. Furthermore nothing was stated regarding explicitly LGBTQ+ related events, which historically have either been blocked by Office of Student Life (OSL) or have a more challenging event approval process. This policy does seem to be changing, with an event titled “LGBTQ+ Safe Space” approved in the last Spring semester — though it was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic — and another this semester titled “Mental Health and LGBTQ: What Helps and What Hurts.”

Despite approval by the Dean’s office, it was reported to the YU Observer that posters put up on the Wilf Campus were taken down multiple times by multiple Rebbeim. In contrast, other faculty have expressed their support of the event. An email sent to students by a faculty member of the English department encouraged his students to attend the event.

The 2009 “Being Gay in an Orthodox World” was considered groundbreaking for changing the conversation around LGBTQ+ individuals within the Orthodox

community. The original panel featured four gay male alumni and an undergraduate student who

presented their personal stories in relation to being gay in Yeshiva University and the Orthodox community, followed by a Q&A. The panel, run by the Tolerance Club and the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, was moderated by Rabbi Yosef Blau, mashgiach ruchani (spiritual advisor) of RIETS. Nava Billet,

a Yeshiva University presidential fellow at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work opened the event and final

remarks were stated by Dr. David Pelcovitz. Over 700 people were reported to have attended the event, packed into Weissberg Commons, with 100 more turned away due to lack of space.

Although the event itself was received positively by those at the event, there was some controversy afterwards. Before the event, a letter was posted around the Wilf Campus, stating: “The Torah’s mitzvos [commandments] and judgments are eternally true and binding. Homosexual activity constitutes an abomination. As such, publicizing or seeking legitimization even for the homosexual orientation one feels runs contrary to Torah.” It was signed by several Roshei Yeshiva. Additionally, after the event, another letter was written by the president and Menahel at the time Richard M. Joel and Rabbi Yonah Reiss, respectively, “to reiterate the absolute prohibition of homosexual relationships, according to Jewish law.” The panel was also criticized publicly by Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Mayer Twersky in a sicha (discussion) in the Glueck Beit Midrash.

Controversy notwithstanding, people who were involved with and who attended see the panel as having changed the conversation around the topic for the better.



Mordechai Levovitz, a panelist on the 2009 panel and founder of Jewish Queer Youth (JQY) — an organization aimed at supporting Jewish LGBTQ+ youth — reflects on the panel as being historic: “[T]here was no denying that the student body was a different place after the panel. During the following semesters, nearly a dozen YU undergraduate students came out of the closet, and one even wrote a Commentator article and signed it with his real name (groundbreaking at the time).” He cites the legacy of the panel as influential on the current activism happening at YU now, “gay students began forming [a] community at YU, something that grew and continues to this day. The video of the panel went viral and had thousands of views, and was credited in changing, and even saving, hundreds of lives.”

When asked by the YU Observer about his thoughts on the event 11 years later, Rabbi Blau reflected that “in retrospect I think it’s fair to say that it altered the dialogue. Not many single events can say that. People were more open in talking about their lives, which I believe literally may have saved lives ... the dialogue became much more nuanced”

Talking to the YU Observer about why she became involved in the event, Isaacs referred to the original panel as being “inspiring and moving.” Although this year’s event was inspired by the 2009 panel in that “it shares the message of trying to foster understanding”, she hopes that this year’s event will have a different impact. “We are now 11 years later and we are hopefully coming from a different perspective both within the school and within the larger community. I think the last one was a shock to the system. I hope now we’re at a point that this isn’t shocking. We don’t want to raise issues of debate, whether halachic [related to Judaic Law] or on how YU views this issue. We want people to focus on the actual message.” Isaacs concluded by saying, “For me this isn’t just part two this is part one of a new discussion.”



## NEWS

# 13 Amendments proposed to Wilf Campus Constitution

BY AMALYA TEITLEBAUM

A vote will be cast amongst the Wilf Campus Student body on December 16 to decide whether or not 13 amendments will be added to the Wilf Constitution.

When it comes to adding to the Wilf constitution, many steps are in place to ensure that the amendments reflect the inclination of the Wilf community. Typically the process of adding to the constitution begins with the creation of amendments by the Amendments Committee, they then are reviewed by the General Assembly (GA), and if approved there, they are voted on by the Wilf Campus student body. These amendments have passed through both the Amendments Committee and the General Assembly, and are now up to the Student Body vote to decide whether or not they will be passed. The vote will be conducted on December 16.

The proposed amendments involve clarifications, additions, repealments, and corrections. The first amendment consists of grammar edits to the already existing amendments. It as well includes removed amendments based on redundancy, and corrections for the sake of uniformity.

The second proposed amendment is mostly clarifications and logical specifications. This includes defining temporary leave for officials, who will serve during temporary leave, clarifications involving club rules, election processes, and making Student Court decisions public.

For juniors and sophomores interested in high official positions, the third proposed amendment offers changes to the requirements needed to obtain these positions. These suggested new class standing requirements involve the opportunity for juniors with four completed semesters to act as Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) vice president (VP) of Clubs, as well as for juniors or sophomores with two completed semesters to become YSU VP of Class Affairs.

The fourth proposed amendment involves the period and timing for new club period submissions for new semesters. The powers and positions of the GA are discussed in the fifth amendment, preventing individuals from being on specified positions simultaneously, and allowing them to remove, by majority of vote, members of the Canvassing Committee (CC) deemed unfit to serve. The sixth amendment involves Katz and Makor rewrites and clarifications. This section includes repealments based on redundancy and prohibitions on Katz and Makor students from voting in certain elections, amongst other rewrites. The seventh amendment contains a comprehensive rewrite

of everything relating to committees and is currently referred to by the Amendments Committee as a “complete mess.” Committee members may want to pay special attention to this amendment. The new and improved rewrite includes committee appointments and removal processes, end of the year committee occurrences, and many more substantial implements.

The eighth amendment involves rules for tied elections and situations where there is no clear winner in Fall-2 elections. Fall-2 refers to the month-long period for filling positions that are not filled during the original fall elections.

The ninth proposed amendment addresses issues of the position of Canvassing Committee chairman. This amendment involves clarification of which committees you may not be a part of while holding this position.

The tenth amendment discusses Student Court-related changes. This includes adjustment to the court’s official replacement process, requirements to be a court official member, and prohibitions from holding simultaneous positions on certain committees.

The impeachment proceedings were changed in the eleventh amendment now stating that an impeachment can be brought forth by 3/5 of the GA, 1/3 of the student body, or 2/3 of the elect-

ed officials of the Wilf Campus Student Government (WCSG). Perhaps more relevant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the twelfth proposed amendment involves emergency amendments. The proposals involve the ability for emergency amendments to be voted on throughout the semester, with setting specific approval requirements.

Finally, the thirteenth amendment discusses archives of student court opinions, election results, and versions of the Constitutions. To summarize, these amendments requirements that all these documents be posted online by certain committees, making them available to the public.

The stated purpose of these proposed amendments is to improve the constitution and therefore improve the everyday occurrences on Wilf Campus. As offered by David Tanner, chairman of the Amendments Committee, “The Amendments Committee has been working hard this semester to improve the Wilf Campus Constitution, and I’m very proud of some of the ideas we’ve come up with.” Whether or not the ideas will be turned into amendments, will be left up to the Student Body. Daniel Melool, a Wilf Campus court member, shed light on the intentions of 13 constitutional amendments that will be voted on by the Wilf Campus. He shared with the YU Observer that “This year’s amendments seek to build off the work that began last year to revamp the Constitution. While last year saw a great improvement, there is still work to be done.”

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## YU Shuttle Service Restarting with Limited Hours

BY MILI CHIZHIK

After the discontinuation of the YU Shuttle during the Spring 2020 semester, the YU Security Department sent an email to the YU community on November 29 to announce the continuation of the shuttle service starting on November 30.

To allow for proper social distancing, instead of using the original shuttle van, a school bus will be used to shuttle YU students between campuses. Students will be required to sit

in every other seat and not directly across, next to, or behind each other. Only undergraduate students who have reservations and wear a mask will be able to board the shuttle. The students who reserve their seats will get a confirmation email and will show that and their school ID to the security officer who will be monitoring who boards the bus.

In addition, there will be a limited schedule that the shuttle will run on. According to the YU Security Department, there will be one one-way daytime shuttle from Wilf to Beren at

8:00 a.m., three evening times from Wilf to Beren (6:15 p.m., 8:15 p.m., 10:15 p.m.) and three evening times from Beren to Wilf (5:15 p.m., 7:15 p.m., 9:15 p.m.). It will only be operating from Mondays to Thursdays starting on Monday, November 30 with the 5:15 p.m. Beren to Wilf time.

The location in which the shuttle will be dispatched on Wilf campus will be between 186th and 187th St on Amsterdam Ave facing north, near the Burger & Grill restaurant. Students will be able to wait for the bus in the Morgenstern Residence Hall lounge. For those

boarding the bus on Beren campus, they should either wait in the Brookdale Residence Hall lounge or stand in front of the building at 50 E. 34th St.

As described in the email, students can reserve their seats either through the MY YU app or web browser. For the former, one should open the application and press “Menu>Scroll down to “Campus Info” category > Tap “Shuttle (Inter-Campus)” > Sign In using “User Login” > Use your Inside Track credentials to login > Follow the cues to register for the shuttle service.” For the latter, one



## NEWS

# Significant Increase of COVID-19 Cases at YU Reported Around Thanksgiving Weekend

BY MILI CHIZHIK

On Friday Dec. 4, 17 COVID-19 positive cases were reported on New York State's (NYS) Yeshiva University School Report between Nov. 21 and Dec. 4. This is a significant increase compared to the four cases reported in the previous school report's two week period.

The school report's dashboard, run by NYS Department of Health (DOH), originally reported all of Yeshiva University's cases together, including the undergraduate schools, Cardozo, Ferkauf, and RIETS. That dashboard reported two cases from Oct. 10-23. On Nov. 7, YU was split into three trackers, with a dashboard solely for the Wilf and Beren campuses. As delineated by a YU spokesperson, YU reports their COVID-19 cases at the same time each day to the DOH, who then is responsible for updating the tracker. The spokesperson shared with the YU Observer that "it may take a few days for the cases to appear on the dashboard." This updated report comes the week following Thanksgiving holiday, but Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel explained to the YU Observer that a majority of the listed cases "reflect students who tested positive and were already in quarantine prior to the holiday weekend." Six cases were reported between Dec. 2 and Dec. 4 when the Nov 30. test results following the holiday,

came back.

After consistently rising for weeks, New York's COVID-19 state-wide positivity rate hit over 4% on Nov. 29, the highest rate since May. Though YU reduced COVID-19 testing from twice to once a week on Nov. 5, the university decided to switch back to testing twice a week on Nov. 13, in anticipation of the Thanksgiving holiday, as described in a Nov. 13 email from President Ari Berman.

In addition to the 17 positive cases, there are a reported 17 students quarantined and zero students in isolation. According to the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) guidelines, quarantine is defined as a 14 day stay at home period for someone in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and isolation is defined as 10 day stay at home period for someone who is infected with COVID-19. The tracker, which includes students isolating both on and off campus, shows no students in isolation, though 17 tested positive. When asked about this discrepancy Dr. Nissel clarified to the YU Observer that "the DOH dashboard is inaccurate regarding the number of our students in isolation, and did not properly reflect the information we had submitted." As of Thursday Dec. 4, between the two undergraduate campuses, there were nine students in isolation and 25 in quarantine.

Of these 17 positive cases, four of them are listed as part of campus administered testing, so the other

13 from off campus tests must have been performed by a private provider or state or local health department. Dr. Nissel declined to comment on the percentage of these students on Beren or Wilf campuses, and whether the students were dorming or living off campus.

This increase in cases comes on the heels of YU's Thanksgiving break. In a Nov. 12 email to YU students and parents, Dr. Nissel urged students to stay on campus for the holiday, mirroring the CDC's recommendation to avoid travel. To incentivize students to stay in, Senior Director of Office of Student Life Rabbi Josh Weisberg announced the YU Thanksgiving Experience via email on Nov. 17, with meals and programming for students. Again, on Nov. 19, in an email titled "Safety during Thanksgiving Shabbat," Dr. Nissel reiterated that while YU had, so far, low rates of COVID-19, there was a concern of this changing if students leave campus for the holiday.

A meta-analysis of COVID-19 studies published on Nov. 19 showed that while most people have a five day incubation period, the time in between exposure and symptom development, it can be as long as 14 days or, in rare cases, longer. The Nov. 30 testing date was only four days after Thanksgiving day, not yet after the median incubation period, when a majority of the cases would have likely been detected. YU students

have not yet received their results from the Dec. 2 testing, which would be five days after Thanksgiving day.

Following this new study, on Dec. 2, the CDC put forth new recommendations for quarantine after an exposure, shortening the 14 day period to 10 days or seven days followed by a negative test. The CDC underscored that this shortened time leaves a small risk that the person could still transmit the virus. In response to this new development, Dr. Nissel shared that "we are reviewing the new CDC quarantine guidelines with our medical director" in addition to consulting with the NY DOH, and "will provide updates when available."

In his quote to the YU Observer, Dr. Nissel also stressed the importance of following proper guidelines such as masks and social distancing, highlighting that this extends to "not hosting or participating in small meals and get-togethers in their dorm rooms or apartments both on or off campus." Nissel called on students who are not feeling well or were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 to stay home or in your dorm room and contact YU's quarantine coordinator to put together a plan for a safe return to campus, concluding that "we need everyone's help in keeping our campuses safe."

## YU SHUTTLE SERVICE RETURNING WITH LIMITED HOURS

should go to [www.yushuttles.com](http://www.yushuttles.com) > Menu > Scroll down to "Campus Info" category > Tap "Shuttle (Inter-Campus)" > Sign In using "User Login" > Use your Inside Track credentials to login > Follow the cues to register for the shuttle service."

Some students have tried to raise awareness of the importance of restarting the shuttle service. Shani Wolfson (SCW '21) said that "I am very appreciative of the fact that YU has decided to reopen the shuttle

in a COVID-19 safe way. With finals around the corner, I wish that the shuttle would run an hour or two later to help [B]eren students who want to study late in the [W]ilf library get home safely, but the fact that the shuttle is open at all is a win in my book."

Any students with additional concerns or questions should contact the YU Security Department by emailing [security@yu.edu](mailto:security@yu.edu).





# Spring 2021 YU Housing Application Released

BY ERICA RACHEL SUTAN

On November 30, the Yeshiva University Housing Application for the Spring 2021 semester was released and publicized in an email from the YU Housing department to the YU undergraduate student body. The email includes a housing timeline plan, the Spring 2021 quarantine program, housing rates, the allowed levels of occupancy, student housing priority, meal plan information, extra information for students returning to campus for the first time since Yeshiva University's March closing, and information for those who are currently living on campus.

The housing application will remain open until Monday, December 14, at 3:00 p.m.. The Spring 2021 housing assignments will be allocated on December 21, a week after the housing application closes. At 3:00 p.m. on December 28, students will be required to accept or decline their housing offer. The last day to do so, without a financial penalty of the \$300 housing deposit, is Monday, January 4, 2021.

Students who have lived on campus during the Fall semester, but are not staying for the Spring semester, are to be moved out and must return their keys to the Housing Department by 5:00 p.m. on January 5, 2021. Additionally, for those students who are remaining on campus but moving to another dorm room are to have done so by the latter date and time, as well. From Sunday, January 10 through Monday, January 11, students are meant to check in with the Housing Department as part of the quarantine program. Incoming students are suggested to be moved in by January 17 and for those who are settled in before, a Shabbat (Sabbath) program for the week of January 15 has been scheduled.

The quarantine program for the Spring 2021 semester requires students from a "non-contiguous

state (any state other than New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Massachusetts), US territory or CDC level 2 or level 3 country, must comply with the following guidelines: 1. Students must have a PCR test administered within three days of departure, prior to arrival in New York. 2. The student must, upon arrival in New York, quarantine for three days. 3. On day 4

of quarantine, the student must obtain another PCR test.

If both tests come back negative, the student may exit quarantine upon receipt of the results of the second negative test." These students are permitted to quarantine in spaces provided by the university, meaning students need to arrive by January 10-11, or they are permitted to quarantine off campus, under their own personal arrangements.

The Housing Department suggests that regardless of the environment where the quarantine will take place, students are suggested to arrive in NY a week before the semester begins. Students who are leaving for intersession but are returning to campus for the spring semester from a non-contiguous state "must comply with these guidelines: 1. Students must have a PCR test administered within three days of departure, prior to arrival in New York. 2. The student must, upon arrival in New York, quarantine for three days. 3. On day 4 of quarantine, the student must obtain another PCR test. If both tests come back negative, the student may exit quarantine upon receipt of the results of the second negative test. 4. Because of the limited quarantine space available, students who live locally who travel during intersession should quarantine at their local homes before moving to campus. 5. For non-local students who need to quarantine in university provided accommodations, you must arrive to the quarantine program on the

early move in dates January 10th or January 11th, 2021."

The current housing rates for the Beren Campus are as follows:  
251 Lexington Ave IHP: \$4625  
30 Park Ave IHP: \$4850  
35th Street Residence Hall: \$6000  
36th Street Residence Hall: \$4625  
Brookdale Standard/Suite: \$4625  
Brookdale Deluxe: \$4850  
Schottenstein Residence Hall: \$4625

The current housing rates for the Wilf Campus are as follows:  
Morgestern Hall: \$4625  
Muss Hall: \$3375  
Rubin Hall: \$4625

\$4625

The occupancy of the YU housings will remain reduced. For the Wilf Campus, there will be one student to a room. For the Beren Campus:  
251 Lexington Ave IHP: Either 1 or 2 students per apartment  
30 Park Ave IHP: 2 students per apartment  
35th Street Residence Hall: Either 2 or 3 students per apartment  
36th Street Residence Hall: 1 student per room  
Brookdale Residence Hall: 3 students per room, regardless of room type  
Schottenstein Residence Hall: 1 student per room

Not every student is guaranteed a housing assignment as there is a priority list:

Students currently in housing on campus

New students who have never lived on campus before

Returning students who live more than 50 miles from campus

Returning students who live within 50 miles from campus

There are three meal plans being offered this upcoming semester. The High Plan, suggested for those who spend \$125 a week on food, will total in \$2000 for the semester. The Standard Plan, suggested for those who spend \$110 a week on food, will total in \$1750 for the semester. The

Reduced Plan, suggested for those who spend \$95 a week on food, will total in \$1500 for the semester.

For those students who are to be moving in with friends, they are to make a Roommate Group on the Housing Application. The group must be validated by the application deadline — "this means all requests to join are accepted by the Group Leader and the 'Validated' button checked. If these steps are not taken, we cannot guarantee that we can honor your roommate requests." For those who need to request medical accommodations, they are to include supporting documentation with their Spring 2021 Housing Application so their needs can be met.

All incoming students who will be housing are required to fill out the Code of Behavior document.

Many YU undergraduate students feel relief due to the housing application finally being live, as students have been wondering about what is to come of the Spring 2021 semester. One SCW '23 student, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared that she is "extremely excited for the opportunity to return to a learning environment! [She is] looking forward to being around people [her] own age again, and to being in New York City." Zippy Spanjer, SCW '21, is apprehensive, stating, "It was odd that we didn't get an advance email- it was just like -Boom!- we're opening applications. And I do wonder if enough people are going to apply for Schott[en] to be open again." Another SCW '21 student, who wishes to remain anonymous, has criticized, "there is a lack of transparency of what students should expect next semester and that was reflected in the vague application that was sent out late. It is making students uneasy about next semester and how to plan."

Your story could be here,  
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opportunity to be heard!



## OPINION

# Civil Unrest Rocks Ethiopia: The Potential Impacts of the Tigray Conflict

BY JACOB LEICHTER

Since the beginning of November, the Ethiopian central government has been engaged in a bitter conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). While this is the first time that violence has erupted between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and TPLF leadership, the tensions between Addis Ababa and Mekelle have been building for years. What drove Ethiopia's central authority and this regional power to war? And, more importantly, what does this mean for Ethiopia and its neighbors on the Horn of Africa?

Understanding the current conflict requires a look back to the Ethiopian Civil War, a bloody conflict that raged from 1974 until 1991. In 1974, the communist Derg group toppled Emperor Haile Selassie and seized power. As they worked to establish a government, opposition groups across Ethiopia rose up in challenge. Despite this, for the next 17 years, the Derg ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist, with the general population suffering from violence, famine, and economic troubles. Finally, in 1989, the TPLF, representing the small ethnic population situated in the northern Ethiopian Tigray region, drove the Derg from its borders and joined forces with three other ethnic groups from across the country. This coalition, known as the Ethiopian People's

Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), then set its sights on Addis Ababa. The opposition reached the capital and ousted the communist regime in 1991. The EPRDF then assumed power, with the TPLF taking the central role in this new federalist government. In the years following, the EPRDF fell victim to corruption and, when faced with challenges, became increasingly authoritarian.

Protests erupted across Ethiopia first in 2015 and again in 2017 as the people expressed their distaste for a regime so similar to its predecessor. However, the EPRDF would remain in power for another 3 years, until Abiy Ahmed's appointment as chairman. In 2019, Ahmed disbanded the EPRDF and created the Prosperity Party. Preaching ethnic unity, better quality of life for all Ethiopians, and even going so far as to make peace with Eritrea, which declared independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after thirty years of wars between the two nations, Ahmed adopted the title of prime minister and removed the Tigrayan leaders from his newly restructured government. Fast forward to November 4, 2020, Prime Minister Ahmed announced that TPLF attacked a federal military base in the region, injuring and killing service members stationed there. In retaliation, Addis Ababa deployed troops and aerial support to the region. On November 23, Ahmed surrounded Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, and gave leadership three days to leave the city. If they refused, Mekelle would face

a military assault. As of the evening of November 26, there have been no signs of compliance, with rumors escaping the region that civilians have been recruited as the TPLF prepare to face off against the Ethiopian military.

What effects will the Tigray conflict have on the country and the region? Domestically, the potential civil war, on top of the coronavirus pandemic, will serve as a major blow to Ethiopian economy, which has, until now, been one of the fastest growing in Africa. Furthermore, as critical resources, like food, are diverted to the war effort, the general population will suffer. This is especially true in Tigray, which is home to hundreds of thousands of people, among them one hundred thousand refugees from the Eritrean war, dependent on aid from the government and international organizations. Perhaps most concerning, at least within Ethiopia's borders, is the threat of ethnic tensions, with some individuals already describing being mistreated because of their ties to Tigray. In a worst-case scenario, this may lead to the fracturing of Ethiopia into smaller states based on ethnic group, but such a future is likely far off and would only follow a more widespread war across the entire nation. The Tigray conflict is also a cause of concern for the international arena. On November 15, the TPLF fired rockets into Eritrea, alleging that Ethiopia's northern neighbor was allowing Prime Minister Ahmed to use one of their airports for military operations against Tigray. The Eritrean government already resents the TPLF for the many years of fighting during their bitter struggle for independence. President Afw-

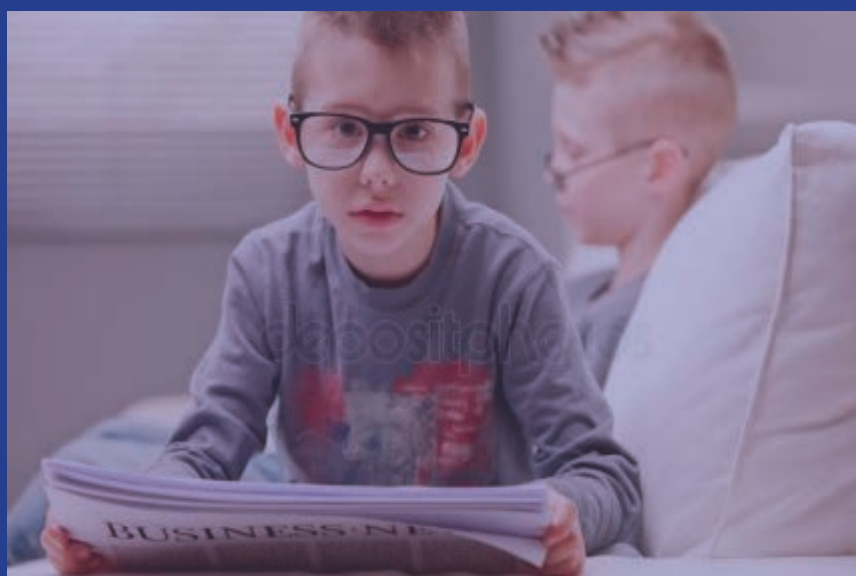
erki is also friendly with Ahmed, following the latter's declaration of peace between the two nations. Tigrayan aggression against Eritrea may force Asmara to launch a military offensive as well, pinning the tiny region between two fronts and furthering the carnage and destruction. Additionally, Ethiopians have been flooding into Sudan to the west. Sudan, currently embroiled in its own internal conflicts, is not properly equipped to handle an influx of refugees, which will only lead to their suffering. As such, the Tigray conflict will cause problems for Ethiopia and could lead to regional instability, setting the Horn of Africa away from the progress it has made in recent years. However, at the time of writing, no new reports have come in from Tigray. What will transpire in the showdown between Addis Ababa and Mekelle remains to be seen. Hopefully, Prime Minister Ahmed holds true to his calls of national unity and finds a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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## OPINION

# Academic Advisement Falling Through the Holes?

BY ANONYMOUS

\*The YU Observer has verified that the anonymous writer is a current YU undergraduate student.

Pre-coronavirus times, one would merely fill out a handy-dandy form online and schedule either an academic or Judaic advisement appointment online. At the time of the appointment, the person would merely go to the corresponding office and have a “wonderful” time talking about the classes they are lacking. Unfortunately, academic advisement meetings have never been productive for me, and now that the majority of academic support appointments are online, students are finding it especially difficult to talk with their advisors.

In a survey done to collect data for this article, it was found that over 83% of YU student respondents had some type of issue occur during their meeting. 91% of respondents who experienced issues reported that their advisor was distracted during their meeting, failed to follow through on student requests, suddenly rescheduled, or did not show up at all. 50% of these students reported that these issues happened not only during their first meeting, but in following ones as well. One anonymous student stated,

“I have scheduled three appointments through academic advice at Stern. Out of those three appointments, my advisor only showed up to one. In that singular appointment, my advisor failed to read parts of my transcript thereby giving me false information as to how many classes I needed

in order to graduate. It threw me off and I lost confidence in my advisor.”

Zippy Spanjer, SCW '21, expressed a similar sentiment stating, “It’s frustrating how little information is available online. I don’t like that I have to make appointments for basic questions.”

Unfortunately, it seems that academic advisement has always been sub-par to say the least, and students found that their meetings were about the same online as they were in person. One anonymous student expressed her frustration regarding pre-medical advisement stating, “As someone who came into YU with no older siblings or cousins who could give me advice, I felt that my first year on campus was a struggle to scramble for resources. It seemed like everybody besides me had guidance from some external source, usually from a family member. When I met with a pre-med advisor, they did not offer

me any tangible advice or provide any resources. It felt more like a therapy session than an advisement meeting. All of the resources I know about and all of the connections I made were not through YU, rather through my own resources.”

“I have scheduled three appointments through academic advice at Stern. Out of those three appointments, my advisor only showed up to one.”

For academic advisement in general, it seems as though there are extra advisors for the pre-health majors, while liberal arts majors are forced to go to general advisement. One anonymous student stated, “I think what Stern should consider seriously at this point is assigning an advisor to each student, major specific if possible. I’ve always been an advocate for this, but now especially things are chaotic, more so than usual, which means that students need more individualized support than usual.” This addition would be beneficial to students in many regards.

At other colleges there are specific academic advisors for majors. For example, if someone is a biology major they will have a biology advisor. An academic advisor specific to the biology major can propose which biology classes someone should take and what biological research one should be partaking in within the department. Not only does this advisor have a connection with the department, but they would

be able to relay relevant information to students concerning their major. This type of advisement would be very beneficial to both YC and SCW students as we would be able to have major-specific meetings as well as general requirement meetings with our current advisors.

On the upside, SCW advisors are quick to respond to their emails in a clear and concise manner. This saves students both time and energy but it is no substitute for a 30 minute advisement appointment. If you need a quick answer to a scheduling issue during the add/drop period, this is the best means of getting your answer.

Academic advisement online has been below average for the majority of students, but this is no change from academic advisement in-person. Advising is meant to be a supportive experience. Advisors need to have information about the student that allows them to provide accurate advice concerning the student’s course load. They need to conduct their meetings in a clear and concise manner so that students do not need to rely on the support of their friends or siblings for proper information. The good news is that academic advisement and our administration can make a fix. Our school has the potential for meaningful academic advisement only if the administration takes both our voices into consideration.

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The Commentator...ANYTHING.

We know you have an  
opinion.

to join us, contact one of our Opinion Editors!







## OPINION

## Can You be Vegetarian at YU?

BY SARAH BRILL

Picture this: you are a vegetarian at Stern. You have just walked into the cafeteria for dinner and find that the main course meal consists of mystery meat. You then turn away and towards the soup wondering if you should have it for the third time that week. You walk towards the salad bar noting that the lettuce is wilted from the long day sitting out. Now you are either forced to order in food, eat in the dorm, or swallow some more soup. At this point, your stomach is only soup, so you go for that. Now it is Shabbat. You stay in with your friends but the meals quickly become a problem. With no places to eat out over Shabbat, and you cannot microwave your Trader Joe's meal, you are forced to survive off of more soup, salad, and stale dessert.

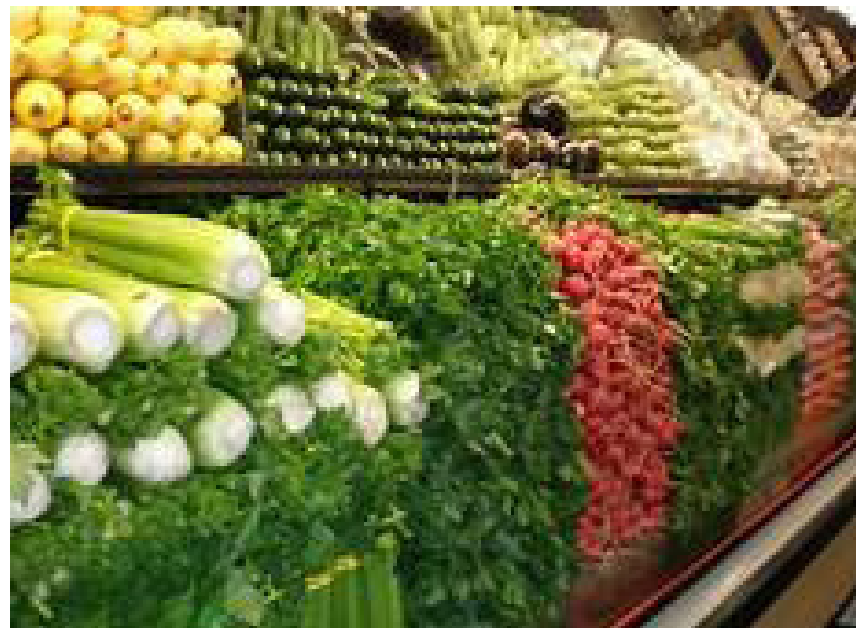
Tova Shmulewitz, SCW '22, stated "I have found it extraordinarily difficult to be a vegetarian at YU. From the caf I would eat only carbs, and other times I would spend money going elsewhere or microwave something in my dorm. Spending money outside adds up while also paying for the caf card. My second year was easier because I had a deluxe room with a kitchen and I could make myself proper meals. But now that I am back in the Brookdale standard room, it is becoming increasingly difficult due to both this factor and the COVID-19 situation. ... In [the] 215 [cafeteria], the main is always a fish so I can't eat that, so I only eat the sides. ... I feel like the food

situation is very unhealthy and there are just not enough options. I think that Stern should provide either a kitchen for vegetarians, or change their meals to accommodate vegetarians. On occasion there are fake meat options, but the majority of the time there is not."

An anonymous vegetarian Stern student, SCW '21, stated her experience "I was always watching people get Mexican food on TexMex night and I wanted there to be a Mexican vegetarian option. ... I tried to be creative with my meals and made bagels and cream cheese a staple. My sister who is a vegan who graduated from YU would tell me that there was a vegan pretzel in the 215 caf that was good. You can be vegetarian at Stern, but it will be hard, but if you cycle through your food choices correctly, you can do it."

I myself was a pescatarin for the year before I came to Stern. I thought I could maintain that lifestyle while at Stern. Unfortunately, I was wrong. I quickly transitioned back to meat as the options were limiting the Stern caf. I made the choice to become pescatarin for environmental reasons, with the hope that someday I would be either fully vegetarian or vegan. Now, living at home, I have transitioned back to my pescatarian lifestyle which supports both my choice of living and the environment.

Shayna Herzage, SCW '21, said "Stern really doesn't allow for enough resources for vegetarian living. We are treated very much like



an afterthought. Almost no mains are vegetarian-friendly in the caf, which is just annoying and it makes living off of the caf as a student hardly sustainable. I became a vegetarian when I was 17. ... Personally I don't feel everyone should be a vegetarian — but I want my lifestyle to be considered legitimate as a part of my value system that is worth sustaining, just like it is for omnivores. Going vegetarian as a YU student isn't easy, but going vegetarian in general is never easy."

While being vegetarian at Stern is near impossible, vegetarianism has positive effects on both the environment and on your own personal carbon footprint. By replacing meat with vegetarian items such as tofu plant-based protein or nuts, the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere is reduced 2.5 times. Additionally, "[b]y eating vegetarian

food for a year you could save the same amount of emissions as taking a small family car off the road for 6 months." Vegetarianism has a positive impact on the environment. As a Jewish school, we should be striving towards Tikkun Olam, helping the world. By making the choice of being vegetarian, a Jew is helping contribute to Tikkun Olam so why isn't Stern endorsing this idea and supporting students who make this choice? The vegetarian diet isn't for everyone, but those who do want to pursue this type of diet, or similar diets such as veganism or pescetarianism, Stern should be allowing for that to happen by providing adequate meals and accommodations for those students.

### RETURNING TO CAMPUS WAS NOT SMART, IT STILL ISN'T

Of course, our school is doing everything in its power to prevent a spread on our campus. Classrooms are socially distanced, masks are required in all buildings, and a safety check is required before entering the buildings. So yes, our school is doing their best to fit their interests, but sometimes, the personal best is not the answer for all of us.

## Writing, editing, layout...

## The ways to contribute are endless!

Contact Fruma Landa at [frumalanda725@gmail.com](mailto:frumalanda725@gmail.com) to get started!



## OPINION

## Defining Activism

payment plan had changed for the worse, and students were rationing cafeteria money by the start of the High Holidays. If activism — in all its daunting glory — did not exist, we would have suffered through the semester with rationed caf money.

However, as many students may recall, that was not the case. We, as a student body, stepped up and acted out. Our voices were amplified through the YU student newspapers with caf plan activists such as Mili Chizhik and Akiva Poppers. Petitions were signed and conference calls were held. By the end of the fall semester, the caf plan was changed back to its original parameters.

The student-led campaign to fix the caf plan was far from controversial. Nevertheless, it was activism. It was students seeing a problem and fighting to bring about change. What about that is not activism?

We also see activism through many of the clubs on campus. For example, Active Minds is arguably one of the most popular clubs on campus. Active Minds takes on the important and relevant topic of mental health advocacy and destigmatizing mental illness. While mental health is still a topic the community is in the process of adjusting to speaking about, Active Minds is not considered a “controversial” club in Yeshiva University.

In case the context of this article and the word “Active” in the name did not already make it clear enough: Active Minds is an activist group in Yeshiva University, acting to decrease mental health stigma. Active Minds, and other such clubs, consist of people who are passionate about something to the point that they wish to publicize, to bring awareness, to take action for their values. When activism is defined without the fear Yeshiva University has built up around the word, some of YU’s most beloved clubs, events, and individuals turn out to be rooted in activism.

Why should we be afraid to take action for our values out of fear of being labeled an activist? In fact, if you are taking action for your values, you are an activist. But that is hardly a bad thing, and hardly a controversial thing in itself. Activism does not require radicalism — it only requires passion enough to take action.

# PROTECTING OURSELVES AND THE PLANET

BY SHANI LEWIS

With over 70 million people contracting COVID-19 worldwide, we all share a responsibility to stop the spread of this virus. For most people this means social distancing, washing our hands and wearing a mask. When it comes to wearing a mask, we have a dual responsibility. We need to wear a mask to protect those around us, and we need to use a reusable one to protect our planet. Experts such as Dr. Jodi Sherman, an associate professor of anesthesiology and epidemiology and director of the program on healthcare environmental sustainability at Yale University said “[t]he general public should be using reusable face masks and performing routine laundering at home ...” Wearing a reusable face mask is just as effective as using a disposable one, and it protects the environment. We need to make a change and we need to make it now.

Wearing disposable masks poses many problems environmentally. The sheer amount of disposable masks being mass produced is outrageous. The World Health Organization (WHO) in March approximated that 89 million disposable masks were needed globally per month in medical settings to combat COVID-19. Since

the WHO made that statement in March, 712 million masks have been mass produced for medical professionals alone. In August, the UK reported that they could either make 24.7 billion to protect the everyday person or 136 million reusable masks could be made instead. Why is this even a question? We are talking about billions of masks being made that will end up dumped into the ocean, versus a few million reusable masks that can be continuously used. The damage is exponential and we are killing the earth. Laurent Lombard, founder of Opération Mer Propre is quoted saying that in a matter of time “... [we] run the risk of having more masks than jellyfish in the Mediterranean.” There is no need for people to wear a surgical disposable mask, the reusable is just as effective. By wearing a reusable mask we are protecting ourselves and our planet.

Whether we are wearing a disposable mask or a reusable one, it is essential that when discarding a mask it is disposed of properly. Instead of throwing away the entire mask, make sure to cut off the ear loops so that they don’t become entangled in animals. Depending on the material, cutting the entire mask in half can significantly reduce the chance of the mask, if blown away, getting caught within an animal or their digestive tract if swallowed. Taking these precautions will protect

our ecosystem and the animals that live within it. COVID-19 has been harming people worldwide, lets not let COVID-19 indirectly harm the wildlife around us. Let’s make strides towards decisions that will save both humans and the environment.

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## FEATURES



Dr. Joy Ladin

## YU FACULTY PROFILE: DR. JOY LADIN

BY BINA DAVIDSON ON BEHALF OF FEATURES STAFF

Each month, the *YU Observer* aims to highlight a YU faculty member. For the November edition, the *YU Observer* is highlighting Dr. Joy Ladin.

**Name:** Joy Ladin  
**Department:** English  
**Educational Background/Qualifications:** Ph.D. in American Literature, Princeton University; M.F.A. in Creative Writing, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; B.A., Sarah Lawrence College  
**Hometown:** Rochester, NY  
**How long have you worked at**

**YU?:** Since 2003

**What got you passionate about your field?:** I started writing rhymes as soon as I learned to write. To me,

*It really is a miracle and a privilege to see them learn and grow.*

it seemed like something electric, world-changing, happened whenever I wrote a poem. It still feels that way. I have never stopped writing, and reading, and I love sharing that excitement with others.

**What do you like about working at YU?:** I've taught at many institutions, but I've never

worked with students I liked or admired more.

**How has COVID/Zoom affected the way your classes function?:** I miss

free-flowing discussions — that's my favorite part of

teaching — and haven't figured out how to do those through Zoom.

**Do you have any advice for students interested in a career in your field?:** I have a lot of advice for those interested in careers in writing or teaching — please contact me if you want to talk! But the one short piece

of advice that applies to both is: whatever you do, keep your delight in what you do alive, and remember that both are acts of love.

**What is one thing you want students to know about you?:** I would want them to know that to me, it really is a miracle and privilege to see my students learn and grow. It really is a miracle and a privilege to see them learn and grow.

*Is there a YU professor you admire who you would like to see highlighted in future editions? Email us at [theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com).*

STAFF WRITER PROFILES:  
JACOB MERMELSTEIN

BY YOSEF ROSENFELD ON BEHALF OF FEATURES STAFF

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 December edition, the *YU Observer* is highlighting Jacob Mermelstein.

**Name:** Jacob Mermelstein  
**College:** Sy Syms School of Business  
**Major:** Finance  
**Year:** Senior, third year on campus  
**Where have you been during the COVID-19 pandemic? With Whom?:** At home.  
**Currently reading:** "Thinking, Fast

and Slow" by Daniel Kahneman

**Current sport:** Running a 5K every other day.

**Currently listening to:** EDM

**Favorite way to social distance with friends:** Reveling in NYC to explore cultural attractions.

**Any cool things you've done/hobbies you've picked up over the COVID-19 pandemic?:** I've been doing more reading with the extra time on my hands.

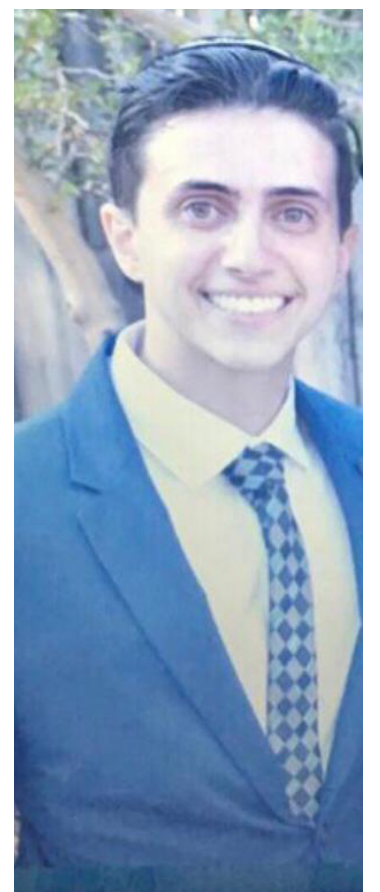
**What do you miss most about your pre-COVID-19 life?:** Personal interactions without masks. I love seeing smiles. They're contagious.

**What is your favorite thing about YU?:** Online classes and the rebound.

**What's a quote/thought/piece of advice you have for your fellow students?:**

"You don't need mentors; you need action" — Naval Ravikant

*Read his past articles here:*  
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/09/etsy-overview/>  
<https://yuobserver.org/2020/11/sea-limited-nysesel/>



Jacob Mermelstein



## FEATURES

## Crisis and Hope: YU Voices

*Repairing the Rift: A Secular Israeli's Path to the Orthodox World*



Bella Raboy and Nurit Sirkis-Bank,  
Interviewed by Prof. Joshua Karlip

## “CRISIS AND HOPE: YU VOICES — REPAIRING THE RIFT”

BY MATTHEW SHILAT

“All one has to do to be happy is to be thankful.” These were the concluding words of Bella Raboy in the “Crisis and Hope” Zoom event I attended last week. This event, titled “Repairing the Rift,” sought to show how the diametrical worlds of secular and religious Israelis need not be so contentious. I went into this event thinking it would be a story I have heard before, but I came out of the event actually inspired and appreciative of the work done by all parties involved.

Before attending the event, I read an article in The Times of Israel titled “Healing the Rift between Secular and Religious Israelis Through Love” by Joshua Karlip. This article provided background for the event that I was about to attend and also discussed the Israeli documentary series “Od Nipagesh”, created by Ohad Gal Oz and Uri Grodner. This documentary follows five secular Israelis over the course of nine days as they try to reconnect with estranged Haredi family members. Each secular Israeli received a Haredi mentor who introduced them to that world so they could better understand the lives that their respective family members now led. The show is currently a finalist for the Rose d’Or, which Karlip calls “the European equivalent of the Emmys.” In his article, Karlip writes:

“The most powerful aspect of the documentary were the deep relationships, based on respect and love, that the participants forged with their Haredi mentors. Bella Raboy — a novelist, journalist, and public speaker — and Dr. Nurit Sirk-

is-Bank — an art curator, lecturer, and expert in Hasidic visual culture — formed one of these relationships. When Raboy was just a year old, her Soviet-Jewish parents divorced in the wake of her father’s embrace of Orthodoxy. Arriving in Israel at the age of 2, Raboy was

raised by her secular mother and grandparents;

she felt abandoned by her now-Haredi father, who seemingly wanted little to do with her.”

From this situation, Raboy became antagonistic toward Orthodox Judaism and Haredim in particular. Yet when she met Nurit Sirkis-Bank, she discovered a connection of love and acceptance that forever changed how she viewed Orthodox Jews. This “Crisis and Hope” event was about this exact encounter as Joshua Karlip interviewed Bella Raboy and Nurit Sirkis-Bank. Karlip stated that “their [Raboy and Sirkis-Bank’s] relationship epitomizes one of the central goals of our interview series [“Crisis and Hope”]: the exploration of the world of the ‘other’ as a means to demolish negative stereotypes and to create relationships across seemingly unbridgeable racial, religious and cultural divides.”

After reading this article, I was excited for the event to begin. Joshua Karlip opened by explaining the series and introducing himself as chair of Judaic studies and associate director of Israel Studies at YU. Raboy spoke next, talking about how she had not been in contact with her father. He had remarried and

now had seven other children. The 32 year old Raboy said that “Od Nipagesh” in a week and a half during the month of September 2019 did what “we [Raboy and her father] couldn’t do in 30 years.” Now the two are on good terms and talk frequently.

*...she discovered a connection of love and acceptance that forever changed how she viewed Orthodox Jews.*

Raboy’s view of the religious world has changed and

now she attempts to keep some religious practices. She described the documentary as having built bridges instead of walls.

Nurit Sirkis-Bank’s father worked at Israel’s Office of External Affairs, so she traveled the world as a child. As she grew, Sirkis-Bank studied philosophy and art, served as an officer in the IDF, and explored European museums during her PhD studies at Bar-Ilan University. During her study of art, she realized: “just as there is human creativity, there must be transcendental creativity.” This notion led her to become religious. She now describes herself as a “person on the bridge” trying to get people together from different walks of life, often using contemporary Jewish art, dance, visual arts, and theatre as a means to form that connection.

The makers of “Od Nipagesh” reached out to both Raboy and Sirkis-Bank and paired them for their documentary, initially telling them little to nothing about the show. While the latter was optimistic about the opportunity to build bridges, she was also apprehensive about how this documentary might depict her world. With guidance from

her rabbi, who said: “You’re not responsible for the result; you’re responsible for the process,” she agreed to participate. Raboy stated: “my response was ‘no’ because I hated everything having to do with religion, because I reflected all my problems with my dad on them [Haredim].” She had recently attended her half-sister’s wedding, which was the first time she saw her father and his new family in 30 years. “Od Nipagesh” interviewed her for seven hours; they called her back nearly two months later, wanting to put her in a religious neighborhood for a week and a half. She finally agreed, saying: “I tried every other way to reconnect with my dad, and every way failed.”

The documentary had Bella Raboy walk around Mea Shearim trying to find her contact, Nurit Sirkis-Bank. When they finally met, Sirkis-Bank hugged Raboy immediately. Raboy described the moment: “I felt like this is where I was supposed to be. I felt secure; I felt loved.” Sirkis-Bank had no knowledge of Raboy’s past, but embraced her wholeheartedly as a commitment to be there for her. For the next 36 hours, Raboy was to remain completely silent while simply following Sirkis-Bank. It was extremely difficult for her, since she disliked everything about the Hasidic culture around her, but the experience forced her to just observe her surroundings without impulsively rejecting them. Only after talking to Sirkis-Bank did she start to feel connected. She

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## FEATURES

## DAF YOMI:

# COVID-19 MEETS PESACH '20 — FULL OF UNCERTAINTY

BY NORMAN ROSENFELD

The Mishna on *daf* (page) 9a in tractate *Pesachim* tells us not to worry on *Pesach* (Passover) that a weasel may have dragged *chametz* (leavened grain product, prohibited on Passover) from house to house, or from one location to another within a single house. Why is this not a concern? Because, much to the relief of those of us with obsessive compulsive tendencies, the rabbis were mindful of the following anxiety-inducing thought process: once I'm worrying about *chametz* being moved from house to house, I should worry about *chametz* being transported from courtyard to courtyard; and why stop there — might as well worry that the darned weasel took *chametz* in its mouth on Amsterdam Avenue in the Heights, crossed the GW Bridge and dropped it off at Dougies in Teaneck, NJ.

Fortunately, the rabbis curbed our required level of concern, allowing us to continue our *Pesach* preparations without going completely crazy. There has been a noticeable trend in recent years to publish articles pointing out the difference between preparing for *Pesach* and cleaning the ceiling, between placing shelf liners in cupboards and

replacing kitchen cabinets. These distinctions came to a head in the weeks leading up to this past year's global matchup between the holiday and first-time *Pesach* preparers, which almost read like a football score: *Pesach* '20, COVID-19. Luckily, tractate *Pesachim* had our backs during this unprecedented challenge.

On the evening before *Pesach*, we are obligated

to initiate a search by candle-

light for *chametz* in our homes. This is the search where we leave 10 pieces of *chametz* around our property, collect them and burn them the following morning. Beginning on *daf* 9b, the Gemara addresses this annual obligation by providing an exhaustive list of what-if situations: What if a mouse came into a house that has nine piles of *matzah* (unleavened bread eaten on Passover) and one pile of *chametz*? What would happen if that mouse took a piece from one of those piles and brought it into another house, one that was already searched for *chametz* ... and we don't know if the mouse helped himself from the *matzah* pile or the *chametz*

pile? In such a case, the second house must be searched again for *chametz* — that is, unless the mouse was only seen taking the piece at a distance from the piles, but was not seen taking from the piles themselves.

Following a series of related questions about the *halacha* (Jewish Law) of finding unexpected *chametz*, the Gemara (Talmud) begins

a new round of inquiries: "If a mouse entered a house..." with a loaf of bread in its mouth, and the homeowner came in afterward and found crumbs on the floor — Rava says that he/she will need to perform a new search, because it is not the way of mice to crumble their food.

"If a mouse entered a house..." with a loaf of bread in its mouth, and then a mouse came out of the house with a loaf of bread in its mouth — can we assume it's the same mouse? Maybe it is a different mouse with the same loaf, or maybe it's a different mouse with a different loaf ... A different mouse with a different loaf would necessitate a new search for *chametz*, but we have no way of confirming those

details ...

"If a mouse entered a house..." with a loaf of bread in its mouth, and a weasel later emerged from the house with a loaf of bread — do we assume it was the same bread that the mouse brought inside?

"If a mouse entered a house..." with a loaf of bread in its mouth, and a weasel came out of the house with the bread and the mouse in its mouth — how do we rule? Was it the same mouse that went into the house initially? It is impossible to issue a ruling on these cases, given we cannot verify essential information, and the Gemara therefore ends by stating: "*teiku*" — let these questions stand unresolved.

With all the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing pandemic, it's important to remind ourselves that we can't know everything or have all the answers. Now more than ever, the future is completely unpredictable — we may very well celebrate *Pesach* '21 much like we did last year, only this time around we can hopefully better prepare ourselves for another holiday spent in isolation. That being said, you might want to start getting ready for *Pesach* by finishing off the last of those jelly doughnuts from *Chanukah*, so as not to leave any crumbs for the mice and weasels!

## CRISIS AND HOPE

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admired Sirkis-Bank's ability to see the beauty in everything. "You have religion and you have people," Raboy said, "when you spend your whole life hating instead of trying to understand the other person, it costs you so much energy — it's so much harder to hate than to love. I spent 30 years being 'right' and living without a father." Sirkis-Bank could tell that Raboy had "no positive exposure" to Haredim. Sirkis-Bank emphasized that she is not different from all the other Haredim, exclaiming: "meet my neighbors, who are all amazing people." She was particularly agitated by the Israeli media's depiction of Haredim stating: "Israel accepts all types of lifestyles, 'but we [Israelis] will [still] speak very bad about Haredim.'" She shared her experience, even before becom-

ing religious, with professors who would only judge people by how they dressed if they were Haredi.

Raboy and Sirkis-Bank spent a week and a half learning from each other. Sirkis-Bank prayed every day that when she eventually spoke to Raboy's father, she would say the right things that could rekindle their father-daughter relationship. Once Sirkis-Bank spoke to him, he started crying and his "unconditional love came out." Raboy's father had apparently been praying every day, twice a day, for the moment his daughter would "come back to him."

Letting go of her internal hate and not blaming religion for the pain she felt, helped Raboy heal. She finally kindled a relationship with her estranged father and now says she loves Hasidut. "When you watch the news, it's easy to hate Haredim. I hated everything to do with religion, then

I realized I hate for nothing." She pointed out that there are "extremists on both sides. When you choose to take the extremists and make them the whole, it's a very slippery road." Raboy shared that the core value she learned from her experience is "don't work from your ego; work from your heart."

After the filming ended, Raboy looked in the mirror and saw her dad's face in her own, and for the "first time in her life" accepted this. When she later saw her father again, it was the first time any of her half-siblings had seen her father cry. Everyone in the room was crying. "I didn't need my dad to realize that he did something wrong," Raboy confessed. "I just needed my dad." Raboy was just on a Hanukkah trip to Eilat with her father's family, now feeling a "connection" to God after having considered herself an atheist for decades.

She describes her performance of mitzvot as being "out of love instead of out of fear."

I personally have friends who are isolated from some or even most of their family due to differing levels of religious observance. As a convert, I have even found my relationship with my own family troubled at times, as they do not always understand the world I am now a part of. It made me happy to see people like Nurit Sirkis-Bank working to unite Jewish families not through missionizing, but simply by fostering understanding and appreciation. I found the words of Bella Raboy particularly inspiring, and I encourage the reader to check out the recording of this event, which is posted on the YU website under Crisis & Hope.



## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



## BOOK REVIEW OF “GROUNDING THE ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE PROCESSES IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: DISTRIBUTED COGNITION IN MUSICAL ACTIVITY”

BY SHAYNA HERSZAGE,  
MANAGING EDITOR

When a person hears music or watches a concert, they are processing only a few outputs of information such as the sound of the music or the appearance of the orchestra. However, while a listener or audience member does not always clearly see the cognitive processes happening for the performers, these processes are very much present in a series of ways. In Linda Kaastra’s new book, “Grounding the Analysis of Cognitive Processes in Music Performance: Distributed cognition in musical activity”, Kaastra pulls apart and examines the many cognitive processes that take place in different musical scenarios in a way that is enticing for both musical and

non-musical readers alike.

In analyzing the cognitive processes in music, Kaastra explains that there are drastically different processes associated with different forms of playing music — for example, learning a song in a music lesson is different from practicing the

same song later on, and both of

these scenarios are different from performing the song on a stage in front of an audience. As such, they all require various forms of cognitive processes related to details such as phrasing, technique, tempo, and emotional expression.

Unlike most other works which focus on the topic of cognitive processes in musical

performance, Kaastra’s book discusses cognitive processes in terms of playing the bassoon. As she explains in the book, the overwhelming majority of past works within this field have utilized the piano as its instrument model, because the measurement of notes on the piano is particularly easy compared to other musical instruments.

However, Kaastra, a bassoonist herself,

explains that the bassoon is “an instrument of character,” largely due to its expressive abilities and the fact that it is often called upon to add color and depth to an orchestral arrangement. Thus, in her work, Kaastra is able to combine both her knowledge of cognitive science and her knowledge of the intricacies of musical performance on the bassoon to shed light not only on how musical perfor-

mance is cognitive, but also how cognitive science can be musical.

In “Grounding the Analysis of Cognitive Processes in Music Performance: Distributed cognition in musical activity”, Linda Kaastra takes the concept of musical performance and separates out the nuances of different types of performance and different aspects of the required cognition processes. Kaastra delves into the details of human cognitive function and musical ability in a way that is fascinating and simple to follow — even for those who have limited experience with music or cognitive science. Musical and non-musical readers alike will finish this book and continue to ponder the many cognitive processes which must take place in every detail of daily life.

...Kaastra explains that there are drastically different processes associated with different forms of playing music.

## INVENTION OF THE MONTH: ALEPH FARM’S MEATLESS MEAT

BY SHOSHANAH MARCUS,  
NEWS EDITOR

Aleph Farms, an Israeli biotech startup firm, announced and revealed the prototype for their revolutionary thin-cut beef steaks at the Asia-Pacific Agri-Food Innovation Summit on November 20, 2020 in Singapore. These steaks, however, are not technically from real meat. Instead, they are grown from the cells of a living cow.

Aleph Farms was co-funded by The Kitchen Hub, a food-tech incubator, and Professor Shulamit Levenberg of the Technion Institute of Technology in Israel. Their goal according to their website, is to revolutionize “the field of cultivated meat, growing delicious, real beef steaks from the cells of cows, eliminating the need for slaughtering animals or harming the environment.” Other objectives include “overcom-

ing dependencies on natural resources in food production” and “providing access to healthy nutrition to anyone, anytime, anywhere.”

In order to grow the meat, Aleph Farms retrieves cells from a healthy cow without killing the animal. These cells are able to grow and regenerate tissue,

mimicking the natural process of muscle-tissue

regeneration, which eventually forms a piece of meat similar in nature to meat directly from the cow.

The company is driven by the desire not only to produce meat that is healthier for consumers, but also as a means of protecting the environment. “With global demand for meat on the rise, we provide an eco-efficient solution to feed and nurture a clean and thriving planet,” states the Aleph Farms webpage.

Aleph Farms is also focusing

on producing the grown meat in an environmentally friendly manner, specifically focusing on “Sustainable BioFarming” and “Ecological Restoration.” This includes the goal of producing

grown meat with zero carbon emissions by 2025, promoting

The company is driven by the desire not only to produce meat that is healthier for consumers, but also as a means of protecting the environment.

resources.

Aleph Farms brought their mission to space and collaborated with the International Space Station (ISS) to provide their cultivated grown meat in an environment far away from any natural resources. In order to produce the meat under zero gravity conditions, Aleph Farms collaborated with the Russian branch of ISS to use a three dimensional muscle tissue bioprinter developed by 3D Bioprinting Solutions. On Oc-

tober 7, 2019, this experiment was done and proved to be successful, revolutionizing the way that meat is obtained in space and opening the door for other incredible applications of meatless meat.

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# SPACE X'S NASA ROCKET LAUNCH NOV. 2020

BY SARA MUHARREMI,  
STAFF WRITER

The name "Elon Musk" has been mentioned quite a few times in headlines these past couple of years. One of the things that he is known for is his love for outer space and NASA. Back in 2002, Musk founded his SpaceX program which is described on their website as a spaceflight company that "designs, manufactures and launches advanced rockets and spacecraft."

Most recently, SpaceX partnered up with NASA on November 15 to send four NASA astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS). Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover, Shannon Walker, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi

Nogushi, had been prepared for their six-month mission to the ISS as "Crew 1." Hopkins had expressed the crew's excitement for the mission and stated, "[w]e're ready for this launch, we're ready for our six months of work that is waiting for us on board the International Space Station and we're ready for the return."

Thank you to all the people at NASA and SpaceX and around the world that have helped us get to this point."

Crew 1's mission is the "first operational flight of SpaceX's Crew Dragon astronaut taxi and the second Crew Dragon mission to carry passengers on board." Back in May 2020, SpaceX launched its first crewed flight as a test mission to the ISS with NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley for two months. Their trip to the

station took almost 19 hours, but Crew 1's trip was supposed to last half the time. The Falcon 9 rocket launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 7:27 p.m. EST, and docked with the ISS the next day on the 16 at 11:01 p.m. EST. They're now going to embark on their six-

*Since SpaceX is a private company, this mission is a hopeful milestone for future commercial launches.*

month mission alongside three other crew members, already onboard the ISS, to continue spaceflight research.

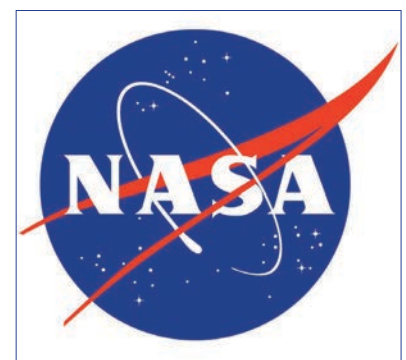
Since SpaceX is a private company, this mission is a hopeful milestone for future commercial launches. Phil McAlister, the director of commercial spaceflight development at NASA, said in a pre-launch conference that "not only can NASA transport out astronauts to and from the [ISS] with U.S. systems, but now,

for the first time in history, there is a commercial capability from a private sector entity to safely and reliably transport people to space." There is still considerable work to be done, but this is a huge first step to be able to make spaceflight more affordable and inclusive.

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## ANTI-MASK THEORIES DEBUNKED

SARAH BRILL,  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

As of December 16, 2020, the United States has had the largest number of coronavirus cases, counting 16.8 million total cases. Countries like Australia, on the one hand, have just hit 0 cases, New Zealand had a complete lockdown at 4 cases in March and has not experienced a surge at all, even China, back in April, hit 0 cases. So what is the United States doing wrong? For one thing, our country is divided. Many people claim that masks "do not work." For instance, there has been a popular trend on TikTok (a social media app) where anti-maskers place their spray bottles up to a mask and indicate that the water droplets are going through the mask. However, protests like these just show a lack of scientific understanding. A sneeze is not as big as a water droplet so their test is inherently flawed. Although scientists, including Bill Nye, have been disproving these theories, even creating videos on TikTok to contradict them, anti-maskers continue to create more theories to prove why they should

not wear a mask.

Another very popular opinion is that masks will somehow restrict the flow of oxygen or that there will be a buildup of carbon dioxide if the mask is worn for a long period of time. A credible source is not required to show that this is not the case. Masks

have been used in the hospital setting since 1897, when Polish surgeon Johann Mikulicz and French surgeon Paul Berger started using them in order to prevent infection while performing surgery. If masks somehow restricted oxygen flow, then from 1897-2020 there would be a considerable amount of deaths or medical emergencies from surgeons wearing masks. According to Mayo Clinic "[t]here is no risk of hypoxia, which is lower oxygen levels, in healthy adults. Carbon dioxide will freely diffuse through your mask as you breathe." Even in unhealthy adults, mask usage is common practice. If you have either volunteered in a hospital or have been a visitor, you will know that many patients, especially on the oncology (cancer) floor,

wear masks in order to protect themselves, while nurses, doctors, and staff, on the reverse, wear masks to protect those patients.

Additionally, there is a myth that someone is not required to wear a mask if they are well. Coronavirus has many dif-

ferent forms. While people may be symptomatic, with visible or tangible symptoms, they can also be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, without visible or tangible symptoms. When people are feeling healthy while actually being asymptomatic, they easily spread the virus to another person whom they encounter. As we know, coronavirus is expressed differently in each person, so it is important to wear a mask to keep yourself and others safe. With both parties wearing a mask, the transmission rate is low.

Some people believe masks have no impact on the spread of the virus or that someone else will wear a mask so they do not have to. Unfortunately, that is not how the virus works. In order to protect others from the virus I must wear a mask. In order to protect myself from

the virus, I need the other person to also wear a mask. This is a two way street which will only work if both parties are wearing a mask. A person might walk out of his or her house and say, "I am not going to wear a mask because everyone else will wear one." Unfortunately, half the population may think the same, which results in the increasing spread. According to the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, 33,000 deaths could have been avoided by October 1 if 95% of people wore masks in public.

Long story short, wear your mask. Protect yourself and others around you, simple as that.

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## INNOCUOUS INVADERS

BY ZIPPY SPANJER

Shield-back stink bugs. Kudzu. Sail-finned catfish. The terrifying murder hornet (*Vespa mandarinia*). And now, tegus. Invasive species have been a problem for centuries, and are often the fault of human species relocation.

The Argentine black and white tegu is a medium-sized lizard native to — you guessed it — Argentina. Fully grown, they can be 3-5 feet long. They are omnivores, happy to eat leaves, insects, and eggs. And this is where the trouble emerges.

Tegus were first found in the wild in Florida in 2012. The lizards are popular in

the exotic pet industry, but some people decided to release their pets into the wild instead of rehoming them. The tegus are thriving, which is positive for them, but they are eating the eggs of vulnerable species, disrupting the ecosystem.

A species is considered invasive if it is not native to the area it inhabits. So, in a sense, we humans are an invasive species. If the new species can fit into an ecological niche in its new environment, its invasive status will not necessarily be a problem. For example, the

peregrine falcon is an invasive species in New York City. After the species was nearly driven to extinction by pesticide use in the 1980s, they were reintroduced to the city, where they roost in skyscrapers and help keep the pigeon and rat populations under control.

The real concern emerges when the invasive species disrupt the local ecosystem. This tends to happen if the invasive species has no predators in the new area, or if the new species is itself an apex predator. In such cases, there are many ways an invasive species can

impact their environment. Some species, like feral cats, multiply out of control and eat prey that is necessary for the survival of native species.

Once an invasive species gains a foothold in a new environment, it can be hard to remove. In the case of tegus, the current system relies on people reporting tegu sightings, whereupon a team is sent out to humanely capture the lizard. The tegu will be rehabilitated and likely rehomed as a pet. This is a time-consuming and often inefficient process.

So, the next time you're thinking of releasing your exotic pet into the wild, don't. The consequences could be greater than you imagine.

In the case of tegus, the current system relies on people reporting tegu sightings, whereupon a team is sent out to humanely capture the lizard.

## DOOMSCROLLING: A “NEW” SCIENCE

BY TOVA SHMULEWITZ,  
STAFF WRITER

2020 has been a year full of negative news, including but not limited to the obvious, and ever-present, negativity in the press surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. People have gone as far as to create websites dedicated to listing negative events that have happened in the world this year, including the unfortunate and untimely deaths of Kobe Bryant and Chadwick Boseman. People have often found themselves scrolling, what is referred to as “doomscrolling,” for hours on end, engrossing themselves in this type of bleak media.

While the concept of doomscrolling is not a new one, the increasing amount of time people have spent doing it throughout this year has led to it becoming a popularized

word in today's lingo. But what exactly does this word mean?

Doomscrolling refers to excessive time spent scrolling through bad or depressing news. Reading article after article about COVID-19 every day or scrolling through social media to

find out what else has gone wrong this year are all forms of doomscrolling. This practice has been proven to have a negative impact on mental as well as physical health. In an experiment done in the 1990s, a group of individuals were split up and shown either optimistic, pessimistic, or neutral news. Those who had watched the pessimistic news became more worrisome about matters not just pertaining to the news they had just watched, but also about person-

al matters as well. Today, it is not just one piece of bad news, but rather a steady stream of depressing headlines. Needless to say, this will not have a positive

effect on people's mental health.

Unfortunately, this is an unsolvable anxiety-inducing problem, as staying informed during these times means absorbing an abundance of bad news. However, there are ways to limit exposure. A few of these methods have been outlined by Amelia Aldoa, clinical psychologist. Some of these include setting timers on apps or websites to limit the amount of exposure time or looking up positive things while also staying up-to-date on more unflattering daily

People have often found themselves scrolling, what is referred to as “doomscrolling,” for hours on end, engrossing themselves in this type of bleak media.

news. Other methods include limiting yourself to check the news once a day, or reading full articles instead of just scrolling through attention grabbing, dramatic headlines which are more likely to be more negative. Using these methods can help you stay informed, but in the healthiest way possible.

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# WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE VACCINES?



BY LEIA RUBINSTEIN

As we enter the tenth month of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is anxious for a return to normal life. Fortunately, several companies have made significant headway in their coronavirus vaccine development, and plan on being able to distribute them in the near future.

In the United States, the companies Pfizer and Moderna have each developed a vaccine and gone through trials showing their effectiveness. Both of these coronavirus vaccines utilize new gene-based technology involving messenger RNA (mRNA). Traditional vaccines inoculate patients with a weakened or inactive form of the whole virus to produce an immune response, but these new vaccines only use the special spike proteins that are located outside of the virus, which antibodies use to recognize the virus. Scientists were able to identify the specific genetic code that the coronavirus uses to produce these spike proteins. They put this genetic information into RNA, which will be injected into the patient who receives the vaccine. The RNA will then enter the body cells and cause them to produce the coronavirus spike proteins. The spike proteins will be exported from the cell and will prompt the immune system to make antibodies as a defense. These antibodies will remain in the body to fight off the virus if the

patient becomes infected at a later date.

Pfizer, who had partnered with Germany's BioNTech in March of 2020, announced that their vaccine is 95% effective and has no serious safety concerns. In their 44,000 subject trial, 162 out of the 170 subjects who developed coronavirus had received a placebo, and 9 out of the 10 severe coronavirus cases were volunteers who had received a placebo. Minimal side effects were seen: 3.8% of subjects experienced fatigue, 2% reported headaches. This

vaccine requires two shots administered three

weeks apart. It also must be stored at a very cold temperature of -94 degrees Fahrenheit, requiring special freezers. Once taken out it can only remain in the refrigerator for about five days.

The other vaccine being developed in the U.S. is from Moderna. This vaccine was shown to be 94.1% effective as in the 30,000 person trial, 185 of the 196 subjects who developed COVID-19 had taken the placebo. It is also considered safe, and the only side effects have been some subject reports of headaches, fatigue, or pain around the injection site. The Moderna vaccine also requires 2 injections, one month apart from each other. This vaccine does not require as cold a temperature as the Pfizer vaccine. Rather, it needs to be kept at -4 degrees Fahrenheit, which is about the temperature of a normal freezer. Once taken out it can remain stable in a refrigerator for up to 30 days.

Both of these vaccines are

still waiting for FDA approval before they can be administered to the public. Given the urgent need, the FDA plans to do a faster review process than it had done for previous vaccines. However, they ensured that it will still hold the vaccine to the high standards required of any other vaccine.

Judging by the fast progress these companies are making, they are projected to have ready to use vaccines as early as mid-December.

However, since both Pfizer and Moderna will only be able to produce limited

*However, they ensured that it will still hold the vaccine to the **high standards** required of any other vaccine.*

amounts of their vaccines, the current question becomes of who will receive the vaccine first? Health experts recommend that healthcare workers treating patients with coronavirus be the first to receive the vaccine followed by people at high risk, such as the elderly in nursing homes and prisoners. The general public is not predicted to gain access to a vaccine until the spring or the summer.

Ultimately, as the coronavirus continues to remain rampant throughout the country, it is reassuring to know that scientists and health experts are working hard to develop a vaccine that will end this pandemic. Many people have doubts about the vaccine's effectiveness, and are wary of the potential side effects a new vaccine can have. Further, people are nervous that these vaccines are going through faster approval processes than previous vaccines have gone through. However, they should recognize the precautions and many trials these companies have gone through to ensure that the vaccine is

safe. Currently, about 867 Americans are dying each day. As a country, we are desperate for a vaccine to stop the deadly surge of the coronavirus and return to life as normal, and the administration of these vaccines is the first step in doing so.

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# AIRBNB JOINS THE PARTY

BY JUDAH ESSES

As one of the most volatile years in the market comes to a close, it is being capped off by one of the biggest IPOs ever. Through disruptive innovation, Airbnb, a home-sharing giant, has broken into and become a leader in the hospitality and lodging industry. After many years of talking about a potential IPO, this past Thursday, Airbnb finally took their shares public. The shares opened on the Nasdaq at \$146 per share, more than double its \$68 IPO price and valuing it at more than \$100 billion. With this valuation, Airbnb is now already worth more than Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt combined. This hot debut comes despite the damage to its business from the pandemic, which forced it to lay off staff and to raise an emergency financing round to avoid bankruptcy earlier this year. The tide shifted when Chief Executive Brian Chesky started noticing that despite the drastic effects of COVID-19, there was money to be made in what looked like a dying market.

Although big cities have usually been Airbnb's strength, the company shifted its focus to local stays, where they saw an upwards trend in bookings. The management team acted hastily, redesigning their website and algorithms to be able to target local areas. By doing

this, Airbnb saw their booking rates return near pre-pandemic levels in July. More than half of these bookings came from within 300 miles away, a clear sign their new strategy was effective. By capitalizing on this new strategy, Airbnb is now on track to report a

*Airbnb is a fanatastic startup company, and because of its top of mind brand image, it has gained great interest from investors*

third-quarter profit this year, which, to many, seemed impossible considering COVID-19 still having a real effect on businesses across the globe.

Airbnb's jaw-dropping IPO follows many other IPOs in the past year, including Doordash (DASH), which took its shares public a day before Airbnb. They saw their share price rise a whopping 85% in its first day of trading. Just a few months ago, Snowflake (SNOW), a software and cloud company, took their shares public in the biggest software IPO ever. Last year, both Lyft (LYFT) and Uber (UBER) went public and also saw hefty multi-billion-dollar valuations. The IPO market is the hottest in years, and many expect this trend to continue into 2021.

However, not everyone is optimistic about Airbnb's stock frenzy. Many believe that AirBnB, as well as many other similar companies that have

seen massive growth during the pandemic, are going to see a correction. To many, the red hot IPO market looks very similar to the dot-com bubble in the early 2000s which led to billions of dollars lost in the market. Keith Fitz-Gerald, Fitz-Gerald Group chief investment officer, said in an interview with Yahoo Finance "This is Silicon Valley operating at its finest, creating excitement, creating froth, creating FOMO, and unfortunately, creating billionaires for the early investors and founders, not necessarily investors who think they're getting a bargain right now. In fact, I'm very worried that ... shares retreat sharply." Jim Cramer, in his show "Mad Money" on CNBC called IPO pricing "broken" and stated that the price action reminded him of the dot-com boom in 1999 when there was a very similar interest in tech companies from retail investors.

Airbnb is a fantastic startup company, and because of its top of mind brand image, it has gained great interest from investors. Additionally, millennials make up more than 50% of their users. By reevaluating their strategy and adjusting to new trends, Airbnb turned a crisis into an opportunity and is back on track to making a profit. However, it is hard to tell how deserved this lofty 100 billion dollar valuation is. With the IPO market booming like it's 1999, many are skeptical about the future, especially considering the current state of the U.S. economy. Nonetheless, it is truly remarkable how far Airbnb has come despite it being on the brink of bankruptcy just a few months ago.





# COUPANG: SOUTH KOREA'S AMAZON

BY BATIA SEGAL

## Introduction

With the Anti-Trust lawsuit going on against Amazon, I found myself questioning whether or not Amazon is as prominent in other countries. Being interested in the South Korean market, I questioned if Amazon is just as influential as it is in the U.S. This is where I discovered Coupang, South Korea's largest ecommerce site. Coupang is a startup company that began in 2010 by Harvard graduate Bom Kim and is already dominating their respective market. In fact, Coupang takes 24.6 percent of the ecommerce market as of March 2020. With this information, people may assume that this is simply because Koreans naturally would support native companies because of country loyalty. Although this may be partially true, research shows that the preference is due to other factors such as convenience and Amazon's inability to compete with the start-up.

## What is Coupang?

Coupang is an online marketplace that provides fast delivery to customers for a plethora of items, ranging from electronics to groceries. Coupang is much like Amazon in the sense that it is South Korea's largest online retailer. Their standing in South Korea is similar to Amazon's standing in the United States. Quite like Amazon's Prime service, Coupang's fast delivery service "Rocket Delivery" delivers orders within one to two days with 99.6 percent of orders being delivered within 24 hours. Not only is there fast delivery, a customer can also change their mind about an item once it is already

on its way. According to Forbes, a person could cancel their order once the order is on its way and change the destination of the order at the last minute. This ability is unheard of in the United States. In the United States, same day delivery service largely only exists in metropolitan areas. On the other hand, Coupang provides same day delivery for over 99.3 percent of orders according to CNBC.

Coupang's  
Fast Delivery

*For such a densely populated and interconnected country, it seems that Amazon would be quite profitable in South Korea*

## Services:

As mentioned earlier, Coupang has two main fast delivery services: Rocket Delivery and Dawn Delivery. Rocket Delivery is equivalent to Amazon Prime's 1-2 day delivery service and Dawn Delivery is equivalent to Amazon Prime's same day delivery service. Coupang has a competitive advantage to other Korean ecommerce companies by taking advantage of South Korea's dense population. This is done by stationing over two hundred warehouses spanning twenty million square feet. With this in mind, CNBC reports that the company claims that 70% of Koreans live within ten minutes of a Coupang logistics center, making it possible for quicker delivery and better for customer convenience. Coupang also takes advantage of South Korea's high speed network, allowing for a quick and seamless online shopping experience. For instance, the cut off for Dawn Delivery is midnight while Amazon's cut off is noon. In other words, a customer can order a pair of pants on Coupang at midnight and receive it by 7:00 a.m. that

morning. By taking advantage of South Korea's dense population and high speed networks, Coupang can provide a service like Dawn Delivery, making them more efficient than Amazon.

Can Amazon ever take over the South Korean online shopping market?

For such a densely populated and interconnected country, it seems that Amazon would be quite

profitable in South Korea. But this is not the case. Amazon has put off

expanding to South Korea for quite a while due to their lack of resources and their disastrous failure in China. Despite this, Amazon Prime exists in South Korea but is constantly crushed by Coupang and their competitive services. Coupang drives out competition by introducing unsustainable business practices in the short term such as pouring an overwhelming amount of money into warehouses and delivery trucks. In 2019, the company reported an operating loss of 593 million dollars. They took a massive loss to drive out competition, a risk few companies are willing to take. As of June 2020, Coupang still remains unprofitable. But this is not unheard of. Amazon remained unprofitable for 14 years since their inception in 1997. All things considered, if Amazon wants to compete in the Korean market, they would have to either acquire a similar company to Coupang, Coupang itself, or they would need to pour an overwhelming amount of funds into bolstering their presence in the Korean market.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, for Koreans, native loyalty plays quite a negligible role in favoring one company over another. In fact, Facebook is the top social media platform in the country along with their acquisition, Instagram. With this considered, Coupang dominates South Korea, not because it is a Korean company, but because of their fast delivery services and seamless online experience for customers.





# RISK MANAGEMENT



## COVID-19 ROCKS RISK MANAGEMENT

BY TOVIYA SLAGER

Risk carries many definitions. Sometimes it is referred to as the chance of losing money while other times it is seen as the chance that the actual outcome will be different from the expected outcome. This summer, the reality was very different from the expected and required many banks' and financial institutions' risk departments to redevelop the way they model, analyze, and assess risks within a very short time frame. There were many "black swan" events that were beyond the normal expectation; the 10-year treasury yield fell below 1%, unemployment abruptly skyrocketed to 13%, and mortgage-backed securities delinquency rates spiked. Each of the risk departments had to address these issues in their own way.

Perhaps the most catastrophic failure happened within the model risk management groups. The models that banks and financial institutions relied on had options of partial economic shutdowns, but did not account for the possibility of a full market shutdown. They relied on historical data that was not agile enough to move to high-frequency data, which may have helped put the models back on course. High-frequency data uses very recent data to build a model instead of historical data which is usually worthless in a crisis. This meant that many firms found themselves without useful models, leaving them with options such as relying solely on expert opinion, recalibrating using only recent data, or using a modified model with an expert opinion. This, however, led to inconsistent modified models within the firm. Moreover, rating systems could

not properly calculate risk, early warning systems lost accuracy, and liquidity models errors put positions at risk. For example, models that are not designed for the event they are predicting can lead to results such as produce many false alarms or discount the importance of a preemptive warning. Many of the fundamental ratios



*The models that banks and financial institutions relied on had options of **partial economic shutdowns**, but did not account for the possibility of a **full market shutdown***

(including hedging ratios) become inaccurate during a crisis. Another problem was that there were no backup models or procedures to fall back on in the event of current models becoming

unreliable. Banks and financial institutions will need to build models in the immediate future that can account for extreme black swan events in the case that they occur again.

Credit risk, the department responsible for calculating the risk of a loan not being paid back, fared much better in the COVID-19 crisis than they did in the Financial Crisis of '08. This was partially because of the better cash positions that were mandated by the federal regulations. Most countries loan-coverage ratios have increased since 2008. While most European countries only increased slightly (between 1-10%), the United States increased almost 60%, and China increased almost 70%. However, there are still problems that need to be faced such as rapidly changing credit scores, devaluation of underwritten property, and macroeconomic changes that need

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## BUSINESS

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to be included in risk calculation. When the lockdowns were lifted, companies once again began asking institutions for loans; however, the metrics to determine the risk of default could no longer be calculated on the standard models. Additionally, banks needed to recalculate the risk of previous loan default and how that would affect capital reserves required.

The most noticeable risk area for most is that of operational risk. With the rising popularity of the WFH culture, the entire operational risk, specifically regarding cyber risk, has changed dramatically. But moving entirely to home offices within days hasn't come without challenges. Some firms miscalculated the bandwidth needed, causing servers to become overwhelmed and resulted in many employees working offline. This seemingly small change led to the increasing risk of hacking, as the distance from co-workers made fishing emails easier since minimal verification is needed when coworkers are sitting an arms length away. This data is further reinforced by a report conducted by FINRA that claimed there was a spike in cyber attack reports within the first two quarters of 2020 than all of 2019. Additionally, domain names related to COVID-19 have increased four-fold in the second quarter and pretend to carry important COVID-19 related information to perform phishing attacks. Perhaps the most creative attack is criminals congratulating people on a recent presentation over LinkedIn and including a malicious link in the comment. Cyber insurers have become much stricter due to this increased risk and insurance premiums have been increasing as well. Safety requirements such as 2-step verification processes and

AI-driven security systems are now being required to remain insured.

Although the crisis led to many difficulties, it did highlight the shortcomings in the risk departments and allowed for major adjustments. Additionally, as many firms adjust their models, they are often including new variables that will help them model future disasters before they happen. One such factor is climate change, which includes risks of rising sea levels, changing weather patterns, and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide. Many of these factors are changing the productivity and danger level of many areas on earth. Many institutions have been pushing off incorporating these factors into their models thinking that the hard work can be done later, yet, COVID-19 has forced the creation of new models and allowed many of these factors to be included.

To highlight the reason many firms realized the importance of including these new variables, one needs to just look at firms that label themselves Environment, Social and Corporate Governances (ESG). According to Titan Investors, hedge funds that focused on ESG saw the risk of the pandemic in January, a month earlier than other funds. This allowed them to plan ahead and protect their portfolios for when the market crash was going to happen. Such an example of how using newer variables help create greater accuracy in predicting the markets highlights why many firms are looking at updating many of their models.

For many of the new traders who began after the crash, looking at the burden institutional investors faced from a downturn may help give a word of caution in the risky space of equities.

It is fun when the market is up, but when it dips, even the smartest have difficulty knowing what will happen.

*The most noticeable risk area for most  
is that of operational risk*

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## SSSB CLUB PROFILE: YU MENSWEAR CLUB

BY NATHAN HAKAKIAN ON  
BEHALF OF THE YU OBSERVER

**Club Name:** YU Menswear Club

**Heads:** Founder and President — SJ Tannenbaum; VPs — Benji, Feldmus, Benny Kutner, Binyamin Sloves, Natanel Salman, Max Leventer, and Max Baker

**Relevant Campus(es):** Wilf and Beren

**What is your club's mission statement?:** The mission of the YU Menswear Club is to inspire, educate and introduce students to real world fashion and menswear professionals — both from the business and creative ends. These professionals have included CEOs and founders of their own companies, social media influencers with thousands of followers on their various platforms, bespoke tailors and more.

**Why is this club important?:** This club is important because it allows students to learn more about a field — fashion and specifically menswear — that they may not have been exposed to previously. College is about trying new things and exploring possible areas of interest in order to better know yourself and what you may want to do in the future. After students attend our events, hear from our guest speakers, read our industry news updates, watch or download our style videos and pictures, or engage with our club's content in any way, we want them to walk away feeling that they have gained something — whether it be for a possible future career or simply for their own general knowledge/interests. Additionally, we want our members — or any students that attend our events — to feel inspired to chase their passions, interests and dreams no matter what they are or how unlikely they seem. We believe in out-of-the-box thinking and goal-setting.

**What was your pull to get involved in/start the club?:** The pull to start the club was based around my love of menswear and style. I truly believe — and have felt for myself — that

the way you dress truly makes a difference in how you conduct yourself, how others view and treat you, and how you view and treat yourself. I knew that I loved fashion and

*This club is important because it allows students to learn more about a field-fashion and specifically menswear*

menswear and that friends of mine did as well. Due to this knowledge, I founded the Menswear Club during my first semester at YU in Fall 2018. I love that the club gives students the opportunity to explore a creative and interesting area, meet with real professionals, and network with students of similar interests to create a real community on campus.

**What are some things your club has done in the past?:** In the past, we have had social media influencers such as Diego León (@dandyinthebronx) and Jon Shanahan (@the\_kavalier), company founders and CEOs such as Hillel Lichtenstein from Made2Measure Bespoke, Michael Berkowitz (SSSB '10) from Norwegian Wool, and Ray Li from Sene. In addition to our speakers, we provide our members with content via our club Whatsapp group chat such as deals, exclusive discount codes, industry news, and style tips and tutorials.

**What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?:** Next semester (COVID permitting), we would like to visit the atelier of Yosel Tiefenbrun. Mr. Tiefenbrun is a former rabbi who trained on London's Savile Row to become a bespoke tailor and has been featured in GQ magazine. We would also like to bring back menswear influencer Diego León, who has presented to the club twice in the past and is always one of our best speakers. Additionally, we would like to have workshops in which students learn fashion design skills, such as tailoring, drawing, and designing on Adobe creative cloud, in addition to fashion business skills such as fashion marketing, branding, entrepreneurship and more.

**With COVID, how is your club adjusting?:** COVID has not been terribly negative for our club.

Unfortunately, there was one event we had planned in which we were invited to visit the atelier of GQ-featured, Savile Row-trained

tailor and former rabbi — Yosel Tiefenbrun. However, we had to postpone that event due to the pandemic. Despite that postponed event, we have thankfully had three amazing guest speakers present to the club this semester via Zoom, which were events co-branded with the Marketing Society: Jon Shanahan aka "The Kavalier" who is a menswear and lifestyle influencer and expert, Hillel Lichtenstein, a co-founder and CEO of Made2Measure Bespoke, and Ray Li, a co-founder and CEO of Sene, a custom clothing company for men and women specializing in performance fabrics.

**What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?:** If you have a passion or interest — no matter what it is — someone else probably has that passion or interest as well. So don't be afraid to share that interest with others. Just create your club, set up events, advertise them well, and even if very few students actually come, they can still get a ton out of the programming. They can then tell their friends and your club will grow. The Menswear Club has had events with as many as 20 students and as few as seven; However, we have found that small, intimate events with our highly experienced and successful speakers have actually allowed our students to engage and ask any and all questions that they may have in a safe and welcoming environment. When it comes to club event attendance, sometimes less is more. If your club is not based around guest speakers, but is instead one based on shared content in a group chat, then share any and all content that you think your members will find interesting. In the Menswear Club group chat, we try to share special deals and exclusive company discount codes with our members (such as the 10% discount code "WeLoveYU" which you can use at custom clothing

company, Sene), in addition to industry news articles/videos, style videos/pictures, and more. The great thing about sharing content in a groupchat is that even when you can't have a guest speaker, you can still engage with your members.

Anything else to say about your club: I would just like to take this opportunity to thank my current VPs — Benji Feldmus, Max Baker, Binyamin Sloves, Natanel Salman, Max Leventer, and Benny Kutner, former VPs, club members, student liaisons, student council presidents and vice presidents, and everyone in the Office of Student Life for helping create a wonderful club with truly unique experiences for the YU student body. If even one student is inspired from the Menswear Club to take on a challenge and share their unique and creative interest/s with others, I believe the club has been successful.

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## BUSINESS

## THE 10% DIVIDEND YOU (PARTIALLY) JUST MISSED

BY YEHUDA WAITMAN

Years after the coronavirus pandemic has faded into distant memory, when masks and social distancing will seem like foreign concepts, one aspect of the unique times we find ourselves in will surely be continuously studied and analyzed — especially, the pandemic’s effect on our financial markets. Markets tumbled as the pandemic was unfolding, with some indices losing 40-50% value in a matter of weeks — an already gloomy situation was made even gloomier. Yet, something remarkable happened over the course of the next few months: financial markets skyrocketed, with the biggest indices — including the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500, NASDAQ — reaching new highs amid soaring hospitalizations and battered economies. Despite the fact that the markets are showing clear signs of investor optimism, not all firms have been lucky enough to hop on the “rollercoaster” ride back to the top, thereby opening up opportunities to capitalize on mispricings — incorrectly priced shares. Many of these mispricings have since dried up as investors took notice, but some opportunities remain, and perhaps none more notable than Exxon Mobil. But by the time you’re reading this article, you may have already missed it.

Exxon Mobil, the global energy behemoth and descendant of John Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, is no stranger to wild swings in the markets. Unlike firms such as Facebook or Amazon, whose successes are largely dependent on their abilities to develop money making products and fend off competition, Exxon wields much less power in determining its own success. Selling prices of Exxon’s products — mostly crude oil, natural gas, and other forms of energy — are determined by trading on the markets several months ahead of delivery date. For Exxon, even if it achieves supreme supply chain efficiency and has superior products than rivals, its profits are capped by prices in the markets. Whether for

the good or the bad, at the end of the day Exxon does not truly control how much money it makes from selling its products. For the past several years Exxon has poured billions of dollars into new investments hoping they would pay off several years down the line, thereby limiting short-term cash maneuverability. Finding itself already cash-strapped in the short term prior to the pandemic, Exxon got hit with an uppercut to the face by the freefall in oil prices brought about by the pandemic. Exxon has quickly found itself in the “red” for consecutive quarters for the first-time ever. The firm’s shares have taken a beating, falling from roughly \$70 in January, hitting a low of \$30 in March, and settling at \$43 as of December 13.

Clearly, unlike many high-flying technology stocks, Exxon has been left out of the markets run to the top, and for largely good reason. The company is facing a severe financial crisis unlike it has ever seen before, leaving some wondering if it will ever be able to truly recover. Making matters worse, the company recently wrote down the value of its natural gas assets to the tune of \$20 billion, has announced layoffs for 15% of its global workforce, and was forced to borrow money to make recent payments. With all this in mind, many investors were puzzled when Exxon’s executives recently reiterated their commitment to maintaining its quarterly dividend amount in the coming year. Investors and analysts alike quickly got to work calculating exactly how Exxon might be able to follow through with that promise, and the results were not pretty. Some have forecasted a shortfall for 2021 of up to \$48 billion, and declared that Exxon might be forced to cut its dividend for the first time in decades. With the above in mind, you might be wondering: “Where’s the mispricing opportunity here? It seems justified! Perhaps overvalued!” However, just a quick look at the news and numbers shows that things are just a bit brighter than they seem.

**Clearly, unlike many high-flying technology stocks, Exxon has been left out of the markets run to the top, and for largely good reason**

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PAGE

# ExxonMobil



## BUSINESS

THE 10% DIVIDEND YOU  
(PARTIALLY) JUST MISSED

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Many analysts have underappreciated the

fact that oil prices could in fact rise significantly in the coming months. The March/April drop in oil prices was driven by two main factors: overall market uncertainty and the evaporation of global demand. The first factor has been overcome, and while the second still largely remains true, the situation is quickly improving as the Pfizer vaccine rolls out. Even without vaccine developments, people across the globe have returned considerably to airports and are taking road trips again. On top of this, Crude Oil prices have risen 40% in the past six weeks, following output decisions by some of the largest oil producing nations worldwide. Seeing as Exxon's profits are much more heavily tied to the markets than many other firms, if oil prices do in fact continue to rise as many forecast, Exxon's bottom line will continue to improve. While this is only part of the profit equation, Exxon has announced plans to cut operational costs to the tune of Billions (beyond just the job eliminations), and has scaled back on its plans to pour money into its long-term investments. In short, with the vaccine rollout expected to continue worldwide, many experts are now predicting a further rise in oil prices, and with Exxon's efforts to save Billions in costs the future of Exxon appears to be far brighter than meets the eye. The root of Exxon's existential crisis from the spring is well on its way to being eradicated.

Finally, let us consider all this information in light of Exxon's stock price. At the start of November, Exxon's stock was trading at \$32 a share, with a roughly \$3.50 annual dividend. This amounted to a dividend yield of over 10%. Depending on the day, this number represented the first or second highest dividend yield in the entire S&P 500. For a company with a 150 year history, nearly \$250 billion dollars in revenue, assets across the world, and decades of consistent dividend payments, this was rather remarkable. When oil prices began to rise in November, investors began to view Exxon's problems as formidable but not insurmountable. Exxon's stock price has trended significantly upwards, sitting at \$43 as of December 13, representing a 40% gain (notice the correlation with oil prices). By now, you might be feeling some regret having missed out on the 10% dividend yield which was available just six short weeks ago. Realize, however, that despite the rise in Exxon's stock, its current price still offers an impressive 8% dividend yield, still good for one of the highest in the S&P 500. While you may have missed the 10% dividend yield, you really only partially missed it.

Exxon's problems certainly seem concerning, and this article was not meant to belittle them in any form. This article is also not coming to argue that Exxon is risk-free, and anyone who chooses to invest is assured to reel in profits — real threats very much do exist. However, despite these threats, when one appreciates that

Exxon considers its dividend payments "sacred," — having increased its annual dividend for 37 consecutive years — and the improving broader economic conditions, maybe, just

maybe, Exxon's juicy 8% divi-

dividend yield is too good to turn away.

*If oil prices do in fact continue to rise as many forecast, **Exxon's bottom line will continue to improve.***

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# THE “ANIMANIACS” REBOOT ISN’T PERFECT, BUT HAS ITS MOMEMENTS

BY TALYA STEHLEY,  
STAFF WRITER

I hadn’t been particularly excited for the recently released reboot of “Animaniacs”. In its original form, “Animaniacs” aired 99 episodes between 1993 and 1998. The cartoon’s main characters are the Warner Brothers, Wakko and Yakko, as well as their sister Dot, a reference to the Warner Brothers animation studio that produced the show. In-universe, Wakko, Yakko and Dot are cartoon characters who have been locked away since their creation during the golden age of theatrical animation in the 1930s, only to escape to cause generalized mischief. The show’s premise is flexible. While many episodes feature the Warner siblings bothering people at the Warner Brothers movie studio, just as many place them in some other place and time, often parodying some aspect of pop culture. Sometimes there are educational songs, you may have seen “The Nations of the World”, which is popular and frequently remixed on YouTube. “Animaniacs” was a variety show. In addition to the Warners, every episode contained other shorts from a wide cast of characters that were more-or-less self-contained. “Pinky and The Brain”, a recurring segment about two lab rats trying to take over the world, was well-liked enough to get its own spin-off series in 1995. I was always partial to “Chicken Boo”, which was about a giant chicken trying to live among humans, whose goals were inevitably thwarted once the people around him realized he wasn’t a man, but a chicken. The original “Animaniacs” was a show that threw a lot of spaghetti at the wall, and while not all of it stuck, it was often very funny.

Which brings us back to the topic of the recent reboot. The original “Animaniacs” ran for a decent amount of time. This wasn’t an “Invader Zim” or “Clone High” situation where a series was cancelled prematurely and later developed a cult following. To me at least, a reboot didn’t feel necessary. In the first episode, the Warners sing a whole song about how reboots and remakes exist just to make money. It’s mildly amusing, but my initial impression of the show was that it had crossed the line from being self-aware to being overly self-conscious, to its own detriment. The characters also note that the show was actually written back in 2018, which is unfortunate for a show so reliant on pop-culture references, released in a year when a lot of things changed. This only contributes to the overall sense of irrelevance.

And yet, despite my initial negative impression, I did watch the show through to the end. The bit that finally won me over happened in the third episode, during a sketch based around the Olympic Games. Despite the fact that the sketch isn’t as topical as it was supposed to be, it has some genuine laughs, and some great visual gags. I’m not so cynical that I can watch a cartoon character win a game of table tennis by eating all the balls instead of hitting them and not laugh. And once I reached that

point, I started to genuinely enjoy the new season of “Animaniacs”.

“Pinky and The Brain” is also back, with new, vaguely vapor-wave visuals to go along with that classic theme song. One standout episode involves Brain breaking into the NSA, to get a favor from Edward Snowden. I guess the writers figured that since Snowden can’t come back to the U.S. without being arrested for treason, they can depict him making out with a houseplant with impunity. On the other hand, another “Pinky and the Brain” segment is downright nasty towards non-exiled late-night TV host Seth Myers, so who knows. The episode where Brain built a robot to be his equal in intelligence is something of a reread of the episode from the original series where he made Pinky as smart as he was, but was enjoyable nonetheless. Because “Pinky and the Brain” is more plot-driven than the main “Animaniacs” segments, it’s less susceptible to the sense that it’s struggling for relevance. Regardless of what’s going on in the world, the Brain wants power and Pinky helps him in his own bumbling fashion.

The original “Animaniacs” was a variety show, featuring a number of different recurring segments, but “Animaniacs” 2020 pares down the cast significantly, with

only the Animaniacs themselves and Pinky and the Brain being carried over from the original show. Two new segments are introduced, each occurring only once. “Star-

box and Cindy” is forgettable, about an alien that a little girl has mistaken for a toy. The other is episode 9’s delightfully absurd “The Incredible Gnome In People’s Mouths”, which had me laughing from start to finish. It comes out of nowhere, has its own artstyle and unnecessarily detailed premise, and may be my favorite part of the whole series. Though the show eliminates some clutter by doing so, cutting so many of the old segments makes the show’s structure feel slightly odd. Most episodes follow the format: Warner siblings segment, “Pinky and the Brain”, another Warner segment. Other segments are few and far between, meaning the end product doesn’t feel like a true variety show. Instead we have two different cartoons stapled together, for reasons that don’t quite make sense anymore. In a way the show’s structure is emblematic of its larger problem, that it’s uncomfortable with what it used to be, yet unwilling to move significantly forward. Which is a shame. When the show is willing to experiment, for example the aforementioned “The Incredible Gnome In People’s Mouths” it shows potential, but too often it gets caught up in its own self-loathing.

While I enjoyed the 2020 reboot of “Animaniacs”, it’s hard to deny that it’s something of a mixed bag. The animation is high-quality, and nicely styled. It’s always cool when the style changes for the sake of a joke. There’s a parody of action anime that’s unironically really cool looking. It’s jokes are often funny, but also often cringe-inducing, and overall it could have benefitted from more variety in segments.

*While I enjoyed the 2020 reboot of “Animaniacs”, it’s hard to deny that it’s something of a mixed bag*





ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT: A SHOW ABOUT CHESS THAT CAPTIVATED THE WORLD

BY YAIR SHAVRICK,  
OPINION EDITOR

**\*SPOILER ALERT\***

This article will have information that may give away plot information. If you would like to watch the show, I would recommend first doing so before reading this article.

“The Queen’s Gambit”, a limited series on Netflix, portrays Beth Harmon on her journey to become the world champion of chess. The show takes place in the mid-1950s and portrays the struggles of sexism and adversity women at the time faced. This show has exceptionally high ratings, being the most viewed show on Netflix for many months, and reinvigorated a “chess craze.” Chess set sales around the country have skyrocketed, and the show’s feel-good plot easily explains this increase.

Beth, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, grows up in a female-only orphanage that is extremely strict and religious. In the time she spent there, she discovers the custodian worker, Mr. Shaibel, playing chess.

She quickly becomes infatuated with the game and finds every possible time she can to return to the basement of the building and play with Mr. Shaibel.

Concerningly, the orphanage staff place the children on medications, one of which seems to induce hallucinations and tiredness. Beth quickly becomes addicted to these pills because they allow her to envision chess being played on her bedroom ceiling, thus furthering her chess prowess.

One of the reasons this show has such success is that it’s a limited series. This is a deviation from the norm of future seasons and extended plotlines is a lovely shock to viewers, as each character is developed well, the episodes are potent with information and plotline, and most importantly, character arcs are completed. This includes Beth’s love life, development of her friendships (which she struggles with throughout the show), and her chess standing in the world.

The show has been watched and enjoyed by the majority of viewers. Rotten Tomatoes, a review website of movies and television shows which is usually very strict and critical of shows, has given “The Queen’s Gambit” extremely high ratings. I personally thoroughly enjoyed this series as it intricately delves into the psychology of a hurt person who struggles to find help with addiction, emotions, sociability, and meaning in her life. This is a quality show which was crafted excellently and hooks the viewer with incredible writing and acting, and I highly recommend watching the show.

**One of the reasons that this show has such success is that it’s a limited series**

From this discovery onward, she quickly learns the ins and outs of chess, and within a few years she has the ability to defeat an entire high school chess team simultaneously. The reliance Beth has on these pills lasts throughout the entire show elegantly depicts the dangers of prescription drugs and their addictive properties. This can be identified as one of the main plotlines the show attempts and successfully tackles.



# MY UPCOMING SOLO YU CONCERT

BY YOSEF ROSENFELD,  
FEATURES EDITOR

On Sunday, February 28, I will be livestreaming a solo concert, titled “Road to Recovery,” via Zoom. It will be my seventh musical performance as a music major at Yeshiva College, featuring an opening set of mostly original songs followed by a closing set with original-lyric covers of songs by contemporary artists. The “double concert” is meant to make up for the in-person performances that I was unable to have during the Spring and Fall 2020 semesters due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as I have already earned one “Performance: Chamber Music” credit for each of those two terms. Like at my previous solo concerts (at Schottenstein Theatre on the Wilf Campus), I will be performing my setlist on vocals, guitar and piano. The show will be open to the public, as always, and has been scheduled for 4 p.m. EST to accommodate viewers in distant time zones and make it easier for them to virtually attend.

## Opening Set

During the first half of the concert, I will be playing eight original songs that tell the story of my emotional journey — from anxiety to ecstasy — between November 2018 and May 2019. The lyrics of “I Wanna Do Better” convey a sense of tremendous spiritual guilt and a longing to improve religiously (“...escaped the

truth and chased the lies / I am a sinner in disguise / But I wanna do better”). The concert’s title track, “Road to Recovery,” discusses repeated failure to correct those internal issues, while simultaneously recognizing that “when you’ve hit rock bottom, there ain’t nowhere else to fall.” The song also confronts personal struggles with alcohol abuse (“Beer cans and empty bottles / Couldn’t stay out of trouble”), lingering feelings of remorse (“Teardrops on guilty blankets / I said I couldn’t take it”) and suicidality (“It’s way too early to end this journey / That I don’t understand”). The emotionally charged narrative concludes

*Audience members will have multiple opportunities to send in special requests for me to sing and play on guitar/piano*

triumphantly with “Prove Myself Wrong,” where I acknowledge through my own homiletic interpretation of Psalms 145:16 that God has provided the tools that each of us needs to overcome our individualized life challenges. Between the first and second set, there will be a brief intermission during which the audience can ask questions, submit song requests or simply get up and stretch for a few minutes.

## Closing Set

The second half of the concert will be dedicated to archived songs that I wrote back in high school — melodies written by other artists that I used for my own lyrical composi-

tions. For example, I wrote a song called “Web of Lies” to the tune of “Why Try” by Ariana Grande about being exposed to the apparent disloyalty among even the closest of my high school friends. I also covered Sabrina Carpenter’s “On Purpose” and wrote new words addressing the cryptic approach I often take to songwriting, naming my version “None of Your Business.” My song “Socially Handicapped” is a cover of “Treat You Better” by Shawn Mendes; it comments on the common generational and cultural gap that sometimes prevents high school teachers from fully connecting with their students. The final song on the setlist, “Just the Same”

(cover of “Hold On for Dear Love” by Bridgit Mendler), expresses my profound gratitude to my parents and Father in Heaven (God) for their unconditional love, and

vows to pass on that same unconditional love to my own children.

Audience members will have multiple opportunities to send in special requests for me to sing and play on guitar/piano. The official date for my eighth and final YU concert will be announced toward the end of the show, and I will stay on the Zoom meeting afterward to answer any questions related to the setlist and/or YU’s music department. I look forward to seeing you virtually on February 28 at 4 p.m. EST.

Zoom link: <https://yeshiva-university.zoom.us/j/91632960580>





# BEST THINGS TO DO IN THE NYC WINTER



BY ABIGAIL GRIGORYAN,  
STAFF WRITER

There is no doubt that New York City is perfect during the winter. The stores are packed with holiday shoppers, festive window decor, crazed hot chocolate drinkers, and so much to do. So where should you start when planning your winter break bucket list? Here is a compilation of a few new and unknown New York City experiences for this season.

## 1. The New York Botanical Garden Glow

This winter season, the New York Botanical Garden

added a light show, NYBG Glow. The whole property has LED lights and festive installations. There are also dance performances, ice carving demonstrations and other seasonal activities to enjoy. It will run from Dec 18, 2020-Jan 9, 2021.

## 2. The Dyker Heights Holiday Lights

In Brooklyn, Dyker Heights residents take the holidays very seriously. The houses have thousands of lights, life-size moving toys, inflatables, and more. Take a walk around the neighborhood or a ride on the bus checking out all of the amazing displays.

## 3. TurnStyle Underground Market

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has finally reopened the TurnStyle Underground Market, just in time for the holidays! The Underground Market is located within the Columbus Circle Subway Station. It consists of 39 retailers with shops and kiosks offering food, drinks, apparel, music, and more.

## 4. Go Sledding at Brooklyn Parks

With snow coming our way, a free activity to do is go sledding with friends at Fort Greene

Park. The

*Check out the Winter Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Winter break is a great time to expand your horizons and explore some museums*

massive space and public atmosphere allows for fun and social distancing. While every NYC public park takes initiative in free winter activities, the most popular one is sledding at Fort Greene.

## 5. Check out the Winter Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Winter break is a great time to expand your horizons and explore some museums. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is currently having an exhibition that includes a magnificently lit, twenty-foot tree that stands over a vivid eighteenth-century Neapolitan Nativity scene. If you plan to go, don't forget your student I.D. for a discount.



## YU OBSERVER DECEMBER POETRY FEATURE: REVISION

BY AMALYA TEITELMAN, SOCIAL  
MEDIA MANAGER

Each month, the YU Observer sends a call to YU students for poetry submissions following a specific theme. This month, the theme was “Revision”, and we are featuring Amalya Teitelman’s piece, “Knowing Color”.

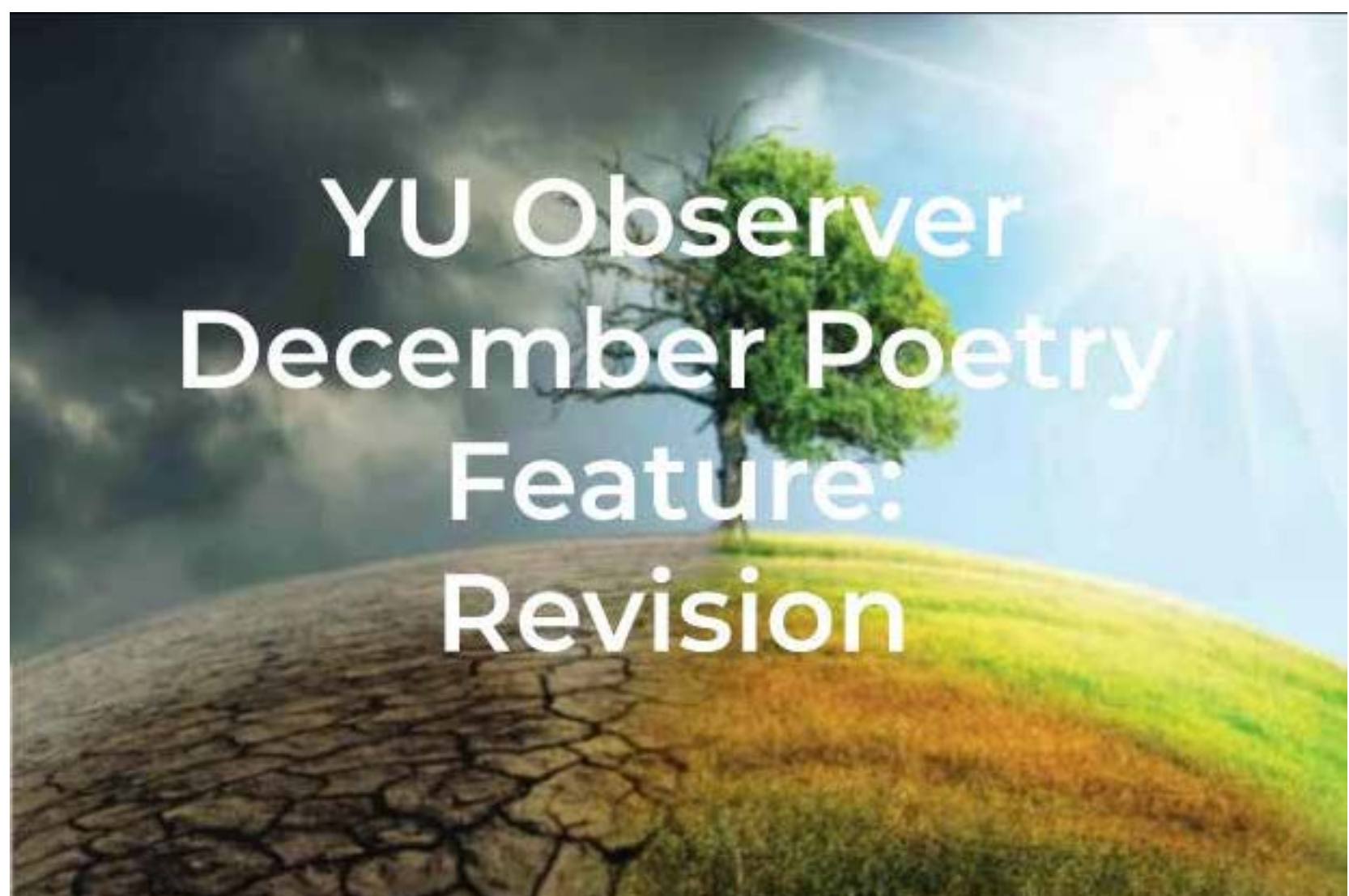


### Knowing Color

We think we know color  
How could we not?  
We have been taught since we  
were mere children  
Roses are red  
Violets are Blue  
Green whispers in our ears as we  
dance through the forest  
Black twirls around us as we look  
to the shimmering night sky  
But our eyes deceive us  
The brick walls to our world  
We are frightened when we see  
black  
Either skin or cloth  
Redheads of course have wild  
untamed tempers  
Whisper and tiptoe around them  
Never hire a blonde  
Ignorance surrounds them  
Don't trust someone with green  
eyes

For  
their trickery and mischief deceives  
you  
These ideals fly through our heads  
when we step outside  
In the back of our minds as we con-  
verse back and forth  
But hold on  
Stop  
Think  
Where did these come from?  
Was it us  
Was it them?  
Why do we separate ourselves  
Flowers flourish together in harmony,  
red against green  
A butterfly's wings flit back and forth  
between black and yellow  
Maybe we should take a step back and  
look at nature's colors  
Observe the harmony learn from the  
outside  
Then maybe we will truly know color

Do you want to see your writing published? The theme for February's poetry submissions is “Clarity”. Send all submissions to [theyuobserver@gmail.com](mailto:theyuobserver@gmail.com) by February 4.





## ARTS &amp; CULTURE



## (KNIGHT TO) “THE QUEEN’S GAMBIT” REVIEW

BY SARAH BRILL, SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

Netflix comes through once more with a stellar mini-series about intellect, struggle, drug abuse, and a game no one really cares about. “The Queen’s Gambit,” based on the book by Walter Tevis, is more than a cerebral masterpiece, it delves into the life of prodigious introvert Elizabeth Harmon (Anya Taylor-Joy) and her climb from orphan to a world-renowned chess champion.

The show starts off with orphaned Beth Harmon in the Methuen Home, an all girls Christian orphanage. Residing down in the basement of the Methuen Home was Mr. Shabiel (Bill Camp), a janitor of the orphanage and a chess player — Beth’s first teacher. After every game she would play with Mr. Shabiel, Beth would return to the sleeping hall and take her sedation pill, required by all students, which allowed her the mental capacity to replay games and visualize the board. Beth soon became a prodigy, beating out high school level boys at the mere age of nine. Unfortunately, Beth’s addiction to this drug progresses, and once the pill is no longer mandated by the orphanage, Beth struggles

through withdrawal. Her addiction leads her to break into the medicine box and shovel down hundreds of pills at once as though they were candy.

Throughout the season, we see Beth discover her

**Who knew that Netflix** *would be able to make a TV show that makes chess, a seemingly uninteresting and slow-paced game, be so entertaining and encapsulating*

passion and addiction to this game. In her teenage years, Beth is adopted by the Wheatley family and is thrust into a regular high school scene with her source of adrenaline, chess, taken away from her. We see Beth struggle with the normal high school experience ultimately signing up for her first chess tournament without practice in order to feed her drive. Beth’s passion for chess progress throughout the proceeding seasons beating out cocky male chess players who underestimate Beth for her age and gender.

This TV show should be on your must-watch list of 2020. Not only does it tackle issues such as substance and alcohol abuse with grace and composure, it conquers the themes of friendship, loyalty, and the importance of family and passion. We see Beth struggle with isolation and turn to alcohol and drug-use as a form of relief; and

on the flip, we also see Beth gain confidence in her chess skills completely dominating that world. This mini-series allows the watcher to not only experience chess through Beth’s eyes, but to grow up with her and see the progression of a character who was shy and stand-offish, to a character who is confident and determined.

Who knew Netflix would be able to make a TV show that makes chess, a seemingly un-

interesting and slow-paced game, be so entertaining and encapsulating. The characters within this show are dynamic from Beth’s best friend Jolene (Moses Ingram) who has her back even when separated from each other, to Harry Beltik (Harry Melling), who Beth won her first major victory over. Needless to say, this TV show checks-off all the boxes of a great mini-series and everyone should be watching it.

**Thank you for reading!  
If you have any questions,  
comments, concerns or want to  
get involved, reach out to us  
theyuobserver@gmail.com  
frumalanda725@gmail.com  
We would love to hear from you!**