

# THE COMMENTATOR

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

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ISSUE NO. 7

## Leading RIETS Roshei Yeshiva Receive Moderna Coronavirus Vaccine



GIFTERPHOTOS

Rabbis Willig and Schachter received a vaccine for COVID-19.

By DAVID SCHMIDT

This article was originally published online on Jan. 3, 2021.

Rabbis Hershel Schachter and Mordechai Willig, *roshei yeshiva* of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS),

received Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 24 and urged others to do the same. Their vaccination was recorded and posted online, garnering nearly 10,000 views on YouTube.

"I highly recommend everyone should take the vaccine," Rabbi Schachter said in the video after being vaccinated. "[Hashem] gave us such *chochmah* (wisdom) to develop the vaccine — we should use it. It can protect

us and protect the whole community." Rabbi Schachter added that he believes everyone who receives the vaccine should make the blessing "*hatov v'hameitiv*," the blessing one makes on good things happening for the general public, just as he did. Rabbi Schachter is 79, and Rabbi Willig is 73, and are both in a higher-risk category for severe illness if COVID-19 is contracted.

Rabbi Schachter and Rabbi Willig took

the vaccine at ParCare Community Health Network's office. On Dec. 26, New York State Health Commissioner Howard Zucker announced in a press release that ParCare would be investigated due to reports that the company "may have fraudulently obtained COVID-19 vaccine, transferred it to facilities in other parts of the state in violation of state

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## 27 COVID-19 Cases Reported on Campus as Quarantine Spaces Reach Maximum Capacity

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was originally published online on Jan. 29, 2021.

Less than two weeks since the spring semester began on Jan. 17, New York State's COVID-19 Tracker reported 27 positive COVID-19 cases at YU's undergraduate campuses with 54 students quarantined and 20 isolated as of Jan. 29. YU's campus quarantine capacity has 32 available rooms, all of which are in use. These numbers follow the general rise in cases, hospitalizations and deaths across New York City since October.

On Jan. 26, Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel emailed the student body that "Since returning to campus this Spring semester, we have identified

*"While we await vaccinations and herd immunity, it is important to continue following our health and safety protocols despite the COVID-19 fatigue that we may feel almost one year out. We need everyone's help to keep our campuses safe."*

Dr. Chaim Nissel, Vice Provost for Student Affairs

multiple positive COVID-19 cases on the Wilf and Beren campuses," adding that YU's COVID-19 Monitoring Program identified "most of these cases." YU subsequently informed students and staff who needed to quarantine or isolate, the email said. If the lesser of 100 or 5% of a university's total on-campus population — including students, faculty and staff — tests positive for COVID-19 during a 14-day period,

all in-person learning must move online and campus activity must be limited for 14 days, according to NYS guidelines. As of publication, YU did not respond to The Commentator's request for a current figure of its on-campus population.

"As we have recently told students and parents, over the past few weeks, the number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise, both in the tri-state area and across the nation,"

Nissel told The Commentator. "In addition to sending out reminders to ensure that students are participating in the COVID Monitoring program, we have put into place additional systems to identify those who have not participated as well as consequences for those not abiding by the rules."

Nissel's Jan. 26 email also included information about the addition of a once-a-week Abbot Binax test — which will allow for "quicker results" and better contact tracing — to the existing COVID-19 testing protocol for "all undergraduate students who live or come to campus, including RIETS (Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary) students." Its implementation began on Thursday, Jan. 28.

YU's protocol requires those students to

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YC Jewish Studies Changes

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Healing after the Trump Presidency

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## Vive Les Humanités!

By ELISHEVA KOHN

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted me to reevaluate the purpose and value of higher education. No longer being able to muster much enthusiasm for any of my classes, I find myself sitting mindlessly through hours of Zoom sessions, only to be confronted with hours of seemingly pointless Canvas assignments. During class, I scroll through the news and my messages; coronavirus cases are increasing, death rates are rising and friends who recently graduated continue to face unemployment as well as a feeling of impending doom. Amid this uncertainty, college classes should — one may argue — serve as an intellectual distraction from these events, a source of knowledge and debate. Students should be looking forward to their classes and enjoying their last semester(s) in college before real life begins. Based on my experiences, however, it appears that quite the opposite has occurred; students join Zoom classes to meet attendance requirements and submit assignments to maintain their GPAs, not, as some may phrase it, *lishmah*. Perhaps as a side effect of this phenomenon — which is not new, but

When the Katz School of Science and Health rolled out a new cybersecurity master's degree nearly a year ago, the undergraduate art floor of 215 Lexington Ave. was sacrificed to provide space for the program. Students protested this with a creative and effective protest campaign, removing all art pieces from the Beren Campus and replacing them with signs that said "NO ART FLOOR? NO ART."

Perhaps YU administrators are unaware that the decision to reduce art floor space, along with the general lack of enthusiasm about the humanities on campus — which manifests itself both in the dwindling number of available courses, as well as the lack of campus events and PR — has left a lasting impression on its students. We humanities students feel that our peers who are studying computer science, biology or finance are getting more bang for their buck — i.e. tuition — than we are.

I have always wanted to major in political science, and my love for the discipline has not dwindled, despite the lack of encouragement from the university to pursue it. It is precisely because I love "polisci" so much that I am deeply saddened by YU's failure to promote the pursuit of a social

university cares about the humanities, but not enough to make them as accessible and resourceful as STEM and business disciplines.

Understandably, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of three to four years to study Plato's works, postmodernist art or parallelism in ancient texts does not sound that attractive. It seems almost natural that YU would navigate students towards business and STEM careers, which provide more stability and a higher income on average. One may argue that the decline of the humanities is already widespread across academia, and there is nothing YU could possibly do about it. It is beyond the scope of this article to convince readers to pursue a humanities degree; most of you have already settled on a major. Besides, those of us who have experienced the thrill of exploring a new poem, symphony or painting in one of our college classes know exactly what I mean when I maintain that the humanities can offer an unparalleled feeling of personal fulfillment, as well as a plethora of career opportunities.

YU prides itself on its "Torah Umadda" motto, and indeed, the humanities offer a unique opportunity for students to pursue

*It is precisely because I love "polisci" so much that I am deeply saddened by YU's failure to promote the pursuit of a social science or humanities education.*

has become more troubling to me in light of the pandemic — the purpose of a university degree has shifted, depending on the academic discipline; technical fields are thriving in a remote world, but the humanities seem to be ... dying.

As a senior majoring in political science and minoring in computer science, I have the unique ability to compare what it is like to experience YU through the lens of a social science student, as well as a STEM student. It appears that YU inherently favors subjects such as computer science, biology and finance over the humanities. One need not look further than YU's PR presence, in which the university is pushing for a specific type of major, and by extension, career. Surely I am not the only one who noticed that recent "my YU story" Instagram posts on the university's admission page featured one computer science major after another. The latest YU poster features five remarkable YU students — but not a single one represents a humanities discipline.

Last semester, I analyzed course offerings on the Beren Campus for a computer science assignment (ironic, I know). Most classes that were dropped between 2020 and 2021 were in the Art and English departments. This spring semester, only a single foreign language class other than Modern Hebrew will be offered to Beren students: Elementary Spanish II. Gone are the days when Beren students were able to explore German, French, Latin, Russian, Arabic or Greek (yes, all these languages were once taught on the Beren Campus, though over the course of many years). Indeed, there have been student initiatives in the past, primarily starting on a popular Facebook group for Stern College students (I have found posts from 2017 and 2019), to try to get the university to offer more French courses. Alas, they were unsuccessful.

science or humanities education. Imagine a freshman — undecided on what he or she wants to study — arriving on campus; is there any proper incentive for this freshman to pursue theater or sociology? No. In fact, these departments recently experienced cuts in faculty hiring.

One may be inclined to blame YU for the lack of enthusiasm and encouragement regarding the humanities. It seems, however, that the university is merely mirroring a global phenomenon. In an increasingly competitive world, it appears that students no longer opt to study for the sake of learning, but to prepare for a specific career. With tuition costs increasing annually and, more recently, university education being diminished to a mere online experience, most students — and their parents — want to maximize the return on their investment. Despite steady increases in overall college enrollment in the U.S., a handful of disciplines have declined in terms of the number of BA degrees awarded over the last decade or so. These fields of study include — among others — foreign languages, philosophy and religious studies, visual and performing arts and English language and literature.

It is worth noting that YU mandates that students take courses in some of these disciplines as part of the general education requirements. Students spend many hours exploring the humanities, though only in order to fulfill academic requirements. Last year, a close friend of mine who wanted to major in philosophy because she loved the philosophy course that she took to fulfill a "gen ed" requirement, ended up switching to a different field of study due to the overall lack of available courses. By requiring certain classes (which differ on each campus), but not actively supporting students who chose to dedicate their time to studying them in depth, YU is sending mixed messages: clearly, the

a meaningful and fulfilling degree. The purpose of our YU education should not solely be to land a job at Goldman Sachs or Google (although those paths are certainly admirable in their own right) so we could be featured in the next Route 4 billboard, but to find our niche field of interest and explore it together with our peers and faculty. Indeed, many before me have appealed to the university to put a greater emphasis on the humanities, but it was all seemingly for naught. The university's recent actions such as letting go beloved professors, bulldozing the art floor, highlighting STEM and finance majors in advertisements and offering fewer humanities courses may seem trivial, but to students like myself, they add up, thereby suggesting a concerning message: that our academic goals do not matter and that we are not the pride of YU.

Above all, YU should encourage students to pursue a major that they find meaningful — in accordance with the Torah Umadda approach to education. Many students find fulfillment in computer science, microbiology or business; but those of us who opt for a discipline in the humanities ought to feel equally valued and supported by YU. This can be achieved through offering a more humanities-heavy course catalog, hiring full-time tenured humanities professors who can properly invest in their students and featuring students of a variety of academic disciplines in promotional material.

These suggestions may require considerable effort, but they are fundamental to the academic success and personal intellectual fulfillment of the YU student body. The implementation of these changes can go a long way to make a real, positive change, resulting in a Yeshiva University where each student is given the academic resources and communal motivation to succeed in his or her best-suited discipline.

## THE COMMENTATOR

2020-2021

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*The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.*

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**1 New Semester, New Content**

Welcoming you back to a new semester with the latest edition of The Commentator. Whether you've been with us for years, months, weeks or days, we sure are glad you're here with us. *Never Stop Commentating.*



**2 A Snow Day???**

Perhaps for the University, but **Chas V'Sholom** for the Yeshiva!



**3 The Commie Hearts OSL!!!**

Now can we please get some #commieswag?



**4 Required Listening**

You know it's gonna be a good one when the Course Materials include a Spotify playlist with 27 rocking tunes to get you into the mood for class.



**5 Vaccination for the Nation!**

Don't want to get my hopes up, but graduation is a mere four months away.



**6 Frum Squad Goals**

The latest in YU advertisements.



**7 Rabbinic Fairy Tales**

Teaching the next generation of *Yiddishe* boys and *Heilageh* girls *Hilchos Yichud* in the way that we know best: in a fully illustrated bedtime story with a multiple choice *Bechina* at the end.

**7UP** by Zahava Fertig  
**NMODZ**

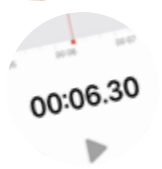
**Syllabi Notebooks 1**

You take out that notebook, the same one you took out on the first day of Fall Semester, turn to the second page and start taking notes on another syllabus, once again. #ParticipationIsWorthHowMUCH?



**Off the Record 2**

For the Record, Off the Record, is only Off the Record, when it is agreed beforehand by both parties to turn the Record Off. "Well, as long as it doesn't end up in The Commentator ..."



**YCSA → YCSC 3**

We "C" what you did there. You can change your name back if you'd like, but chances are that students will still refer to you as "the other student council."



**MissingU @ YU 4**

Yes, YU ... we missed you too ... thanks for the ... scarf?



**Amen and Awomen 5**

I'm not sure that word means what you think it means.



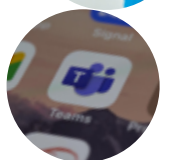
**A Great Way to End a Conversation 6**

"Sooooo, how have you been?"



**Microsoft Teams 7**

Making it more complicated for students to run and access online events is definitely going to drive up participation numbers. Well done.





# YC Jewish Studies Department Dissolved, Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies Formed

By YOSEF LEMEL

The Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva College (YC) has been dissolved. The Commentator has learned. The changes have already taken effect for the Spring 2021 semester. Before its dissolution, the Jewish Studies Department was the largest department at YC.

Faculty who were previously in the YC Jewish Studies Department have been moved into three separate departments, depending on their disciplinary backgrounds: Jewish Philosophy professors are now in the Philosophy Department and Jewish History professors are housed in the History Department; other Jewish Studies faculty have been moved into the newly-formed Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies.

The YC History Department now features two divisions: General History and Jewish History. According to Dr. Joshua Karlip, who served as chair of the Jewish Studies Department before its dissolution, the decision to dissolve the Jewish Studies

Department “was made by the faculty with the approval of the administration.” Karlip will serve as chair of the Jewish History division of the History Department, while Dr. Douglas Burgess will continue to chair the General History division. Dr. Ari Mermelstein was nominated by the faculty to chair the Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies.

When asked why the changes have occurred, University Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman told The Commentator that “It is not uncommon, in higher education, for faculty members to move from one department to another in order to align more closely with colleagues who share a common disciplinary focus.” She explained that the restructuring occurred so that professors of Jewish Philosophy and Jewish History are placed in departments in which their “training and research methodologies align with their new colleagues.”

Rabbi Shalom Carmy, a professor moving to the Philosophy Department, told The Commentator, “I am happy to share a department with my dear friend of 50-plus

years, Prof. Shatz, and with my newer friend Prof. Johnson.” Dr. Jess Olson, a professor of Jewish History, says he was “positively affected by the changes.”

The restructuring will not result in any curricular or requirement changes for students. “Students will continue to study with accomplished and dedicated professors and all courses are being preserved,” assured Botman. Similarly, Karlip stated, “It is important to realize that Jewish History, as well as academic Jewish Studies as a whole, is alive and well at Yeshiva College,” noting a recent podcast series titled “Crisis and Hope: YU Voices” produced by Jewish History faculty as one example.

Dr. Aaron Koller, a professor of Near Eastern Studies who previously served as chair of the YC Jewish Studies Department, expressed that the changes will “certainly make things more complicated, as multiple departments will now have to coordinate with each other to plan the [Jewish Studies] courses.”

Koller mentioned that the Jewish Studies Department has faced “huge [faculty] losses in recent years.” In the past four years,

Professors Barry Eichler, Shmuel Schneider, Sarah Kasher-Bendet, and Mitchell Orlian have retired, and Dr. Yaakov Elman has passed away. Other faculty members who previously taught in the YC Jewish Studies Department, including Professors JJ Schachter and Jill Katz, are currently teaching at Stern College for Women, but not at YC.

According to Koller, “The university administration has made it clear that we will not be allowed to hire anyone new to replace all these losses, so the department has slowly – actually, rapidly! – been shrunk.” Botman did not address The Commentator’s inquiries as to whether there has been, or will be, a plan to replace the Jewish Studies faculty losses in YC.

At press time, the university has not made a public announcement regarding the changes. The web page for the YC Jewish Studies Department is still up, while the Department of Bible, Hebrew, and Near Eastern Studies has not been added to the list of Yeshiva College departments on the YU website.

## MODERNA VACCINE

Continued from Front Page

guidelines and diverted it to members of the public.” The company is now under criminal investigation.

On a TorahWeb Zoom *shiur*, Rabbi Schachter reassured the audience that he and Rabbi Willig had no knowledge of any illegalities. “We were led to believe that it was [legal],” Rabbi Schachter said. “If either of us would have been told that this was inappropriate, that it wasn’t legitimate, we would not have done that,” he added.

About a week earlier, on Dec. 19, Rabbi Willig gave a *shiur* on Zoom with Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt, currently the chief of infectious diseases and hospital epidemiologist at

Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital, about the vaccine. The program was moderated by Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, dean of YU’s Center for the Jewish Future, and had 868 views on the YUTorah website.

During the talk, when asked about the *halakhic* (legal) nature of taking the vaccine, Rabbi Willig said, “Any clarity you receive from me is a result of my training from my *rebbe*, Rav Soloveitchik, who told us as *rabbonim* that there are fields we don’t know too much about and we are duty-bound to listen to those who are experts in that field.”

On Dec. 11, the Food and Drug Administration gave emergency approval

to the first COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer. One week later, Moderna’s vaccine was also approved. According to New York’s vaccination guidelines, high-risk healthcare workers, nursing home residents and staff are prioritized first to receive the vaccine, followed by other long-term and congregate care staff and residents, EMS and other health care workers. Essential workers and the general population, starting with those who are at the highest risk, will be vaccinated after the initial priority groups.

According to the NYS COVID-19 Tracker for Beren and Wilf campuses, there have been 20 reported positive cases since Dec.

19 with four students quarantined and six isolated.

“Information regarding the University’s vaccine policies will be announced once they have been finalized,” Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel told The Commentator. “Additionally, it is important to note that in accordance with applicable health guidance, we still expect everyone – even people who may have been vaccinated – to continue to comply with our mask-wearing, social distancing, and other protocols, as well as participate in our COVID-19 monitoring program.”

## COVID SPIKE

Continued from Front Page

submit one negative Nasal PCR test before returning to campus after a break, fill out a daily health-screening questionnaire before entering YU buildings and test for COVID-19 twice a week on Monday and Thursday. The Abbot test will be complemented with a PCR test every week.

“While we understand that roommates may be in close proximity to each other, everyone should try to remain 6 feet apart, at all times to prevent potential spread and reduce the likelihood of needing to quarantine,” Nissel said.

From the testing, only students who were in “close contact” – within six feet for 15 minutes during the 48-hour period prior to testing or symptoms – of someone who tested positive will be notified to quarantine, according to Nissel’s email.

Spring 2021 campus life has changed in several ways compared to Fall 2020. Near the end of the fall semester, indoor dining was banned at YU cafeterias in line with NYS Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s order prohibiting indoor dining at restaurants across NYC.

Spring 2021 has 32% of undergraduate classes functioning with an in-person component – either being entirely or partially on campus – while 68% remain online, which marks an increase of in-person classes since Fall 2020. Beren and Wilf libraries, as well

as each campus’s *batei midrash*, hold consistent COVID-19 policies for both semesters.

Some students felt confident about YU’s protective measures. “I think YU has been doing a pretty good job at testing students on campus and continuing to search for better testing options,” said Elizabeth Kershteyn

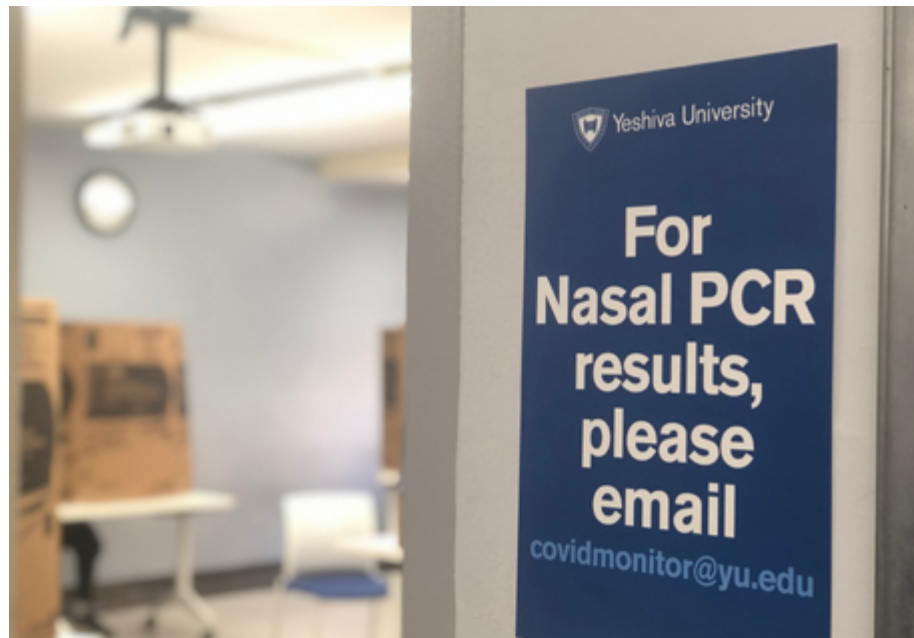
(SCW ‘22), a student living on campus for Spring 2021. “Of course, there will always be issues and problems but overall I think campus is a relatively safe place to be. Ultimately, the safety of the student body rests in the hands of students themselves.”

Other students were concerned about the

spike in cases. “I think YU needs to make sure that everyone on campus takes their COVID-19 tests,” said Alexander Wildes (SSSB ‘21), who is living in an off-campus apartment. “The fact that so many people have positive cases is frightening, but the number of students quarantining because of this is even scarier. The earlier we can catch the cases, the better.”

According to the NYS Department of Health COVID-19 Tracker, 13,398 people tested positive for COVID-19 in New York on Jan. 27. In the past week, since Jan. 21, an average of 12,735 people out of 230,838 daily tests have tested positive every day. Since Jan. 24, 1,304,050 people have received their first dose of the coronavirus vaccine, while 564,600 have received a second dose.

“With new, more infectious strains of COVID-19 emerging, now more than ever, continued vigilance and caution is imperative,” Nissel said. “While we await vaccinations and herd immunity, it is important to continue following our health and safety protocols despite the COVID-19 fatigue that we may feel almost one year out. We need everyone’s help to keep our campuses safe.”



Students on campus sign up to get tested twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.

THE COMMENTATOR



# LGBTQ Student and Alumni Reflect on Experiences in the Orthodox World at YU-Sponsored Panel

By SRULI FRUCHTER

This article was originally published online on Dec. 21.

Three LGBTQ Yeshiva University alumni and one student reflected on their experiences in the “Orthodox World” at a YU-sponsored panel on Sunday night, Dec. 20. Held over Zoom and attracting over 670 students, faculty members, administrators and alumni, among others, the program was the first of its kind since December 2009, when YU held a similar “gay panel,” as it was called, of students and alumni.

Moderated by Associate Professor of Psychology Dr. Jenny Isaacs, the event featured Rachael Fried (SCW '10), who is also the executive director at Jewish Queer Youth (JQY), Aryeh Foreman (YC '12), Dov Alberstone (YC '20) and Chana Weiss (SCW '21), who shared their experiences as LGBTQ students in the Orthodox community. The panelists spoke about struggling to accept their LGBTQ identities, facing discrimination and homophobia on campus, and their hopes for greater support and acceptance in the Orthodox community.

In emails promoting the event to students, Isaacs explained that the panel’s purpose was to provide students with an “opportunity to hear the experiences of current and former undergraduate YU students, develop a greater understanding of the issues they face, and to foster cultural competency, inclusion, and support.” She also emphasized, “This panel is not a discussion of Jewish law and it is not a lecture or debate regarding YU’s view on LGBTQ+ students.”

The panel comes nearly four months after YU announced its new LGBTQ-inclusivity policies while denying the formation of an official LGBTQ club on campus. Since then, the university has hosted some LGBTQ-related events, such as a presentation by Dr. Sarah Gluck on “Mental Health and LGBTQ: What Helps and What Hurts” on Nov. 17.

The Dec. 20 panel began with a pre-recorded video of LGBTQ students and alumni talking about their times at YU, fol-

lowed by introductory remarks by Isaacs. “We would also like to extend our gratitude to Yeshiva University for their offer of support,” Isaacs said. “We all recognize that an open discussion about sexuality and gender-identity at a religious institution is a complex issue that can be fraught with criticism.”

Fried followed Isaacs’ words by reflecting on her time at Stern College for Women

*“After what I and many others felt was repeated discrimination by the administration at this school, I realized that I didn’t reject Judaism and I didn’t reject the Orthodox community. They had rejected me.”*

Dov Alberstone (YC '20)

(SCW) and involvement on campus. She discussed her difficulty accepting her sexuality as a gay woman and how that impacted her relationships with peers during her time at YU. “Before I even told a single person I was gay, I was so hyper-aware of every little thing I did,” she described.

“I saw myself in YU and in Orthodoxy, and that’s a big part of my identity,” Fried shared later in her speech. “And it troubles me that that doesn’t always feel mutual, that when Orthodox institutions talk about ‘we,’ they refer to ‘me’ as the other.” Fried ended her speech by speaking about her involvement at JQY and calling for more inclusion of LGBTQ Jews in the Orthodox community.

Foreman spoke next, describing his depression and suicide attempts from hiding his gay identity. After he came out to his family, Foreman became involved with Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality (JONAH), a Jewish conversion therapy organization that has since shut down. “They perpetuated the notion that gay people were sick, or disordered, or broken, and that gay people were likely to become alcoholics, abuse children and die of AIDS,” Foreman said. “I believed in all of it. I genuinely felt that I could do the work and heal, and become the super-straight person I was meant to be.”

Eventually, Foreman’s own research on JONAH and homosexuality led him to his own self-acceptance. While he didn’t “come out” during his undergraduate years, Foreman shared one experience speaking with a closeted student who expressed suicidal thoughts and guiding him to the Counseling Center.

Later on, Foreman mentioned, he met his current partner. He said, “It changed

my perception that my life would be devoid of meaning and love. I can love and be loved, by him, my friends and my community, and understanding this saved my life.”

The third speaker, Alberstone, focused on the struggle reconciling his Orthodox faith with his gay identity. When he went to Yeshivat HaKotel in Jerusalem, Alberstone continued grappling with these questions, marking one of his early experiences coming out to his close friend. In his years after HaKotel, Alberstone came out to friends and family, “all of whom accepted me,” he said.

Once at YU, Alberstone struggled with his “feeling of alienation” from the YU community and surrounded himself with “caring and accepting friends.”

“At this time in my life, I’m no longer part of the Orthodox community,” Alberstone expressed nearing the end of his speech. “After what I and many others felt was repeated discrimination by the administration at this school, I realized that I didn’t reject Judaism and I didn’t reject the Orthodox community. They had rejected me.”

Weiss, who identifies as queer, was the last speaker for the event. From a young age, Weiss “suppressed [their] feelings toward girls” and denied their attraction to men and women until later admitting it in their journal. “I have come a long way in the five-and-a-half years since coming out to myself,” Weiss said.

At SCW, Weiss grew more comfortable with their identity as an LGBTQ individual, eventually joining the “YU LGBTQ+” WhatsApp group, which Weiss described as a milestone in the acceptance of their identity. Weiss also recounted experiences of homophobia from other students at YU. Reflecting on learning about the rejection of the proposed amendment to add an anti-discrimination policy into the Wilf Campus Constitution in May 2020, Weiss said, “I just went to my room, and I sat down, unable to move, unable to breathe, unable to comprehend that that had just happened... that people are so threatened by me.”

The event closed with a Q&A presented by Isaacs, consisting of questions emailed by students before the panel began. Prompted by the questions, the panelists addressed topics including coming out and the need for LGBTQ representation.

In the days leading up to the program, Isaacs told The Commentator that getting YU to sponsor this panel “has not been easy. There are lots [of] individuals who are very uncomfortable with this sort of

discussion. Fortunately, there are also individuals who put the needs of the students in the forefront and focus on their well-being. I am grateful to those individuals.”

LGBTQ-related issues became more relevant on campus when over 100 YU students, alumni and others marched for LGBTQ equality in September 2019. Among the demands was the official recognition by the university of a Gay-Straight Alliance club, which later became the YU Pride Alliance, an unofficial, student-run club that sought to “to foster an environment of acceptance on campus for the LGBTQ+ community and its allies,” according to its Facebook page.

In February 2020, under the new name “YU Alliance,” the club requested official club status — which would enable it to hold on-campus events and receive funding from YU’s Office of Student Life. Sent with a petition of over 50 signatures from student leaders, the request was eventually sent to the administration for a final decision after student council members from Beren and Wilf campuses abstained from voting.

The Jewish Week reported at the time that seven students later filed in the New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) alleging discrimination from YU. When the YU Alliance petitioned the Beren Constitutional Council arguing that student council leaders discriminated through the abstention, the Constitutional Council declined to hear the case citing the pending NYCCHR claim. The coronavirus pandemic put these issues on hold until September 2020 when the YU administration officially announced its new policies.

The NYCCHR commented, “The investigation is still open and the Commission does not comment on the status of open investigations.”

“As an educational institution we strive to create an understanding, compassionate and respectful campus for all our faculty, students and staff,” Vice Provost for Student Affairs Dr. Chaim Nissel told The Commentator in the week before the panel. “There is more work to be done and we are continuing to design programs and convene conversations to deepen the respect and compassion that is the hallmark of Torah character and community.”

Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon felt similarly. “As was said in the fall, in accordance with our Torah values we have committed to taking concrete steps to ensure that our undergraduate campus environments continue to be supportive of all of our students, with the goal of fostering an inclusive community of belonging,” Bacon said about the event. “This is part of a larger campus-wide effort to identify educational opportunities and programs to further support all of those who feel marginalized.”

Some students who attended the event felt positively about the program. “Most YU events have a pretty mediocre turnout and it was really inspiring to look down and see how many participants were at this meeting and how much people care about an event like this,” said Alex Fischer (YC '22). “It’s important to listen to people’s stories and create a sense of unity within the student body. The attendance by both professors and students last night felt like a step in the right direction.”

Other students, who chose not to attend the panel for religious reasons, felt

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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Over 670 students, faculty members, administrators and alumni, among others, watched the LGBTQ panel.



# Most SCW and YC Departments to Merge in Coming Semesters

By RIKKI KOLODONY

Most Stern College for Women (SCW) and Yeshiva College (YC) departments will be merging together in the coming semesters, with some joining together in Fall 2021, according to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman.

As per Botman, this collaboration will allow faculty on the Wilf and Beren campuses “to plan together” and will give them the opportunity to be able to teach on both campuses. The planned merger will follow a similar model that is already in place at the Sy Syms of School of Business (SSSB) and the Economics Department; SSSB departments have been integrated for Wilf and Beren students since its founding, and the Economics Department was first merged in 2009.

“This is not a restructuring but a unification of departments to broaden the curriculum where appropriate, align the curriculum where appropriate, [and] share faculty where appropriate,” Botman told The Commentator.

The Math, Political Science and History departments have already aligned. Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Science Karen Bacon and Botman will be speaking with the English, Psychology, Music, Physics and Chemistry departments regarding collaborations between SCW and YC departments for Fall 2021.

In the integrated SSSB model between Beren and Wilf campuses, SSSB Dean Noam Wasserman told The Commentator, faculty members teach both men and women on their respective campuses. The school also has “consistent requirements” and provides “similar high-quality content in the courses we offer on both campuses,” he added. He also emphasized that the merged program has a “cohesive Honors program.”

Economics Department Chair Dr. James Kahn said that when the Economics Department merged between SCW and YC in 2009, SCW students “benefited in the first six or seven years through exposure to a wider range of high-quality, research-oriented faculty.”

When asked how this change will affect terminations and new hires of professors, Bacon said, “As the semester unfolds, we will have more information about Fall 2021 plans.”

In 2015, then-YU President Richard Joel announced plans to “merge the faculty” of YC and SCW, according to a Times of Israel article published at the time. In a March 2015 interview with The YU Observer, Bacon explained her prospects for unifying some of the two school’s faculties and policies.

Some professors seemed optimistic about

their departments possibly merging. “I hope that faculty cooperation across the two campuses will offer a variety of coursework and learning experiences for the students, enriching their college experience and offering new possibilities for mentorship and academic success,” expressed Fine Arts and Music Department Co-Chair Prof. Daniel Belivsky.

*“This is not a restructuring but a unification of departments to broaden the curriculum where appropriate, align the curriculum where appropriate, [and] share faculty where appropriate.”*

Dr. Selma Botman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Other professors felt that their department was already coordinating between YC and SCW. Dr. Raji Viswanathan, who is the co-chair of the Chemistry Department, said, “The Chemistry departments between the two campuses have always worked together and shared curricular innovations and materials. We have recently discussed our major requirements and are working to ensure that the requirements for the Chemistry

and Biochemistry majors at both campuses are identical.”

Professors of already integrated departments spoke positively about their department’s coordination between YC and SCW. “We find this arrangement to be effective in offering students a wide array of courses,” said Dr. Joseph Luders, who is chair of the Political Science Department at YC and SCW

and coordinates each campus’ schedule. “We find this arrangement to be effective in offering students a wide array of courses. Indeed, we might be regarded as a model for other departments.”

Luders added, “Such an arrangement may not be optimal for all departments for various reasons... departments should be able to think creatively about what sort of efficiencies or improvements might be achieved

with closer coordination.”

One student was excited for the prospects of this change but felt nervous about some drawbacks. “I am definitely excited by the prospect of diversification in curriculum and just in categories in general,” said Rivka Schapiro (SCW ‘24), who is a physics major. “I am though a little bit worried that in the effort to bring in and diversify some depth or accessibility might be lost. For example, if there’s more staff in a department it might cause all the staff members to be less attentive or give less time to each student. While it makes more sense that if there’s more faculty there would be more time to give attention to everybody, if there’s a significant increase I am worried it might result in overall less attention being paid to students.”

Another student felt this was a move in the right direction. “I think it would be great to see more [professors] on both campuses,” shared Adam Bressler (YC ‘22), who is a psychology major. “The ability to offer more electives will give psychology students the flexibility to tailor their education in a direction that is more meaningful to them.”



The planned merger will follow a similar model that is already in place at the Sy Syms of School of Business and the Economics Department.

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## LGBTQ PANEL

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negatively about the program.

“Everyone should feel comfortable at YU,” said one student under the condition of anonymity. “However, something that celebrates something antithetical to [T]orah values removes this comfort, particularly in a Yeshiva environment.”

Another student felt more strongly, saying, “100% these type[s] of forums should not be going on in a yeshiva. No other yeshiva would have such an event.”

According to Mashgiach Ruchani Rabbi Yosef Blau, the 2009 panel also had some “strong negative reactions that assumed the event was approving homosexual behavior.” He added that while the 2009 event was careful to avoid “Halakha and homosexual behavior,” had there been more discussions that clarified this with *roshei yeshiva*

beforehand, the reactions may have been reduced.

Following the 2009 panel, a statement was posted outside the Glueck Beit Midrash on the Wilf Campus bearing the names of then-President Richard Joel and then-Dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary Rabbi Yona Reiss. It said, “public

gatherings addressing these [LGBTQ] issues, even when well-intentioned, could send the wrong message and obscure the Torah’s requirement of halakhic behavior and due modesty. Yeshiva has an obligation to ensure that its activities and events promote the primacy and sacredness of Torah in our lives and communities.” For over 10 years

*“There is more work to be done and we are continuing to design programs and convene conversations to deepen the respect and compassion that is the hallmark of Torah character and community.”*

Dr. Chaim Nissel, Vice Provost for Student Affairs

since — until Sunday’s panel — YU has not sponsored a similar LGBTQ event.

However, Rabbi Blau thought the 2009 panel had an overall positive effect on the community. “After the immediate controversy [in 2009],” Rabbi Blau reflected, “the lasting effect has been to change the nature of the dialogue and has probably saved lives.”

“What’s very clear to me is how much the student body has changed from the 2009 panel to now,” Fried told The Commentator after the event. “The support from YU for this panel was huge, but what I find to be the most impressive is how strong and brave the queer YU student community is and how that’s only getting stronger ... I’m really excited to see what the future holds for queer YU students as they continue to grow in strength and in numbers.”



# 13 Proposed Amendments Ratified Into Wilf Constitution, 18% of Eligible Voters Participate

By JARED SCHARF

This article was originally published online on Dec. 20, 2020.

Wilf undergraduate students voted on Dec. 16 to ratify 13 proposed amendments into the Wilf Campus Constitution. 186, or 18% of eligible students, participated in the voting process. All 13 proposed amendments were passed, despite an error resulting in an initial announcement that only eight were passed.

The amendments were first drafted and proposed by the Amendments Committee to the Wilf General Assembly (GA) — a voting body consisting of four student council presidents and the chairman of the Student Life Committee. The GA voted to place 13 amendments on the ballot to be voted upon by the student body. Amendments require 60% approval from voters to be ratified into the constitution.

“I’m proud to have worked with the other members to come up with a host of suggestions to improve our Constitution and present them to our fellow students for a vote,” said David Tanner (YC ‘22), chairman of the Amendments Committee.

The amendments covered a variety of issues relating to the constitution, some of which included grammatical, syntactical and semantical revisions. There were some more significant amendments, such as lowering required class standings for certain positions, extending the timing for submitting a petition for a new club, restricting Katz and Makor students from voting for certain positions, implementing a system for emergency amendments and an archive for student court opinions, election results and versions of the constitution.

Akiva Poppers (SSSB ‘22), president of the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY), was involved in the drafting and passage of the amendments. “My main goal throughout the processes involved was to bring forward and discuss a myriad of suggestions and corrections which I and other members of the Amendments Committee and General Assembly believed to be beneficial to the Student Body and/or refine the constitution in a logical way, and allow the Student Body to decide whether we were correct,” he told The Commentator.

The link to vote was sent through a private email list by Dovie Solomon (SSSB ‘21), chairman of the Canvassing Committee, at 6:00 a.m. on the day of vote. The email did not explain the purpose of the vote, nor did it specify when the polls would close.

The polls eventually closed at 3:00 a.m. on Thursday, Dec. 17. At 8:04 p.m. Solomon sent a message to the “WCSG Announcements” WhatsApp group — a group for “official updates ... regarding Wilf Campus Student Government” — reporting, with a detailed breakdown of the results attached, that only eight amendments were passed and five failed to receive the 60% approval necessary for passage.

On Friday at 12:36 p.m., Solomon sent an update to the group noting that the “The Canvassing Committee erred in their initial tabulations of the Amendments.” The initial error of the Canvassing Committee was counting abstentions along with the “nay” votes, resulting in five amendments being rejected. Solomon, in the update, explained that abstentions are supposed to count as blanks and not count against the 60% necessary to pass an amendment. “With the new tabulations, all 13 amendments have

## Constitution



## of the Yeshiva University Undergraduate Student Government

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passed,” he said. Solomon posted the updated tabulations on Sunday at 4:09 p.m. Students have not received an email announcing the results of the vote.

The following is a rough summary of the 13 amendments to the constitution, all of which received the 60% necessary for ratification.

### Amendment 1- Cleaning Up the Constitution

The first amendment rewords and restructures unclear or unspecific clauses, removes redundant clauses and makes various grammatical changes to the constitution.

**Yea - 82.3% (126)**  
**Nay - 17.6% (27)**

### Amendment 2- Clarifications and Logical Specifications

The second amendment states the process by which student government officials may take temporary leaves of absence. Additionally, the amendment modifies the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) VP of Club’s role regarding student complaints and control over YSU’s financial records and provides modifications for club rules, events, and non-club events. The Yeshiva College Student Association’s (YSCA) name was also changed to the Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC), reverting back to its original name. There are also various rules regarding student council elections and committee appointments.

**Yea - 69.3% (97)**  
**Nay - 30.7% (43)**

### Amendment 3- Lowering Class Standing Requirements for Certain Positions

The third amendment allows juniors who have completed four semesters to act as YSU VP of Clubs, and sophomore and juniors who have completed two semesters to act as YSU VP of Class Affairs. Additionally, class representatives do not have to be a member of their class up to the incoming academic year; instead, this is only required from Election Day through the end of the upcoming academic year.

**Yea - 70.9% (105)**  
**Nay - 29.1% (43)**

### Amendment 4- Period and Timing for New Club Petition Submissions

The fourth amendment increases the deadline for new club petitions from one week to two weeks. Additionally, the requirement for club petitions to be announced within the first month of fall classes was reduced to within the first two weeks of fall classes.

**Yea - 74.5% (102)**  
**Nay - 25.5% (35)**

### Amendment 5- General Assembly Powers and Positions

The fifth amendment institutes new rules for the GA. For example, the GA is now required to approve a YSU VP of Clubs replacement, whereas previously they did not. Furthermore, the amendment provides for a process by which a majority of the GA will be allowed to remove members of the Canvassing Committee without impeachment proceedings.

**Yea - 64.9% (85)**  
**Nay - 35.1% (46)**

### Amendment 6- Katz & Makor Rewrites and Clarifications

The sixth amendment rewords and modifies texts relating to the representation of Katz and Makor students in student government. Katz and Makor students will not be able to vote for the YSU president, SOY president, class representatives and other positions. However, the amendment provides positions in YSU for the Katz representative and the Makor representative.

**Yea - 78.1% (107)**  
**Nay - 19.7% (27)**

### Amendment 7- Rewriting Everything Relating to Committees

The seventh amendment rewrites Article IX of the constitution, clarifying the role of committees and committee members. The Amendments Committee has been elevated to membership in student government.

**Yea - 75.5% (102)**  
**Nay - 24.4% (33)**

### Amendment 8- Rules for Tied Elections and Situations Where There is No Winner in Fall Elections

The eighth amendment lays out a process for determining the winner of a tied fall election. Furthermore, the amendment ensures that presidential and vice presidential positions receive redo elections in the spring if no candidates are elected in the fall.

**Yea - 72.2% (96)**  
**Nay - 27.8% (37)**

### Amendment 9- Canvassing Committee Chairman and Replacements

The ninth amendment corrects previously inaccurate wording of what positions the chair of the Canvassing Committee may not hold; it also stipulates that a replacement’s replacement must come from the same council, and not the same “school” as it was phrased previously.

**Yea - 66.4% (83)**  
**Nay - 33.6% (42)**

### Amendment 10- Student Court-Related Changes

The tenth amendment clarifies the requirements in order to be a member of student court as well as updated procedures and policies in the situation that a member of the court needs to be removed and/or replaced. A simple majority vote of the GA is needed to remove a justice instead of the previous 4/5. Additionally, minor laws relating to oaths and appeals are stated.

**Yea - 67.2% (84)**  
**Nay - 32.8% (41)**

### Amendment 11- Impeachment Proceedings

The eleventh amendment augments the number of votes needed to begin an impeachment trial. Now, 1/3 of the student body, instead of the previous 2/3, 3/5 of the GA or 2/3 of Wilf student government members are necessary to begin impeachment proceedings.

**Yea - 70.7% (94)**  
**Nay - 29.3% (39)**

### Amendment 12- Emergency Amendments

The twelfth amendment creates “a mechanism for emergency amendments” that would be able to be passed anytime during the semester, motivated by events that occurred in the Spring 2020 semester, when, due to COVID-19, “the student Student Body was unable to vote on an amendment to reduce the signature requirement for candidates for Spring 2020 Elections, resulting in numerous students failing to make the ballot.”

**Yea - 65.6% (86)**  
**Nay - 34.4% (45)**

### Amendment 13- Creating Archives of Student Court Opinions, Election Results, and Versions of Constitution

The thirteenth amendment requires the Student Court to archive and maintain the archives of various student-court documents and information, which the student body is permitted to view. This amendment was proposed due to “numerous requests from students.” A website hosting the archives was launched following the passage of the amendment.

**Yea - 83.5% (111)**  
**Nay - 16.5% (22)**



## 32% of Spring 2021 Undergraduate Courses to Have In-Person Component, 68% Remain Fully Online

By SHLOMIT EBBIN

This article was originally published online on Nov. 30.

32% of undergraduate courses will include an in-person component for Spring 2021 and 68% of the total courses will continue fully online, according to course listings on MyYU, marking an increase of in-person classes compared to Fall 2020. The spring semester begins on Jan. 19 and ends on May 14.

Courses for registration are marked online-live, online-asynchronous, blended or face-to-face on the MyYU student portal. According to an email from President Ari Berman on Dec. 9, blended courses will have on-campus students and the faculty member “periodically meet on campus for instruction,” and remote students will participate online. Face-to-face courses take place only on campus and are not available for remote students.

At Stern College for Women (SCW), 64% of its 389 total course offerings will be completely online, with 59% of classes as online-live and 5% as asynchronous. 30.5% of classes will be conducted using the blended model, and 5.5% of courses will be face-to-face. 75% of Yeshiva College’s (YC) 191 classes will be conducted completely online, with 71% being listed as online-live and 4% as online-asynchronous. 19% will be blended courses and 6% will be face-to-face. In contrast, 71% of YC classes and 85.5% of SCW classes were listed as “online” for Fall 2020.

“The most important thing we’ve learned is to constantly monitor students’ experience, to listen to students, and to do our best to incorporate their experience into our planning,” said Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman. “We will continue to provide an excellent

education to all our students, whether they are remote or face to face.”

Within the 160 courses at Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB), 82.5% are online-live, 3.7% are asynchronous, 1.9% are blended and 11.9% are face-to-face. 10.1% and 14.6% of SSSB courses are face-to-face on the Wilf and Beren campuses, respectively. This is a significant change from the fall semester, in which SSSB conducted 100% of its classes online.

“Last spring, like the rest of the world, we focused on live online teaching,” said Dean of SSSB Dr. Noam Wasserman on YU’s Dec. 8 community call. “For the coming semester within Sy Syms, we’re going to maintain full student choice while also adding a lot of in

back to campus this semester, and we hope to invite even more faculty, even more *rebbeim*, back to campus next semester to give in-person *shiurim*,” said UTS Associate Dean Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky on the community call. “Even those that are going to be continuing and already are giving *shiurim* in person, we are having a Zoom option.”

Torah Studies classes for Beren students are included in SCW’s total course count. “For the Torah classes, students really wanted the in person experience,” said Shoshana Schechter, associate dean for Torah Studies at SCW. “I’m thrilled to say that for the spring semester over 50% of our Torah classes will be in person, meaning with an in person component. Most of them

“They’ve kept up with the needs of the students for next semester as well. I’m going back to campus next semester and I’m super excited to have two SSSB classes in person!”

Other students felt limited by face-to-face classes being exclusively open to students who are in person. “It was very important for me to take biochemistry this semester to stay on track with my pre-med schedule,” said Aaron Singer (YC ‘22), who will continue with online learning for Spring 2021. “However, with the lab in-person only this semester, I will have to commute to the Heights once a week and possibly risk putting members of my family in unnecessary danger.”

Some students expressed that the number of in-person course offerings for the spring semester is underwhelming. “It’s disappointing that the in-person classes seem to be limited to only a few departments. All my classes this spring will still be online,” said Elazar Abrahams (YC ‘22). “YU has done a great job ensuring campus is safe, so unless there are real health concerns, I don’t understand why some professors still refuse to teach face-to-face.”

With more classes functioning in-person for Spring 2021, more professors opted to return to campus. “Currently, I am teaching what is now called a blended course using one of the special technology rooms and that is going well but class discussions tend to be more stilted and sometimes it is hard for the in-person students to hear the remote ones,” said SCW Professor of Archaeology Jill Katz, who will be conducting her course face-to-face this spring. “I decided to offer this course [exclusively] in person because I prefer to teach in person, and I know that many of the students who have returned to campus would like to take in-person courses.”

*“The most important thing we’ve learned is to constantly monitor students’ experience, to listen to students, and to do our best to incorporate their experience into our planning”*

Dr. Selma Botman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

person options where possible. We’re focusing on the principles courses and similar courses within Sy Syms where we’ll be able to offer fully in person sections because we also have online sections that we can offer of the same course.”

Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) is offering 59% blended, 39% online and less than 1% face-to-face classes and *shiurim* this coming semester. Within UTS, 26% of Mazer Yeshiva Program *shiurim* are online-live and 74% are blended, and 9% of Stone Beit Midrash Program *shiurim* are online-live and 91% are blended. 58% of Isaac Breuer College courses are online, 39% are blended and 3% are face-to-face, while 42% of James Striar School courses are online and 57.6% are blended.

“Many, many of our *rebbeim* did come

are the blended model.”

Some students are looking forward to having classes exclusively in person for the first time since YU closed in March. “I really enjoyed my in person classes this semester and I’m really looking forward to continue learning in-person next semester!” shared Yael Laks (SCW ‘22), a student who lived on campus for Fall 2020. “It can be difficult for the teachers and for the students who are at home to have a blended class, so I’m really excited to have a more cohesive environment with my fully in person classes next semester.”

“I really appreciated that SSSB had all their classes online this semester because it was more accommodating to everyone,” commented Sela Boord (SSSB ‘22), who took her classes online this past semester.



A classroom on the Wilf Campus with socially-distanced desks



# Indoor Dining Banned at YU Cafeterias Following Gov. Cuomo's Order

By YOSEF LEMEL

*This article was originally published online on Dec. 16, 2020.*

Indoor dining in Yeshiva University's Furman and Kushner dining halls — located on the Wilf and Beren campuses, respectively — has been banned due to an order by NYS Gov. Andrew Cuomo prohibiting indoor dining at restaurants in New York City, which began on Monday, Dec. 14. The Office of Housing and Residence Life emailed students residing in on-campus housing of this development at 10:16 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 13.

While students residing off-campus were previously allowed to dine in the cafeterias, they did not receive an official notification from the university regarding the indoor dining ban.

Residents were assured that the university "will continue to offer takeout food options" that can be eaten "outside or in open lounges, open classrooms, common spaces" and dormitory rooms. The email did not indicate that the university will set up a designated outdoor location for students.

Students will only be provided with a pick-up option for Shabbos meals, according to an email on Tuesday, Dec. 15 from Rabbi Joshua Weisberg, the senior director of student life and acting director of housing and residence life.

Students choosing to eat in the cafeteria were prompted by a cafeteria worker to sign a sheet of paper with their names, residences and phone numbers, after which they were allowed to eat in the cafeteria for a maximum period of 20 minutes; on the paper, students

to spending Shabbat together."

According to the NYS COVID-19 Tracker for the Beren and Wilf campuses, there are 10 reported positive cases since Dec. 5 with 42 students quarantined and seven isolated. On Wednesday, Dec. 16, Director of Athletics Joe Bednarsh emailed students that one female athlete tested positive for COVID-19. As a result, the entire women's basketball team is required to quarantine for 14 days. Since reopening campuses on Oct. 21, YU has seen more than 30 reported cases.

In a Dec. 8 YU community call, Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum announced that flex dollars — student caf card funds used for non-taxable food purchases at nearby restaurants — would once again be available for the Spring 2021 semester; for the Fall 2020 semester, flex dollars were not available to students.

Apfelbaum did not respond to The Commentator's request for comment on whether the university will create outdoor dining options for students and how the planned flex dollar policy change might be affected by the recent developments.

*"At the end of the day, it's not up to us. It's just up to COVID and New York."*

Jacob Linder (SSSB '22)

Cuomo explained the reasoning behind his decision at his Dec. 11 announcement of the new regulations. "In New York City, you put the CDC caution on indoor dining together with the rate of transmission and the density and the crowding, that is a bad situation," he said. "The hospitalizations have continued to increase in New York City. We said that ... if the hospital rate didn't stabilize we would close indoor dining. It is not. We are going to close indoor dining in New York City on Monday."

Prior to Monday's ban on indoor dining, university protocol allowed two students, separated by a distance of six feet, to sit in the dining hall and dine together at one table.

indicated the time they entered and exited the cafeteria.

"There's a huge amount of doubt whenever you go in the caf because you don't know when it's going to get shut down," said Jacob Linder (SSSB '22), the Wilf Student Life Committee dining liaison. "At the end of the day, it's not up to us. It's just up to COVID and New York."

"For me Shabbat is the time to spend with my friends while enjoying a meal together," expressed Miriam Fried (SCW '22). "While it's sad that that won't be possible anymore, no one wants Covid and I appreciate the steps that YU is taking to protect us from it and hopefully we'll soon be able to go back



Tables were removed from the Furman Dining Hall following Gov. Cuomo's ban on indoor dining.



## 2020: A YU Year in Review

By ELAZAR ABRAHAMS AND ZAHAVA FERTIG

This article was originally published online on Jan. 1, 2021.

2020 was a year for the history books. The past 366 days are widely considered to be a total dumpster fire, yet even among the disaster of a worldwide pandemic, we have a lot to be thankful for. Especially in our little corner of the world — Yeshiva University — the year was littered with special moments of connection, iconic victories, and yes, plenty of memes. As easy as it is to knock our beloved college, we really do appreciate the tremendous efforts everyone on staff, from professors to the maintenance crew, showed during such a tumultuous period. As 2021 arrives, we decided to look back at the year that was and highlight some of our favorite bits.

In no particular order, here are the top Yeshiva University moments of 2020.

### The Macs' Championship Run, and Beyond

Hold up, that was this year? Believe it or not, the YU Men's Basketball team won the Skyline Conference championship on March 1, 2020. The squad's regular season was itself historic, but now, with an incredible win streak of 27 games, the Maccabees were headed for the NCAA tournament in the school's second ever appearance.

Unsurprisingly, these former Yeshiva League ballers breezed past the first round handily on March 6, defeating Worcester Polytechnic University 102-78. It seemed as if the Macs were doing the impossible, and the decisive victory was proof that we were going all the way. Uncertainty loomed in the background, as the university had canceled classes for a few days after the novel coronavirus had infected a student. The team played their second round match in an empty gym, although even without the in-person support from fans, they dominated the court, eliminating Penn State Harrisburg 102-83.

Advancing to the sweet 16! The worldwide Jewish community rooting for them! What could possibly go wrong? But as we know, the NCAA pulled the plug on the tournament the afternoon of March 12, just a day before the Macs were poised to beat Randolph-Macon College in round three. It was heart-breaking, but let's treasure the victories up until that point. The 2019-20 Maccabees turned a former West Wing punchline into national headlines, and we'll forever remember getting to cheer them on in the Max Stern Athletic Center. As one Commentator reporter wrote at the time, last year's Macs have an "unequivocal claim as the best team YU has ever fielded." Each member of the roster is now a legitimate Jewish celebrity, and the world better watch out for the upcoming season's tip-off...

### The Commentator's First Ever Summer Issue

Allow us to give ourselves a pat on the back. Normally, The Commentator would publish its first issue of the academic year in the fall, when all students are back on campus. In this "unprecedented" year of "robust" craziness, however, The Commie released the first issue of its 86th edition online on July 14. There were simply so many news stories to cover, opinions to draft and loads of 7up/7down jokes begging to be written. Under the guidance of Editor-in-Chief Yosef Lemel, Managing Editor Elisheva Kohn and Executive Editor Yitzchak Carroll,



Taking a look back at Yeshiva University's highlights of 2020

THE COMMENTATOR

your favorite paper kept the student body updated on important stories like the departure of SVP Josh Joseph, administrators' salaries, Rabbi Lamm zt"l's passing, and whether or not we'd ever see campus again.

### The COVID Code of Conduct Video

No, you didn't dream this one. Grab your passport and buckle up for this August 26 YouTube release, in which a woman dressed as a flight attendant walks around the Wilf Campus and vaguely explains how YU will keep you safe when you return to their halls in just a few weeks. Instantly, this informational film was memed into oblivion, with jokes of the depicted coed classes, butchered mask wearing and the fact that nothing substantial was actually mentioned clogging our Facebook feeds. This was also the first time we saw the COVID-19 survey's green, thumbs-up smiley face, who would soon become our best friend. This video's impact is rivaled only by the follow up installment that included President Ari Berman's infamous hand sanitizer squeeze.

Is it ridiculous that YU spent money hiring an outside firm to create this three-minute clip? Yes. Despite that, did we love that it gave us all so much to bond over? Also, yes.

### Shoshana Schechter Named Dean

On April 7, students were notified that Ms. Shoshana Schechter had been named the associate dean for Torah Studies at Stern College for Women (SCW), a brand new position. Herself a graduate of SCW and Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Schechter has had a storied career at YU. She began as an adjunct professor in 1998 and has been teaching Bible classes ever since. In 2004, she founded the Mechina Program, which accommodates SCW students who did not receive a formal Jewish education before college. Her promotion to associate dean represented a big step in women's Torah learning and a demonstration of the administration's commitment to making Jewish studies a focal point of the oft-ignored downtown campus.

Since taking on the role, Schechter has appeared in YU ad campaigns standing alongside other women Torah leaders, organized numerous shiurim and programming for undergraduates on and off campus, and striven towards her stated goal of making Stern a "makom Torah on all levels." Going forward, she hopes to tackle low enrollment in advanced Jewish studies courses, while

still teaching multiple classes herself. We stan!

### The Computer Science Department Blows Up (In a Good Way)

As political science and English majors, we couldn't explain what computer science is if we tried. That being said, we're so happy that YU seems to care about it so much! On April 7, Yeshiva College's Computer Science Department announced a new four-year Bachelor of Science (B.S.) track, in addition to the existing three-year track option for a Bachelor of Arts. Students who declare enrollment in the B.S. program have a lighter Jewish studies requirement than other YC students.

The boosted course offerings and rising popularity of the field also became a focal point of YU's advertising. Take a look at any YU admissions social media page, and it's evident that nearly all the students highlighted are CompSci majors. We can't blame them — clearly a strong Computer Science Department is a draw to those who are technologically inclined; according to the annual President's Report, 380 YC students and 186 SCW students enrolled in Computer Science classes in 2020. The Stern CompSci majors are even getting matching sweatshirts. We aren't jealous of the swag as much as we are of the plethora of job opportunities awaiting you guys after graduation.

Just don't get us started on the Katz School's Cybersecurity graduate program.

### 'Good Shtick! With Zack' Premieres

In the early days of quarantine, Yeshiva Student Union President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) was brainstorming ways to keep the student body involved and connected from afar. A biweekly talk show "airing" on Zoom seemed like the perfect way to boost morale among the homebound. And it was! Peaking at about 70 live participants, (and with hundreds tuning in to watch the recordings on YouTube,) *Good Shtick! With Zack* was the light at the end of a dark week. Guests included head RAs, board members of clubs, student government officials and other students with interesting stories. The first season ran from March 10 to May 4, with another limited batch of episodes occurring from Sept. 8 to Sept. 22. In April, one Commentator editor decided to play into the shtick as well, and reviewed the show. We published the following:

The second episode, the first to feature the show's cinematographically brilliant intro

clip, succeeds where the first episode fails. Perhaps this is because the episode featured not one, but two, guests, which makes it less awkward and there's more people to pop in and speak. Even the serious conversations feel fun and entertaining. This episode also saw an increase in audience participation, another area where this show excels, utilizing interactive polls and even allowing audience members to speak live on air! In one particularly inspiring moment of the episode, Zack strikingly declares, "My ultimate dream is to build Disney in Israel."

Through working on the show, Greenberg actually met his *bashert* and is set to be married in just a few months. Mazal tov!

### P/N Policy Instituted for Spring 2020

Sometimes there is justice in the world. On March 23, an email was sent out to all undergraduates announcing a new pass/no credit policy exclusive to final grades that spring semester. After a change.org petition circulated around friend groups, the provost and deans recognized the hardships many students were facing in the heat of the pandemic and extended a helping hand. Subject to certain restrictions, students could opt to have any grade of C or higher changed to a P on their transcript, and receive full credit for the course. A grade of C- or below could be changed to an N, indicating that no credit was received while still masking a poor grade. This was in line with other colleges' policies at the time.

Sy Syms School of Business students were limited to doing this for two courses that did not fulfill any major or minor requirements, while SCW and YC students had no limit on the number of classes they could P/N as long as they weren't requirements for their majors. So the policy wasn't perfect, but we were stuck at home, learning on a foreign platform called Zoom. We were adapting to a whole new vocabulary that included words like "asynchronous," and phrases such as "unmute yourself." Anything helped. This was also proof that student activism works, and it set up the fight a few months later to get the changed drop date reverted back to normal. In both instances, kudos to our student leaders and our administration for sitting down, discussing the problem and finding a solution.

### The Return to Campus

Yeshiva University campuses reopened for undergraduate students on October 21,

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# Evaluating a Turbulent Year: YU Professors Reflect on 2020

By ELISHEVA KOHN

This article was originally published online on Jan. 18, 2021.

There seems to be a consensus that 2020 was an “unprecedented year.” For months, YU students turned to social media and student publications, including *The Commentator*, to express concerns about their academic and social lives that arose as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Professors, however, have thus far not had the opportunity to share their thoughts on what it was like to teach during a pandemic. We reached out to 18 professors from both campuses — representing a wide range of academic departments — who shared their reflections on 2020 with *The Commentator*. Here are their thoughts on what the other side of Zoom is like.

When the university went virtual in early March, professors were left to grapple with transitioning to online learning while maintaining an interactive and engaging class format. At first, back in Spring 2020, many professors simply aimed to complete the suddenly virtual semester on time, which they found “challenging” and “stressful,” yet also “rewarding.” “At that point,” shared Prof. Rachel Mesch, department chair of the Yeshiva College (YC) English Department, “my concern was to maintain the intellectual community we had been building and to support the students,” as well as “stay connected.” As it became clear that the fall semester would take place remotely as well, professors’ attitudes shifted, as they worked on providing a “more rich and satisfactory experience” than “Zoom school,” as Political Science Prof. Maria Zaitseva put it.

Overall, it appears that professors were cognizant of how their students were feeling. “In many ways the students rose to the occasion and brought their best selves to class over Zoom,” said Prof. Ronnie Perelis, who teaches Jewish History at YC, Stern College for Women (SCW) and Revel, yet other times he “felt that the upheaval and uncertainty of Covid weighed on them heavily.” Apart from the academic and technical difficulties, many students and faculty members had

close family members and friends who were suffering from coronavirus — medically and financially. Mesch noted that it “was painful to deal with and not really talked about” in the classroom.

Prof. Herb Leventer, who teaches philosophy at SCW College for Women, pointed to a phenomenon of widespread depression. He “sympathized much more” with his own students when he found himself “being late in handing back student papers, and watching Netflix and reading mystery novels instead

*“I want my students to know that I very much miss teaching in person, and I know how difficult it is for them to learn via Zoom... Overall I was very impressed with the level of engagement of my students.”*

Prof. Alan Broder

of preparing” classes halfway through the term. “I imagined how much more depressed my students must feel, living cooped up with their siblings 24/7 and harried parents juggling tight schedules while keeping the household functioning,” he said.

Indeed, remote learning produced a wide range of novel issues for faculty. When asked, professors indicated that shortened student attention spans, time difference complications and interruptions by their own family members or roommates were the top three challenges they faced.

A handful of professors opened up about their struggles balancing teaching and taking care of small children at home. One professor, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told *The Commentator* that students took “advantage of the online learning environment,” citing students’ inattention, lack of integrity and “suspicious behavior” while completing assignments. Other professors pointed to more technical obstacles, such as no longer being able to help students visualize concepts by drawing on a physical board or being able to make proper eye contact with students. “I want every student in my class to feel seen and valued,” said Prof. Joy Ladin of the SCW English Department. “Zoom makes that very difficult.”

Acknowledging these challenges, many professors highlighted their efforts to provide students with an enriching experience. Prof. Alan Broder, chair of the computer science department at SCW, has been using high-end video mixing equipment, including a green screen and a physical white board, to make it easier for students to understand computer science concepts. He also used Zoom’s built-in features, such as breakout rooms and poll questions to add interactive elements to his class format. Many profes-

sors added small breaks to the regular class schedule and adjusted their syllabi to meet their students’ needs.

Most respondents taught synchronous classes via Zoom this past fall semester, and will continue to do so in Spring 2021. Only a handful will be teaching synchronously with some asynchronous or in-person elements, and not a single professor we reached out to will be teaching completely in-person this upcoming spring semester. Other professors, however, will reportedly be returning to campus in the spring. Sociology Prof. Daniel Kimmel said that he credits YU “for not trying to strong-arm” professors into in-person teaching. Kimmel told *The Commentator* that his supervisors asked him what format he was comfortable with and “respected those preferences.”

Some professors shared that they will be incorporating elements of the 2020 academic year into their future teaching styles, even post-pandemic. “I hope to take along some of the new habits I’ve picked up,” said Prof. Lori Linzer of the Wilf Hebrew Department, referring to more flexible office hours conducted via Zoom and using Canvas to administer assignments. “Saving paper is a pleasure, and I’m enjoying not trying to decipher illegible handwriting!” she added.

Nevertheless, nearly all professors agreed that overall, the 2020 academic year was less enjoyable and that they look forward to returning to traditional teaching. “I can’t believe I miss the crowded elevator at 215 Lex!” said Prof. Seamus O’Malley of the Beren English Department. One professor noted Zoom class was “a flat, and dull way of teaching. I know that students didn’t learn as much as they had in previous semesters.”

Unusual teaching circumstances also offered a unique opportunity for professors and their students to become better acquainted with each other’s personal lives. “I had [students’] parents, friends and girlfriends listening in on my class,” said Rabbi Dovid Bashevkin, who teaches Judaic classes on Wilf. “It’s nice to connect more holistically with student’s lives.” Another professor shared that “during an evening class last Spring, my 4 year old son ran out of the bath and right into my lap while I was teaching!”

Since universities across the country have

adapted to remote learning, students are concerned that they may never be able to return to a proper, in-person, socially and academically enriching university campus when the pandemic is over. When asked whether the pandemic has shaped higher education forever, professors addressed quite a vast array of issues. Rabbi Shalom Carmy, professor of Jewish Philosophy and Bible on Wilf, pointed to a national trend of the devaluation of Liberal Arts. “Liberal arts claimed to offer extra value for face to face learning. [I’m] not sure that most professors enact this, or that all who give it lip service are ready to deliver,” he told *The Commentator*. He hopes that “our school can do better to resist the trend and to defy the fashion.”

Despite those concerns, most professors emphasized that the pandemic had, in fact, highlighted the necessity of in-person instruction. “There will surely be the temptation to switch away from in-person teaching, but that is clearly second-best,” said Leventer. “Much of the learning that occurs in college is from other students, in face-to-face casual conversations. This is mostly lost online,” he added. Prof. Marnin Young, chair of the Beren Art History Department, agreed, emphasizing that “traditional education offered by universities is now clearer than ever.” Perelis pointed to the practical advantages of virtual components, predicting that Zoom will offer an alternate option for students who are feeling ill or are unable to attend in-person. This, Perelis said, will also “be true for cultural events on campus.”

The vast majority of professors who shared their reflections expressed appreciation towards their students for their handling of remote learning. “I want my students to know that I very much miss teaching in person, and I know how difficult it is for them to learn via Zoom,” said Broder. “Overall I was very impressed with the level of engagement of my students,” he added. Bashevkin said that his expectations of his students were “exceeded by miles.” Prof. Lauren Fitzgerald, who teaches English studies at Wilf, echoed Broder’s sentiments. “I have been so impressed with the resiliency of the students and faculty I’ve been in contact with since March,” remarked Fitzgerald. “I’ve been humbled by what I’ve seen and heard about.”

As YU students approach yet another semester of mostly remote learning, perhaps professors’ encouraging words will boost their morale. “We’re all in this together, friends. If you’re having trouble, come to us,” said Kimmel. “We know this isn’t easy; it’s not easy for us either. We’ll do anything we can to help make things work,” he added. In a similar vein, Ladin remarked, “your professors know how hard it is to maintain attention and concentration on Zoom (it’s hard for us too!), and how hard it is to focus and work with all the stresses of the pandemic on top of the usual stresses of school, and we are proud of you!”

*Editor’s Note: The author would like to express her thanks to all professors who took the time to share their thoughts with *The Commentator*. All responses directly contributed to her research for this piece.*



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Assistant Dean Shoshana Schechter holds an in-person class while remote students tune in via Zoom.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

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after eight brutal months of exile prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A true *Kibbutz Galuyot*. Our return was painstakingly slow and beyond stressful; move-in was even delayed from its original date due to fears of a post-Simchat Torah coronavirus spike.

When approximately 550 students finally did get to enter the dorms, cafeterias, libraries and *batei midrash* again, it was smack in the middle of midterms week. With Hashem’s help, we made it work.

Pinch us, we kind of still can’t believe that

we made it back. With mandatory COVID testing twice a week, enforced mask wearing and social distancing, things seem to be running smoothly. It has been amazing to see our friends in person again, and we hope that even more of them will join us on

campus this coming semester. If we continue on this path, 2021 is shaping up to be a pretty bright year. Stay safe, everyone.



## We Asked, Y(O)U Answered

### Hi! I'm a \_\_\_\_\_ Major

By **DEBORAH COOPERSMITH**

Unlike other American colleges, Yeshiva University is a place where most students graduate in three years. That means YU students have one less year to figure out their major and desired career path. For this article, The Commentator reached out to the student body to learn why they chose their major, whether they knew this was the subject they wanted to pursue before starting college and what helped them make their decision. The responses of six students are provided below.

**Jonathan Wenger (YC '24)**  
**Major: Computer Science**

"I chose my major because I have a passion for math and computer science. I took computer science classes in high school and found that I really enjoyed it. Computer science is something that I'm skilled at and something I really enjoy working with, as it's challenging and intellectually stimulating.

"That's why I knew I wanted to major in computer science before I started YU. I chose it mainly because it's an interest of mine, but it also helps that there are excellent career opportunities throughout both America and Israel. Additionally, hearing that YU has an excellent Computer Science Department was another good reason to major in it."

**Elisheva Goldman (SCW '21)**  
**Major: Speech Pathology & Audiology**

"I always knew I wanted to work with kids, and once I heard about this major, I thought I would really enjoy it as a career. I loved the intro class so I stayed in the major!

"I decided on my major after coming to

YU. I love that [speech pathology] allows me to work in so many different kinds of settings and with so many different kinds of people. The major also combines science, English, education, and psychology, all of which I am interested in."

**Efrat Malachi (SCW '21)**  
**Major: English, Media Studies**

"English, Media Studies checked off most of the boxes on my list for what I am skilled in and what I desire to do. It encompasses lots of basic communication skills that every

*"As someone who chose this major with future goals of practicing medicine and expanding the breadth, quality, and affordability of care to less fortunate communities, this major accomplished both objectives."*

—  
Michael Nissanoff (YC '21)

company needs while having its own set of specialties or specific tracks, like PR, journalism, advertising, etc. It also blends many sides of me well, too.

"I figured out my major at the end of sophomore year through speaking with Naomi Kapp from the Career Center. She helped me narrow down and put a name to the many ideas/interests I have. It was a very helpful meeting that allowed me to articulate my passions and skills and also focus my energy toward the right pursuit/major.

"I chose my major mainly because it was an interest of mine. I work much more effectively when I'm working on something I deeply care about and find meaningful. It's harder to motivate me and do well on a

project that I have no connection to. My line of work has to be, personally, purposeful and productive in order to have stellar results."

**Jacob Shiner (SSSB '21)**  
**Major: Accounting and Finance**

"I decided I wanted to major in finance when I was 15 years old. This stemmed from following the stock market from the age of 13. I ultimately expected to work as a banker in a field like equity research.

"I was forced into accounting as well. My dad and grandfather are accountants, so the

"Business of Medicine" to help bridge the gap between the two fields. Economics plays a vital role in the allocation of healthcare resources and can be used to create solutions to economic barriers by developing innovative, cost-effective practices, which allow access to healthcare both locally and around the world. Ultimately, this major is a stepping stone for me to achieve health policy changes that will expand healthcare to the underserved populations.

"When I first arrived at YU, I knew I wanted to do something in the medical field, but nothing beyond that. Witnessing the scarce medical care in Africa inspired my goal to create sustainable healthcare systems for the needy as no person should be denied any medical care.

"As someone who chose this major with future goals of practicing medicine and expanding the breadth, quality, and affordability of care to less fortunate communities, this major accomplished both objectives."

**Yannay Kaplan (YC '23)**

**Major: Biology**

"I'm interested in medicine and health. I started YU with this interest, but my passion has grown stronger, especially because of Dr. [Radhashree] Maitra. I now have a stronger conviction to study it.

"I knew I wanted to major in the sciences, but I had to choose which one I wanted to delve into. I enjoy helping people, and the science of the human body interests me so biology made sense. At the same time, I was debating between biology and physics, and I didn't want to go into business (most physics majors go into business in the end)."

accounting track was pushed on me with a threat from my dad of paying for my own tuition if I didn't double major.

"Through my years in YU, I found that the finance major to be not up to par. There aren't many good teachers and the courses are more theoretical than practical. Also, I was disappointed to find out that YU doesn't help much with job placement on Wall Street. Looking back, I'm glad I took on accounting because I ended up liking the major more and will be working in accounting upon graduation."

**Michael Nissanoff (YC '21)**  
**Major: Business of Medicine**

"I created my shaped major entitled

## From the Bolsheviks to Belfer: Spotlight on Prof. Maria Zaitseva

By **DANIEL MELOOL**

Rarely is a teacher universally beloved across an entire student body, but Maria Zaitseva, a political science professor at Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women, seems to be the exception. Her classes on weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and international relations are considered "must takes," and often attract students from the Sy Syms School of Business looking for exciting electives. Zaitseva boasts

*"I try to see [my students] as individuals, not just students who are getting grades coming to my class, but also understanding that they have a life outside of the classroom.."*

—  
Prof. Maria Zaitseva

a 4.9/5 on Rate My Professor, and Yeshiva Student Union VP of Academic Affairs Josh Weinstein (YC '22) called her "a truly instrumental part" of his college experience.

The Commentator recently sat down with Zaitseva in hopes of learning her secrets to an engaged classroom. What followed was a captivating conversation about her USSR background, choosing a career in teaching and her care for Yeshiva University students.

Prof. Zaitseva was born in Moscow in the now-defunct Soviet Union to parents who were diplomats. In the early 1980s, her family was sent to New York to work for the Russian delegation to the United Nations.

They resided in the Bronx, where all the Russian diplomats lived, and Zaitseva went to a special Soviet school where classes were taught in Russian. She also learned English as a second language. As Zaitseva was finishing high school in the early 1990s, the Cold War was nearing its end, and she was allowed to transfer to an American school to complete her secondary education.

Growing up in the environment of a diplomatic compound, Zaitseva says that international relations is "in my blood." She

has always been curious about how states relate to each other, why they act as they do and how countries can go from enemies to allies. This drive would eventually lead her to pursue a career in international affairs.

Zaitseva enrolled in Yale University where she earned her BA in Political Science. Thinking she would go to law school, she worked for a few years as a paralegal in New York. However, not content with the legal field, she decided to return to Yale for graduate school where she earned her MA in International Relations. It was during her years in that Master's program that she concluded she did not want to be a lawyer

and instead looked to get a doctorate. She then applied to various Ph.D. programs, finally accepting a scholarship from Cornell University.

Part of her scholarship required her to work as a teacher's assistant for several semesters. It was during this time that Zaitseva realized how much she enjoyed

the classroom. This was a particularly unique experience for Zaitseva, who as a child was "afraid of public speaking and an introvert." From answering questions to running review sessions, the more time she spent in the classroom, the more comfortable she

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Prof. Maria Zaitseva has taught political science at Yeshiva University for close to a decade.

MARIA ZAITSEVA



## Can an Algorithm Get You a Job? The Career Center Thinks So.

By ALIZA LEICHTER

On Monday, Dec. 21, the Yeshiva University Career Center, YU Investment Banking Society and YU Finance Club hosted their annual “What is Wall Street... Other than Investment Banking?” speaker and executive panel, where students were introduced to Jobscan, a tool that allows users to strengthen their online applications and make their resumes stand out.

According to Joshua Meredith, Director of Career Advising and Technology with the Career Center, there are currently 75 students using Jobscan, with hundreds of additional accounts available. Students can email [careercenter@yu.edu](mailto:careercenter@yu.edu) to receive access to an account or to schedule a live chat for assistance.

James Hu, founder and CEO of Jobscan, developed the platform after his job hunt in 2013 led to the discovery of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), software that companies use to

automatically analyze resumes based on keywords. Jobscan provides users with the power of ATS before applying to jobs and internships. Users have the opportunity to optimize their resumes and cover letters with suggestions on which skills to emphasize and what terminology to utilize. Jobscan displays the percentage that the resume matches the job description put forth by employers, which increases as users incorporate the suggested edits to their resume. There is

personal information, education, and even job-match preferences. Included also is an option to browse job listings and filter by job type (i.e. full-time, part-time, internship) as well as by location. The Jobscan dashboard features the user’s most recent resume scan, LinkedIn scan, as well as the option to create new scans. Users can view their scan history to quickly access and update past submissions. The website interface is approachable and the different features

Jobscan is a powerful tool that allows YU students’ resumes to stand out. The world of ATS is highly unintuitive, and many standard resume suggestions often fall short of what ATS are looking for in candidates. These suggestions are aimed at appealing to a hiring manager, but due to the prevalence of ATS, resumes rarely make it that far,” Adler explained. “Jobscan does a terrific job helping students understand the methods behind ATS and properly editing their resumes accordingly. I found Jobscan to be a great resource in getting my resume into the hands of hiring managers, and believe it could have a similar impact when made available to all YU students.”

Meredith believes “This is important for all students at YU to use in order to increase their ability to be competitive in an ever-competitive marketplace for jobs and internships. Jobscan gives students the ability to get their resume in front of more employers at a higher rate but also improve the language on their resume so it’s more aligned to the industry they are going into.”

The service is applicable and valuable for all fields, whether in liberal arts, STEM or business, all of which are competitive and use ATS in their online applications, making it key for students to utilize the platform to their advantage.

Susan Bauer, Executive Director of the Career Center, explained the importance of Jobscan best: “Targeted resumes that address the specific needs of the employer, showcase how you can and will meet the goals of the role, and are optimized with the keywords from that job posting, are the resumes that land interviews. We already have students who attribute using Jobscan to landing an interview – we want all students to use it.”

*“In an increasingly competitive job market, Jobscan is a powerful tool that allows YU students’ resumes to stand out.”*

Shmuel Adler (SSSB '22)

no limit to using the system; applicants can scan their resumes and cover letters to match any description as many times as they would like.

The sign-up process is simple and automated, even including an option for users to connect their LinkedIn accounts. Users can update their profile with

are easy to navigate, which helps reduce some of the stress associated with the job application process.

Shmuel Adler (SSSB '22) landed an internship for the summer of 2021 after using Jobscan to align his resume with the internship description. “In an increasingly competitive job market,



The YU Career Center’s Joshua Meredith is excited to bring Jobscan to students.

JOBSCAN/YESHIVA  
UNIVERSITY

MARIA ZAITSEVA  
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became with the setting. Teaching and helping students become more “inquisitive and curious about the world,” was “incredibly gratifying and satisfying.”

Zaitseva points to the renowned international relations scholar Dr. Peter Katzenstein as one of her biggest influences. As her doctoral advisor, he taught her that “you can support someone on an academic-intellectual level but also on a personal level.” Katzenstein portrayed himself as a person who “understood there was more to life than cramming for exams and writing papers.” This shaped how Zaitseva relates to her students now. “I try to see them as individuals, not just students who are getting grades coming to my class,” she explains, “but also understanding that they have a life outside of the classroom.”

Prof. Zaitseva has now been teaching at YU for nine years. Landing her position at YU was “pure luck,” she jokes. While she was finishing her dissertation, she began looking for jobs and saw an advertisement for an adjunct position in international relations at YU. She then met with the then-chair of the Political Science Department

Dr. Ruth Bevan who Zaitseva says went on to be her mentor at YU. After speaking for a while, Dr. Bevan asked her, “So, what do you think? Should a woman be teaching all these men about security and international relations?” Zaitseva immediately responded, “Yes, I think she should.” At that moment, she was hired.

In a Zaitseva course, the classroom is always active with discussion. Students engage with each other and the professor, often tying in the daily material to current events. This kind of participation is encouraged, and usually accounts for about 20% of a student’s grade in the class. For Zaitseva, developing this kind of atmosphere was a “process” as the classroom she grew up with was quite different. Back in the Soviet school she attended during her childhood, Zaitseva shared that there was no discussion. “It was lecture, regurgitation, memorization — that’s it. Critical thinking was not something that I was honestly taught at school.” That changed once she went to college where many of the professors invited students to talk, debate and ask questions. This was exactly how Zaitseva decided to run her classroom once

she started teaching. Debate and discussion, not just memorizing information, is extremely important for Zaitseva. “You can read the books, you can memorize, but really, engaging in debate and engaging in discussion is what gets you to form your opinion on things,” she insists.

Her forum for free and open debate is important to Zaitseva who is particularly careful to never “force [her] point of view.” Instead, she wants students to “form their own opinion, and the only way they are going to do it is by talking it out, not only with me but with other students in the class.” Zaitseva encourages this forum of debate even in larger classes with more than 30 students.

At the start of her time at YU, Zaitseva taught only one class each semester. Over the course of her tenure, she began to teach more and more. She now teaches five classes total, typically teaching two every semester, on both the Wilf and Beren campuses. Her classes explore a range of issues related to international relations, from the details of America’s foreign policy, to the formation, motives and causes of terrorism. Out of all her classes, she especially enjoys teaching

about weapons of mass destruction, a topic that was part of her dissertation “When Allies Go Nuclear: The Changing Nature of The American Response to ‘Friendly’ Nuclear Programs.” She also enjoys teaching the introductory class where many of the students are new to the world of international relations and political science in general. Zaitseva says she finds it “very satisfying” that students enter the class knowing almost nothing about politics outside of the United States and leave with a new understanding of how to assess what is happening in the world.

Speaking about political science in general, Zaitseva believes the field is important because “we are surrounded by it by every single day, whether we like it or not.” As for her international scope, Zaitseva commented that it is important for people to educate themselves about what is happening in the world “and not just focus on our immediate surroundings.” She hopes that students will leave her classes with a better sense of understanding about how other countries operate differently from the United States, and a sharper sense of how to analyze the news.



# Donald Trump Brought Out the Worst in Us. Now, We Need to Heal.

By Sruli Fruchter

This article was originally published online on Jan. 8, 2021.

I celebrated in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected to be the 45th president of the United States. With eyes glazed by the glowing TV and lips salivating at my first taste of politics, I was excited for what would come. He was “pro-Israel” and “good for Jews,” so what more could we want? Over the past four years, however, I’ve watched our values collapse and our morale deteriorate. Now, I’m left appalled at the damage Trump has done to the Jewish community.

On Jan. 6, we saw white supremacists and neo-Nazis storm Capitol Hill with a mob of pro-Trump supporters. Explosives were found near the Capitol. Pictures surfaced of a man wearing a “Camp Auschwitz” sweat-shirt, videos circulated of rioters clutching confederate flags as they bulldozed past law enforcement and photos showed Trump supporters smashing windows as the broke into the Capitol. This is who he inspired.

With countless accusations of sexual assault and misconduct, matched with overt misogyny, racist dog whistles and unabashed bullying, Donald Trump was not supposed to be our moral leader. We, the overwhelming majority of the collective Orthodox community, were convinced that he would be the best U.S. president for Israel, and thus, for Jews. How wrong we were.

Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew better than to accept our naïveté, as he said in 1932, “The presidency is not merely an administrative office. That is the least part of it ... It is preeminently a place of moral leadership.”

We’ve been corrupted. Over Trump’s four years, we made him out to be our Mashiach, the savior we’ve been waiting thousands of years to arrive. With this affinity, we excused his racism, his sexism and his divisive comments, waving away those concerns as if they didn’t define who he was as a person

and a president — and we’ve paid the price for it. It’s tainted our hearts, our rhetoric and our community. Trumpism has arguably amounted to a modern-day *avodah zarah*, an idolatrous religion we feel compelled to live by.

Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein, a *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshivat Har Etzion, said it best

*I don’t know what our community would have looked like if we had Trump for another four years, but I’m thankful I won’t have to find out.*

a few months ago: “They don’t stop for a moment to think about the moral damage that [Trump] inflicts on the United States, or even on the world. They don’t ask how it’s possible to abandon the fate of humanity to such an unbalanced man, who doesn’t recognize the concepts of truth and falsehood.”

It wasn’t a momentary revelation that radically shifted my feelings toward Trump. However, over the course of his long, four years, the mounting evidence of who he was as a person was too much for my feeble justifications to bear — it became intolerable. Supporting Trump and excusing his insolent and hateful rhetoric went against everything I believed in.

I wanted to publish my feelings after Trump failed to denounce white supremacy at the first presidential debate, but I decided against it. After Wednesday’s assault on American democracy, an assault that Trump incited, I knew I could no longer self-censor. Capitol Hill was the breaking point of this disastrous period; few could still deny the damage of Trump’s rhetoric, how he inspired an attack on the very fabric of the country’s democracy.

The sycophantic Trumpism that our community has developed over his presidency came with consequences, lost opportunities and unimaginable costs, and we need to acknowledge this to heal from it.

Every detractor is a liar in Trump’s eyes. Science is subjective, facts are fluid and his

actions are always above reproach. The election was rigged before it began, assuming Trump lost, and the media is out to get him, assembling witch hunts and fallacious stories to dethrone him. But that’s just Trump being Trump, so we learned to live with it; we normalized his lies and conspiracy theories.

conspiracy-theory inclinations about the coronavirus, and as infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths are still on the rise, we continue to pay the price for it. We’ve even defamed Hashem’s name with shameful riots and behavior, making a *chilul Hashem* to combat restrictions made for *pikuach nefesh*. Then again, if the whole thing is a hoax from the fake-news media, what’s the worry?

Our young ones even belted support for his re-election in song like a soulful, Shabbos-day *zemer* for Hashem. We don his slogan on our shirts and hats and plant his picket signs on our front lawns. “The Democrats” and “The Radical Left” have become our enemy, the heartless people who want to uproot all we know and love.

Trump constantly used his vitriolic language to bully and slander others. It’s only natural that when we idolized him, when we crowned him to be a near demigod, we allowed his behavior to seep into our being.

It’s a *bracha* that Biden will be the 46th president of the U.S. This isn’t about Republican or Democrat, right or left. There’s legitimacy to both parties and their values — to say otherwise would be unfairly one-sided. This is about the bare basics of stability and peace that this country so desperately needs, and Trump has consistently failed to deliver.

Now is the time for healing. The love, compassion, sensitivity and civility that are so valued in Judaism have been fractured. Our psyche has slowly but surely devolved to embody, albeit with variance, Trump’s worst qualities. I don’t know what our community would have looked like if we had Trump for another four years, but I’m thankful I won’t have to find out.

There is so much pain in the air, so much brokenness and hatred that’s darkened the spirit of the world. We say we want to be a “light unto the nations,” so now is the time to do just that. Let’s put the era of Trump behind us and lead the way for a better tomorrow.

Trump reinforced our doubts and



Neo-Nazis and white supremacists stormed Capitol Hill with a mob of pro-Trump supporters on Jan. 6.

TYLER MERBLER VIA FLICKR



## Valor Amidst the Violence: The Heroes of Jan. 6

By LEVI BOSHNACK

*This article was originally published online on Jan. 14, 2021.*

Jan. 6, 2021 will be remembered as one of the darkest days in American history. For three hours, the Capitol was mobbed by a crowd spurred on by the president of the United States due to his narcissistic inability to concede the 2020 presidential election. Five people died, dozens of law enforcement officers were injured, and Capitol Hill was heavily damaged. The certification of Joe Biden's victory was halted, stopping the peaceful transfer of power this country has taken for granted. Donald Trump's actions have validated my reasoning for not voting for him, and the cowardice of many elected Republicans in the weeks following the election contributed to this mass delusion.

I don't want to talk about that today, though. Countless pieces have been written about the evils that occurred at the Capitol. Much ink has been spilled over the moral failures of elected officials and lack of planning by law enforcement leadership. The legal, political and societal fallout from the insurrection has been and will continue to be substantial. Rather, I want to highlight courageous actions taken by individuals before, during and after the events of Jan. 6.

Leading up to the certification of the 2020 election results, Mike Pence had a choice to make. He could preside over the joint session of Congress and certify the results against Trump's wishes. Trump and his allies seemed to think that Pence could reject the electors, so they called on him to "come through." (Anyone with at least a rudimentary understanding of civics knew that Pence had no such power, but elements in the right-wing media complex pushed this as a possibility.) Alternatively, he could have recused himself from the process and have Senate President Pro Tempore Chuck Grassley (R-IA) preside in his stead, saving himself the ire of Trump supporters and potentially ensuring their support in a potential 2024 presidential run.

Mike Pence chose to put our institutions and democratic norms over his personal ambition. After Trump's giant "Stop the Steal" rally and right before the joint session of Congress began, Pence issued a statement explaining that he couldn't reject the electors due to his oath to defend and protect the Constitution. Pence remained at the Capitol throughout the duration of the insurrection and took the lead in coordinating a response with the Department of Defense. Once the Capitol was secured and the Senate reconvened to finish debating the objection to the Arizona electors, he gave a speech stating: "To those who wreaked havoc in our Capitol today, you did not win. Violence never wins.

Freedom wins, and this is still the people's house." At 3:41 a.m., Pence announced the completion of the certification of the election results, ensuring that, indeed, the mob did not win. When the mob stormed the Capitol, they were targeting Mike Pence for his commitment to preserving norms and respecting democracy. Pence will be remembered as Donald Trump's VP, but the courage he

displayed need not go unnoticed. Jason Crow (D, CO-6) probably didn't expect to feel like he was an army ranger in Iraq or Afghanistan ever again. On the morning of Jan. 6, he was likely prepping for a long day of fierce debate with his Republican colleagues planning to object to the certification of certain electors. Everyone was aware of the "Stop the Steal" protest/rally the president was leading, but he assumed that security forces would keep the peace. Yet there he was that afternoon, trapped in the House chamber with roughly two dozen individuals being told by officers to shelter in place and get to the ground. Gunshots and flash grenades were heard in the hallway, and rioters were pounding on the doors attempting to get in. Lying on the ground next to him was Susan Wild (D, PA-6), shaking and terrified. Crow took her hand and tried to comfort her, telling her firmly, "We are going to be OK." Crow told the remaining members to remove the pins identifying them as lawmakers. He also began to seriously consider the possibility he'd have to fight his way out. "I had a pen in my pocket that I could use as a weapon," Crow told CNN, "and I was looking for other weapons as well."

*The actions of Mike Pence, Jason Crow, Ruben Gallego and Eugene Goodman were all courageous in different ways, but all of them won't get nearly the attention they deserve.*

displayed need not go unnoticed.

Representative Ruben Gallego (D, AZ-7), an Iraq war veteran who served in the Marine Corps, was thinking along the same lines as Crow. "I thought I'd have to fight my way out," he told The Washington Post in an interview. Earlier, he had assisted members who were having trouble putting on their gas masks, telling them to breathe slowly to avoid hyperventilating. The chamber had been in chaos. "The problem is that there was no leadership on the floor," said Gallego. "Once they took away the leadership, there was Capitol Police. They didn't give us clear instructions. They were telling us to do this and do that, but they weren't communicating."

Gallego had jumped on a chair in the House floor to direct traffic, guiding members off the floor toward an undisclosed secure location. He was wondering how to best fight his way out of the Capitol when Capitol police told the remaining individuals on the

floor to continue the evacuation. Gallego, Crow and Rep. Eric Swalwell (D, CA-15) were the last people on the floor before the chamber was completely cleared. Gallego also took six journalists who were turned away from entering the undisclosed secure location to shelter in his office for several hours, where he entertained them with war stories and brought them food.

the doors. His actions likely preempted what could have been a violent confrontation, Kirk D. Burkhalter, a professor at New York Law School and a former New York City police officer, said in an interview.

The Capitol Police were heavily criticized for their lack of preparedness and the irresponsible actions of a few of their officers, but the vast majority of them showed great courage and bravery on Jan. 6, and one of them tragically lost his life after being bludgeoned by a terrorist with a fire extinguisher. The bravery shown by officers doesn't make headlines the way misconduct and leadership failures do, but something tells me Goodman is fine staying out of the limelight. "My job is to protect and serve," he told co-workers after the video of him went viral. "And on that day, I was protecting." Goodman is a hero in every sense of the word, and Congress should formally recognize his actions.

The actions of Mike Pence, Jason Crow, Ruben Gallego and Eugene Goodman were all courageous in different ways, but all of them won't get nearly the attention they deserve. The history books will not feature Pence's commitment, Gallego and Crow's leadership, and Goodman's heroism as what was notable about Jan. 6, 2021. That does not make their courage any less impactful, however. As C.S. Lewis said, "Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching."



Eugene Goodman led rioters away from the Senate Chamber

TWITTER

## Orthodox Jewry and President Trump

By RABBI YOSEF BLAU

*This article was originally published online on Jan. 22, 2021.*

At least eight buses filled with Orthodox Jews went to Washington, D.C. on Jan. 6, 2021 to attend a rally in support of Former President Donald Trump's claim that the election was stolen and that Congress or the Vice President should declare him re-elected. This rally was being held after all the states had certified the votes and over

60 court cases objecting to the count had been rejected by state and federal courts on every level, including the United States Supreme Court.

*Examining Trump's appeal to other parts of American society might be helpful in understanding the causes for support for him in the Orthodox community.*

The rally ended with the President telling the crowd to walk up to the capital and apparently, through this, influence Congress and Former Vice President Mike Pence. A significant number of people understood

this as a directive to enter the Capitol and riot. Let us assume that the overwhelming number of Orthodox Jews who participated in the rally did not enter the Capitol and were

not part of the violence. It is also possible that these Orthodox Jews were not familiar with the white nationalist groups who participated with them and had a history of violence. Some mistakenly believed that

the rioters, broadly speaking, were leftists masquerading as Trump supporters.

After giving them every benefit of the doubt, these Orthodox Jewish supporters of Trump had accepted as fact that the election was rigged, an operation which would have involved both Republican and Democratic state officials on different levels in at least six states. The many judges who decided the court cases had to be part of this conspiracy since every single complaint had been rejected.

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# Why I Am Returning to Teach In Person This Spring

By MARK FINKEL

*This article was originally published online on Dec. 27, 2020.*

This upcoming spring semester, I will be teaching my Beren students in-person. I did not make this decision lightly. These are the most uncertain and trying times we have faced since WWII, and we're learning on our feet how to operate, with no clearly correct course of action. As educators, it has always been our duty to help our students navigate the changing world around them.

The tremendous stress this past year has put on us all raises new and daunting questions. How do we accept our new normal while still remaining optimistic that there will be better times ahead? The nature of mankind is to think about and plan for the future. For college and university students, this is especially true. Creating plans, determining next steps, and, yes, even dreaming, are an important part of this stage in a young adult's life. Now that we do not know what the future will bring, what do they do with that extra mental time and energy? Uncertainty turns into worry.

Even world-renowned epidemiologists' best answers, at this time, are "We don't know." How can we, as educators, guide our students when we don't know what the world is changing into?

Over the past months, I have watched many of my students struggle through the

health worker. My students are not only trying to address the same stress and uncertainty we are, but also, in a sense, have been forced back into their childhood; in a time when they are supposed to be spreading their wings and learning to fly, they have been put back into what must feel, at

optimize online education. My faculty colleagues have been working very hard to be as pedagogically effective as possible, a task much harder online than in person. We mix up the modalities of learning, add extra content and block out our classes in small time increments to keep everyone's attention. I am in awe of my colleagues' ingenuity, energy and alacrity in creating such engaging online curricula. Too, I have been astounded at the many times my students have done extraordinary individual and team projects under the current challenging conditions. I firmly believe this current generation of young adults will find their best selves in this era and emerge to work for a better future for all of us.

My hope is that, like the Renaissance that followed the Black Death and the Jazz Age that followed the 1918 Spanish Flu, we emerge from this pandemic and step into an era of unprecedented creativity and growth. The human spirit persists. And, maybe, this new era will even have a jaunty jazz soundtrack accompanying the new golden age.

*Mark Finkel is a clinical associate professor of management at the Sy Syms School of Business.*

*I want to attempt to do my small part to enrich their educational experience by trying to facilitate better, deeper and more meaningful connections through being in a formerly mundane environment: a classroom.*

isolation, the monotony. These same young adults, just last year, experienced their first exhilarating taste of independence as they left home for a gap year program in Israel or to join a university campus. I see these students now back in their childhood bedrooms, or in their family dining room, with little siblings running about, or in dorm rooms under a considerable amount of isolation. Human beings are naturally social creatures that develop, grow and learn through in-person interactions. Lacking this, something within us withers.

Over the past two semesters, I've come to see myself as a bit of a front-line mental

times, like cages. This coming semester, I look forward to welcoming back my students who wish to return to campus, while taking every available health and safety precaution. I want to attempt to do my small part to enrich their educational experience by trying to facilitate better, deeper and more meaningful connections through being in a formerly mundane environment: a classroom. For me, coming on campus is a small risk compared to the potential benefits for the students in my classes.

YU has done an extraordinary job, in a short period of time, of creating the infrastructure and training us professors to

## ORTHODOX JEWS AND TRUMP

*Continued from Page 15*

If one followed the narrative in one state, Georgia, Trump made claims that were systematically refuted by state officials. He pressured the Governor and Secretary of State, both Republicans, and threatened them. To accept Trump's version required not following the details of the story; it meant rejecting information that came from the mainstream media.

The explanation that the Orthodox Jewish vote for Trump was based on supporting his policies on Israel or religious rights fails to explain the segment of Orthodox Jewry that remained loyal to him against the apparent evidence that he had lost and wasn't re-elected. Something deeper was happening. Trump had convinced them that if he loses, the results would be catastrophic. He represented the only model of America that they could live with.

Orthodox Judaism has been remarkably successful after many thought that it would disappear. The periodic shift from presidents of one party to the other had virtually no impact on this growth. As a notorious abuser of women and frequent liar, Trump's personal behavior and crudity should have

turned off religious people. Clearly, his personal qualities are irrelevant to a major portion of Orthodox Jewry.

The consequences of the attack on the Congress — with more information to emerge from continuing investigations — are likely to reduce support for Trump. Examining Trump's appeal to other parts of American society might be helpful in understanding the causes for support for him in the Orthodox community. Trump's slogan, "make America great again," is a good place to start.

American society has changed. The traditional family has been transformed by the changing role of women and the greater acceptance of gays and lesbians. The dominance by white males is declining. In the view of many traditional Catholics and Evangelicals, America has become a secular country. Additionally, while the legacy of racism hasn't disappeared, Blacks and Latinos have earned prominent spots in American life, marking another shift in broader society.

Many Orthodox Jews want to return to an earlier time. Like the idealizing of life in the *shtetl*, the problematic aspects of the past are ignored. While it is bizarre to partner with white nationalists who are violent

anti-Semites, they are the enemies we have coped with in the past. Because leftist opponents of Israel are a new threat, they are seen as more dangerous.

When the runoff Senate election in Georgia resulted in victories for a Black and a Jew, for non-Orthodox Jews this stirred memories of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King marching together. For many Orthodox Jews, who associate Blacks with crime and riots, it only meant that the Democrats would control the Senate and that the crime and riots would continue.

For some Christians, beliefs are more important than behavior; this enabled them to disregard Trump's behavior and focus on his fundamental ideology. There is a segment of Orthodox Judaism that also sees incorrect ideology — which they see as embodied in the Democratic Party — as being worse than improper behavior. With the memory of the Holocaust in the background, bad behavior by a non-Jew is a given for this segment, which makes the argument that all politicians are corrupt effective. If there is no difference between politicians, then the prime consideration of the voter is reduced to: "who will do more for me?"

In general, Orthodox Jewry has become less concerned about the welfare of the broader society. The Trump administration was sympathetic to support for religious institutions. Political activity from Orthodox organizations in Washington is focused on increasing governmental response to Orthodox needs and supporting Israel. On issues facing the general society Orthodoxy has almost nothing to say.

Accepting the above, it is still difficult to find an explanation for this absolute trust in Trump's assertion that he was cheated out of his re-election; none of the legal resources have supported his claim. There has developed within segments of the community a commitment to Trump that is extraordinary.

A plausible explanation involves examining the nature of the Orthodox community's support for Trump in the 2016 election. There was some dislike for Hillary Clinton and political polarization that left Trump as the only alternative. Clearly his personal behavior and character were far from minimal religious standards. When the policies of his administration, whatever his motivation, led to fulfilling religious and Israeli aspirations, there had to be an explanation.

Looking to Jewish history there were non-Jewish monarchs who were the agents for G-d to save His people. Koresh gave the Jews permission to rebuild the temple. Achashverosh gave Mordechai and Esther the authority to save the Jews from Haman's decree. The kings' personal behavior was irrelevant. Achashverosh was at best a foolish king, but was nevertheless a vehicle for fulfilling the Divine plan. Historical models existed for Trump as an immoral agent of G-d.

From this perspective, whether expressed explicitly or not, Trump's lies and immoral actions could be ignored as irrelevant. A segment of Orthodox Jews view Trump as G-d's agent who must therefore receive their support. If this explanation is correct this bond will only be broken when it becomes apparent that Trump's role as Divine agent has ended. Perhaps, with the end of his presidency, Orthodox Jewry can return to its appropriate vision that character matters, and that we were meant to better the world — not only ourselves.



The White House

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## The Mandalorian Saved 2020

By Zachary Greenberg

*This article was originally published online on Jan. 22, 2021.*

*Editor's Note: This article contains spoilers for season two of "The Mandalorian." If, for whatever reason, you have not watched the series yet, you have been warned.*

In what might go down as one of the worst years in living memory due to COVID-19, Disney+'s "The Mandalorian" has provided television junkies and Star Wars fans with a much-needed distraction.

Airing throughout the last months of 2020, the second season of the show was nothing short of astounding. From kicking off on a high note fighting a Krayt Dragon in the premiere, to meeting Bo-Katan, to the appearance of Anakin Skywalker's old padawan, Ahsoka Tano, and, of course, watching the infamous bounty hunter Boba Fett return to the screen, the series added fantastic stories to Star Wars lore.

For those of you who don't know, "The Mandalorian" revolves around Din Djarin, a bounty hunter in the New Republic after the fall of the Galactic Empire. Djarin, nicknamed "Mando," was adopted by a Mandalorian tribe after his parents were killed by Separatist battle droids. Mando is a soft-spoken, yet skilled, fighter. As a rule of his tribe, he never removes his helmet in front of another person. In the first season, Mando is ordered to capture a 50-year-old unknown creature, which he successfully does. It ends up being the adorable Grogu, then known as "The Child," but more commonly known on the internet as "Baby Yoda." Grogu is a cutie pie, to say the least, because despite being 50, he looks like a toddler due to his species' slow aging process. Grogu also has force abilities, but due to his limited training, is not good at controlling it and

uses it sparingly. Djarin decides to spare the Child and keeps him as a sidekick until he can find him a suitable home and eventually the two form a close bond with each other.

In episode six of season two, Mando takes Grogu to the planet Tython where the "seeing stone" resides, so that Grogu can make contact with a Jedi and alert them of his presence. After seemingly making contact, Grogu is captured by the villainous Moff Gideon and brought aboard his Imperial Light Cruiser. Moff wants to use Grogu's blood for some unknown sinister purpose. Mando is upset and rounds up a rescue team consisting of Cara Dune, Bo Katan, Boba Fett and Fennec Shand to rescue Grogu.

The finale starts off with the Djarin's team capturing the scientist team who experimented on Grogu. One of the bad guys, a former Stormtrooper, begins to mock Cara Dune and the fact that her home planet, Alderaan, got blown up. Dune retorts by angering the pilot, referencing the fact that the Death Star was blown up — twice. The pilot responds, "You think you're funny? Do you know how many millions were killed on those bases?"

I loved this response because it exemplified a common question that The Mandalorian explores: "Was the Empire really so evil?" Time and time again we hear from former Imperial supporters their side of the story and how they didn't view the empire as an evil entity, but as a necessary authority for keeping law and order. The pilot's response goes even further and brings up the fact that millions of people died in the destruction of the bases. From the Rebellion's point of view, the destructions were happy moments, a culmination of years of planning leading to those triumphs. However, the pilot is reminding Dune, and the viewer for that matter, that despite the fact it was a victory for the rebels, millions still died.

As a Star Wars fan growing up, I've never

really considered the Stormtrooper's outlook of the conflict. The first time it crossed my mind was in the first of the sequel trilogy, "The Force Awakens." In the film, one of the protagonists, Finn, is a Stormtrooper deserter who joins the Resistance which fought against the First Order, an autocratic military junta that was formed from the remnants of the Galactic Empire during the New Republic Era. Finn gives the viewer a new perspective from the point-of-view of a Stormtrooper. However, after Finn joins the Resistance, the trilogy doesn't really explore so much how he feels about fighting against his former comrades. It feels like a no-brainer decision for him since Finn views the First Order as a pure evil that must be stopped. The Mandalorian show gives us a unique flavor that suggests that Stormtroopers are people too. They might not agree with the good guys, but they're people and they have values as well. They see it as their mission to uphold order and sustain peace. I loved this opening scene, and thankfully it only gets better from there.

The heroes decide to steal Pershing's ship and use it as bait to board Gideon's ship. They lightspeed jump to the area where Gideon's ship is and pretend to be escaping from Boba Fett. Fett puts on a show and fires a melee of lasers that intentionally miss Pershing's ship, but are convincingly close. The rest of the team, onboard Pershing's ship, sends a distress signal to Gideon and Gideon sends out a squadron of TIE-Fighters for assistance. The TIE-Fighters come out from the launch tube of the Imperial Cruiser and the heroes cunningly declare that they must land immediately and come in through the launch tube. The heroes then pop out and blast all the Stormtroopers at the launch bay.

This scene reminds me of the one from the 2nd sequel film, "The Last Jedi." In the opening scene, Poe Dameron "deceives" General Hux by pretending that his transmission unit isn't working and he can't hear

him. This gives Poe enough time to charge up his ship's cannons and destroy a ship. The scene was downright silly and made a complete mockery of the Star Wars franchise. Why anyone in their right mind wouldn't just blow Poe's ship out of the sky makes no sense as he was literally just standing right in front of the ship and would have easily been destroyed. Besides that, it wasn't a "brilliant" strategy by Poe, he just made a joke and somehow it worked. In the scene from "Mandalorian," the heroes pretend to be getting shot at and use that diversion as a means to board the ship. This strategy is smart since Boba Fett is a known bounty hunter, they appeared to be clearly in distress and they were using Pershing's ship which is an Imperial vessel. Thus the deception makes sense, whereas Poe's was just a joke; for some reason, the director, Rian Johnson, must have thought it was funny to include. I may have laughed at Hux's stupidity, but it was not a good scene at all for Star Wars.

After boarding the ship, the episode took a progressive turn to do an all-female scene with Bo-Katan, her assistant, Cara Dune, and Fennec versus the ship's Stormtroopers. This scene was amazing and the fights were very well done. I would compare this scene to "Avengers: Endgame" which also had an all-female scene. In "Endgame," I hated that scene as it appeared to be more about the fact that they are females as opposed to the fact that they are cool superheroes. It was way too forced and I think it took away from what the scene could have been. The emphasis that scene made of only having women, to me, made a statement that the females being powerful and able to fight is not the norm, but an exception. However, this episode did the women justice and it was an epic scene. They worked together, showed off some amazing fighting skills, and it was a very believable scene. It was a

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The Mandalorian (Pedro Pascal) and Grogu in Lucasfilm's THE MANDALORIAN, season two, exclusively on Disney+. © 2020 Lucasfilm Ltd. & tm All Rights Reserved.



*THE MANDALORIAN*  
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major triumph in that regard for women in cinema and I hope future filmmakers take note of this scene.

The episode continues with some epic battles between Djarin and a Dark Trooper and later with Moff himself who used the legendary Darksaber. After the capture of Moff, a platoon of Dark Troopers arrives to break free their leader. As all hope seems lost, a familiar X-Wing starfighter arrives on board. The music suddenly changes to a mysterious score and one can't help but feel that this is no ordinary X-Wing. Moff's face turns to terror as the Dark Troopers who have nearly opened the door to free him, turn around in unison to face this new foe. The heroes watch the video monitor in the bridge and see a cloaked figure walking through the halls. In the next few shots, we see the figure deflecting blasts, spinning, chopping and using the force to utterly decimate the platoon of Dark Troopers.

At last, the Jedi reaches the door and to the other heroes' protest, Djarin opens the bridge door and the cloaked Jedi enters. In an epic shot, the Jedi lowers his hood and we see that it is none other than Luke Skywalker, the protagonist from the original trilogy. I've never shrieked so loud in my life.

The Mandalorian show made me fall in love with the unlikely duo of a tough, rugged and quiet bounty hunter, Din Djarin, and the adorable Groggu. I watched as Djarin's tough demeanor slowly evaporated as he

fell more in love with Groggu, and I couldn't help but fall in love with him too. I could not imagine any scenario where I would be satisfied watching the two depart, yet the show not only left me satisfied, but ecstatic.

I read a review of the episode on IMDb and the user commented that "seeing Luke walk into frame was like seeing Jesus." I am not a Christian whatsoever, but I fully agree with this theoretical comparison. Luke is the one who started it all. We watched him grow from a kid to a confident Jedi master who never stopped believing and was ready to take on any challenge. One Dark Trooper nearly killed Djarin. Luke took out an entire platoon of what looked like at least 50 of these Dark Troopers. He did so without even breaking a sweat. It was a magical moment that fans have been waiting for since "Return of the Jedi" (1983) and it was executed to perfection. Luke was the Jedi Master we had hoped he'd be and everything a Star Wars fan would want to see.

The last scene has Groggu looking at Mando seemingly asking him if he should go with Luke to begin his Jedi training. Mando picks up Groggu and tells him it'll be alright, he can go. Then Groggu sticks out his little arms and points to his face, gesturing for Mando to remove his helmet. Djarin had never taken off his helmet to anyone, except once in the previous episode and that was in order to save Groggu. There was no life-threatening need for him to take off his

helmet, but Djarin's heart had fallen for the kid so much that he agreed and removed his helmet.

We see Groggu and Djarin looking at each other for the first time eye to eye. Djarin's eyes are watery and he's clearly heartbroken knowing that this is the end of their journey. Mando tells him that this isn't the end and he'll make sure they see each other again. Luke takes Groggu and begins carrying him away. The music score intensifies to a touching note and everyone in the room's eyes are in tears. The camera zooms in on Djarin and Groggu's faces separately as we see them say goodbye for the last time. I'm crying as I type this and I cried like a baby both times I've watched the episode. It was such a powerful and emotional scene to see.

This is what we wanted from the sequels. Seeing a confident and posed Luke taking out a hoard of bad guys. The chaos of the galaxy as it struggles to adapt to no longer being oppressed by the Empire. The old Star Wars feel of a mixture of futuristic technologies, like robots, lasers and machinery, with a slumville, western-style atmosphere with gunslingers, gangsters and grotesque creatures.

The finale of Mandalorian was everything a Star Wars fan could want, plus the most beautiful closure to an incredible show. I have never seen a rating so high. The episode literally has at the time of publishing a 9.8 out of 10 rating on IMDb and if you read the

user reviews, it'll take you several hundred reviews to find one less than a 10 out of 10. That's how good it is.

Personally, I was fortunate enough, by coincidence, to have just rewatched the original "Star Wars: A New Hope" with my fiancé. She agreed to watch it on the condition that I make a TikTok — I made it for the sake of Star Wars, okay! Rewatching "A New Hope" reminded me how amazing Luke was, and then when he returned in the Mandalorian, I was overwhelmed with joy.

I can't stop thinking about the final episode and watching other people's reactions on YouTube. I've been watching Star Wars since I was 4-years old and used to throw Star Wars themed birthday parties with my friends. I've been to Disney theme parks so many times and have been on the Star Tours ride at least 40 times. I have an R2-D2 robot in my room, two lightsabers and so much apparel, yet I've never felt this much happiness for the franchise until this episode. This episode is probably called "The Rescue" because it "rescues" the Star Wars franchise from the mediocre sequels we've had to endure the past decade.

In sum, the episode was an emotional rollercoaster and I give it a 10 out of 10. I probably should be studying for finals, but this episode was too good not to review. For those of you who have read this and did not watch it, shame on you! Go watch it now!

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## Tesla's Power Surge

By NACHUM LIEBMAN

When you think of electric cars, you think of Tesla. The electric vehicle industry remained dormant for years, with not much excitement from the general public. Tesla, however, created a new narrative. Aptly named after the genius inventor Nikola Tesla, it has proven to be a dominant force in the industry. Money from eager investors floods into Tesla's stock more and more every day. Notably, the high-performing ETF of ARK Investment Management holds around \$1.5 billion of Tesla shares. ARK's founder, Catherine Wood, has projected Tesla's stock to potentially rise to \$7,000. While Tesla is not yet at a \$7,000 share price, gaining a spot on the S&P 500 certainly places them on the right track.

On Dec. 21, history will be made. The addition of Tesla to the S&P will be the largest company ever added to the index, with a \$538 billion valuation, shattering the previous record of \$127 billion held by Berkshire Hathaway. The addition makes Tesla the seventh-largest company listed on the index. With their success, it was inevitable that they would be included on the index, and with numerous straight quarters of profits, it became a question of not if, but when.

Standard and Poor's 500 stock index, dubbed the S&P 500, is possibly the most highly vaunted index for a company to be selected for. The index provides an economic pulse of sorts, illustrating how well many of our nation's largest companies are performing. The highly impressive criteria to be inducted onto this index include metrics such as a specific minimum market

capitalization and average trading volume, ensuring that only the largest firms make the cut. However, these are only prerequi-

Executives from the S&P actually consulted with investors in November, questioning which option would be more beneficial. Many

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sites to be considered for the opportunity. The firms that qualify are determined to be added to the index by the highly selective "Index Committee" at Standard and Poor's Dow Jones Indices. One of the main reasons companies vie to reach this milestone is due to the potential for an enormous increase in value once added. Since Tesla is now a member of possibly the most well-known and traded index, when individual investors or investment firms desire to invest in the S&P 500, they are partly investing in Tesla. The recent rally of Tesla's shares seems to indicate this. The firm's stock is up around 580% this year alone, with excitement piling in from investors who are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Tesla to the index.

Interestingly, due to the astronomical size of Tesla, there was an ongoing debate as to whether it is better to add the firm to the S&P 500 in the usual one simple step, akin to "ripping the band-aid off," or the second option of an unprecedented two-part addition process. This two-part process would consist of adding pieces of Tesla to the index over a few days, allowing the trading volume to be spread out, hence making it more easily digestible for investors rebalancing their portfolios to accommodate such a large addition.

investors are worried that the massive addition will cause a wild session of index trading volatility since suddenly flocks of fund managers will be trading the involved indexes. However, Steve Sosnick, chief strategist at Interactive Brokers, believes that the classic

one-step move is a safer decision, as opposed to testing out a new method on such a followed index.

The biggest one to stand to gain from this landmark index inclusion is none other than the world-famous CEO of Tesla, Elon Musk. In recent weeks, Musk's net worth has already shot up over \$15 billion, vaulting him to second place on the Forbes 500 with an eye-popping \$140 billion. As more money continues to pour into his firm, that number will likely continue to grow, reaching astronomical heights as if it were one of Musk's SpaceX rockets.



Tesla is the largest S&P 500 addition of all time.

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## Titans and Tiffany's

By ALIZA LEICHTER

On Jan. 7, 2021, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the world's largest luxury goods conglomerate and owner of brands including Louis Vuitton, Givenchy and beauty retailer Sephora, announced the completion of their acquisition of New York City-based jewelry retailer Tiffany & Co.

LVMH first agreed to buy Tiffany & Co. at \$135 per share in November 2019, but due to a dispute caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the takeover price was discounted 2.5% and set at \$131.5 per share. Tiffany has been suffering greatly as a result of the pandemic and tariffs. LVMH had initially stated that they could not complete the deal with Tiffany "as it stands" because of a request from the

French government on Aug. 31 to delay the deal beyond Jan. 6, 2021 due to the possibility of tariffs being imposed by the United States government. After much speculation about whether the merger would happen amidst a turbulent economy, the acquisition was finalized for a total of \$15.8 billion, the largest deal ever in the luxury sector.

Tiffany & Co. is an iconic retailer mentioned in various pop culture works from Audrey Hepburn's 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's" to a lyric in the Eagles' 1974 song "Hotel California" ("Her mind is Tiffany-twisted"). The acquisition of such a distinctly American brand allows French-based LVMH to significantly bolster its presence in the U.S.

Prior to adding Tiffany & Co. to their portfolio, LVMH's watch and jewelry subsidiaries consisted entirely of European brands;

watches and jewelry are also the corporation's smallest subsidiaries. LVMH has long been recognized as a major player in the soft luxury market — designer clothing, leather bags and accessories — as a result of their

Bogliolo devised a new strategy that would resonate with their target audience. In their first TV ad in 20 years, the retailer ran a spot during Super Bowl LI featuring American singer Lady Gaga as one of the new faces of

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*With so much speculation and publicity surrounding this historic deal, Tiffany & Co. has rapidly established itself as an LVMH brand, and the newly-created association consolidates the corporation's position as a force to be reckoned with in the hard luxury sector.*

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ownership of numerous renowned and elite fashion houses. However, in the hard luxury market of watches and jewelry, LVMH was significantly less-established; Italian brand Bulgari, was one of the few names recognizable to Americans out of the six brands in their hard luxury division. Hard luxury sales only account for nearly 9% of LVMH's sales and the merger has the potential to bolster their profitability. With so much speculation and publicity surrounding this historic deal, Tiffany & Co. has rapidly established itself as an LVMH brand, and the newly-created association consolidates the corporation's position as a force to be reckoned with in the hard luxury sector.

Even before the pandemic, Tiffany & Co. was in "turnaround mode." While the jeweler's historic past — starting with its founding in 1837 — remained esteemed, it had lost its charm with the younger generation. Following plunging sales and a bleak business plan, CEO Frederic Cumenal resigned in early 2017 and was replaced with Alessandro Bogliolo, whose leadership has proven beneficial for Tiffany. With a fresh image in mind for the future of Tiffany and the goal of appealing to millennials, in particular,

the brand. Additionally, Tiffany shifted the focus from engagement rings and wedding bands to jewelry marking milestone events, an appropriate decision considering millennials generally prioritize their careers over marriage and are therefore waiting longer to get married on average. The business was steady until the pandemic forced the lockdowns on malls and boutiques, leading to international travel flatlining, and causing Tiffany & Co.'s revenue to plunge 45% from the previous year, amounting to \$65 million in losses.

In a comment about the acquisition, LVMH CEO and French billionaire Bernard Arnault said that Tiffany would "thrive for centuries to come" as part of his diverse portfolio. However, with plummeting interest in luxury goods amidst the global pandemic, social-distancing lockdowns and a sharp decline in travel, it remains uncertain whether LVMH will recoup the billions spent acquiring Tiffany & Co.



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## Passion Leading to Success

By AARON ERBER

There is something really special about the intertwining of passion and business. When financial success is a mere byproduct of this passion it is truly a win-win. This application that channels inner fulfillment lends itself to almost every field and endeavor. A great example of this would be one of the great mathematicians, James Simons. Although Simons founded Renaissance Technologies and is one of the most successful hedge fund managers of all time, he is known for his preferred passion for math, with his title being “Mathematician.”

James Simons was born in Newton, Massachusetts, and had a mind for math from the outset. At just four years of age, Simons intuitively understood Zeno’s paradox by proposing that a car would never run out of gas if every time it needed to move it just used half of the gas it had left (with the only problem being that it wouldn’t travel too far). Simons continued his mathematical pursuits throughout his teenage years and later at MIT. Simons then went on to study

at UC Berkeley and co-developed the Chern-Simons theory, which has contributed to the fields of mathematics and physics.

After working for the NSA cracking codes and heading the math department at Stony Brook University, Simons found himself getting involved in the stock market. He started trading, getting investors and even recruited a graph-model maker for his business. Simons recognized that commodities charts seemed to have some shape and that

computer scientists, astronomers, and other academics that were able to analyze data. These models really revolutionized quantitative trading — many quantitative trading firms have emerged since.

Quantitative trading uses mathematical models to understand trends in the market and how to capitalize on them. As it gathers more and more information it will be able to analyze which variables in the market have a significant effect on a given security.

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*Success to James Simons has been loving what he does.*

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they didn’t look random. However, after creating some models for the commodities, Simons and his partner put them aside while they focused on fundamental trading. After some time, Simons went back to his passion and mathematical roots by starting to build mathematical models for the market. After constantly working on and updating these models for eight years, Simons started Renaissance Technologies which fully traded off of these mathematical models. Simons also brought in Ph.D. mathematicians,

This can lead to many correlations, such as perhaps the price of a drill and gold. If such a correlation were to exist and is recognized by the model, the model might suggest the firm to buy gold when the price of a drill increases or vice versa.

To this day, Renaissance Technologies is the most successful hedge fund in the world. Its largest fund, the Medallion Fund, has generated over \$100 billion in profits. All of this was started by passionate people, who applied their passions to a field that they can

analyze. James Simons avoids the limelight and infrequently gives interviews, yet in the few that he has given it is amazing to listen to the way he speaks and to his messages. You would never believe that he runs and created the most successful hedge fund. He loves math and applying it to other parts of his life. He has extended this passion to the good of others as he runs a charity that donates to math and science teachers across the country.

It isn’t stated that he used passion to create wealth, but it is certainly implied. He surrounds himself with people who are academics and donates to perpetuate his love of mathematics and science. Success to James Simons has been loving what he does. When asked whether he is more proud of his success in the academic world versus what he has accomplished in the financial world he said: “he was proud of both.” This simple answer sheds light on this idea. To Simons, it was about his enjoyment and impact, not necessarily the monetary effect. He is an example of “love what you do, follow your passions, and success will be your reward.”



Being passionate is the most important thing