



# THE BSERVER

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WOMEN, SY SYMS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, AND YESHIVA  
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## Discarding the Default: Why YU Should Reevaluate Its Dress Code

Molly Meisels  
Junior News Editor

“I can see down your shirt,” reproached my high school principal as she pointed to the undone button near the nape of my neck. I took a deep breath and buttoned it up, ready for discomfort to accompany me for the rest of the day. This instance of tzniut (modesty) policing was not new to me. My principal was a principled Chassidic woman, and she believed that by ignoring my lack of tzniut, she would be doing me a great disservice. “Inappropriate” aspects of my dress were made the focal points of my education for as far back as I can remember. My very first preschool memory involves a lesson about Ruth and her extreme piety as she knelt modestly in Boaz’s field. My fellow four-year-old classmates and I spent time practicing how to kneel, for Ruth’s tzniut was the epitome of a Jewish woman’s responsibility.

The first eighteen years of my life revolved around my mode of dress. My Chassidic community and my schools were hyper-focused on the length of my skirts and the tightness of my shirts. I believed this to be the natural way of the universe until I was empowered by friends and my literary heroes to believe otherwise. My eighth-grade teacher called me aside and caringly informed me that since my skirt did not reach four inches below my knees, I would not enter Heaven. She asked me if I wanted something as silly as my

skirt length to prohibit me from entering God’s kingdom. On another occasion, she complimented my new school sweater before whispering that I should never wear it again, because it highlighted parts of my body that were better left unseen. That was the year I became aware of my body. I was ashamed of it. I noticed all the curves of my newly formed female figure and was disgusted - I did not want this. I did not want a body that demanded to be hidden. How could I focus on the rest of my education when I was so preoccupied with my physical appearance? I was taught that while Jewish men had to focus on Jewish

learning, we women had to focus on our modesty. I was taught that the ideal Jewish woman wore loose shirts, long skirts, and had a modest demeanor. I was taught that I was not the ideal Jewish woman.

I arrived at Stern College for Women straight from high school. I was ready to start anew in a university priding itself on religious diversity. I could finally follow my form of Judaism in an environment engineered to facilitate open Jewish learning. I knew that Yeshiva University welcomed Jews from all backgrounds, and that I could expect to socialize with classmates from public schools as well as

those from religious homes. I was ecstatic, but my bubble burst rather quickly. Sure, there were plenty of women like me at Stern. There were women who showcased their religious identities through forms other than exterior proofs. But Stern’s dress code prohibited the full extent of that expression.

Yeshiva University’s dress code is as follows: “Female students are required to wear dresses or skirts that are knee-length, and tops that have sleeves and a modest neckline. Male students are required to wear pants and shirts.” While this makes it seem that male students at the university must adhere to a dress code as well, this is not truly the case. In our general society, men tend to wear pants and do not go shirtless to class. However, women do not limit their fashion choices to knee-length dresses and skirts. This is no different in Stern College for Women. Stern serves a diverse group of women, with diverse outlooks on religion and modesty.

When fellow students discovered that this article was being written, I was flooded with messages, each detailing negative experiences women at Stern have encountered due to the dress code.\* “Stern’s dress code conveys to students that they cannot exercise autonomy over their own bodies... The dress code does

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## YU’s Dress Code: “Against the First Amendment?”

Sara Schatz  
Staff Writer

“[We] strive to maintain a community which supports intellectual growth, learning from others, mutual respect and freedom of thought and expression.”

The above quote was taken from the opening statement of Yeshiva University’s “Bill of Rights and Responsibilities,” a statement which, to my understanding, the YU faculty and administration abide by relatively well.

Until I decided to write this article in defense of the dress code, I was innocently unaware that Yeshiva University even had a dress code. Despite my naivete, the rule was not a catastrophic shock to me; the concept of a dress code had always seemed self-explanatory, especially in a private, religious institution whose mission statement clearly states that it is “rooted in Jewish thought and tradition ... [and] dedicated to advancing the moral and material betterment of the Jewish community and broader society, in the service of God.” The fact that Yeshiva University requires each student to take Judaic courses that teach halachic

practicum based on Modern Orthodox standards, and has a Beit Midrash that holds some of our holiest scriptures, gives me the sense that we should give it as much respect as we would a synagogue, or any religious structure for that matter.

I recall a year ago accidentally ending up at the Baha’i Gardens whilst touring Haifa with a friend. The Baha’i religion, created by Iranian expatriate Bahá’u’lláh in 1863, promotes equality and unity, and happens to have a temple in Israel. At the temple, there was a sign requesting we take our shoes off and cloak ourselves with special scarves. Though we didn’t enter the temple, the sign left a lasting impact on my tzniut (modesty) standards when it came to any Jewish institution I’ve encountered since.

To my surprise, in comparison to those places, and to numerous Jewish schools and places of worship I’ve been in (many of which delineate sleeve length and provide detailed consequences should one break the rule), the standards held at YU seem quite moderate. The concise description

simply requires female students to “wear dresses or skirts that are knee-length” and ensure that their shirts “have sleeves and a modest neckline.” It seems that the administration purposefully did not go into detail regarding sleeve-length, nor state the consequence should one break the rules.

To support this point, a statement from Dean Bacon published in a December 2017 Commentator article (“The YU Dress Code: Setting a Standard and Creating a Community”, December 3rd, 2017) states that the reason for the dress code is to reflect the “culture of a Torah U’Madda Modern Orthodox institution,” implicating that the dress code is not necessarily meant to have impose moral values, but was set in stone to create a certain environment on the Stern campus and beyond. And from my understanding, Dean Bacon and the YU administration have labored to make this the ultimate goal for the dress code. From another article I discovered in the depths of the Commentator archives, written in November 2002, (“SCW Students Decry Current Dress Code”, v. 67 i. 2) Dean

Bacon is quoted similarly, saying that “[the] dress code at Stern College for Women was instituted as a school regulation, not as a formulation of halacha. Its purpose is to ensure an atmosphere or milieu that is most conducive to who and what we are – a women’s college that provides Torah education and Jewish studies in addition to a program of general studies.” This article additionally displays an eventual sense of compromise and understanding to certain students who found it unfair. And, in YU’s “Bill of Rights,” it’s quite clear under its “Expression” principle that “students have the right to examine and exchange diverse ideas, consistent with the mission of the University, in an orderly, respectful and lawful manner inside and outside the classroom.”

So, with all the reasons to support the dress code... why do the students continue to oppose it?

I decided to investigate by asking the student body itself. A couple of days before formulating this article, I posted to “Stern

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## Keeping Up Appearances: On Whose Opinions Matter at YU, and Whose Don't

Kira Paley  
*Editor in Chief*

If you asked me to sing a song that captures my attitude about YU at the moment, it would be Carly Simon's 1972 hit "You're So Vain." Lyrical analysis aside, it's simply the title of the track that exemplifies a core issue I take with YU's most recent questionable decision--that is, taking out two advertisements in The Wall Street Journal. In making this bold move, the school acted as a quintessence of itself in that as an institution, YU is more concerned with its external image than with its "internal image," as I'll call it. That is to say, YU cares most about the opinions of those who are not directly affiliated with it on a daily basis--donors, employers, potential students and parents--while the opinions of students and faculty, whose lives are more deeply entrenched in the university, are brushed aside. (For the sake of this editorial, I will limit myself to discussing the diminished value of the student's opinion, since discussing how the university deals with faculty satisfaction is, at the moment, beyond my scope.)

YU is presenting itself sort of like an insecure teenager. Obsessed with how he or she compares to his or her friends in looks, smarts, and athletic ability; echoing the values and opinions of those by whom he or she is surrounded--parents, a high school, or a youth organization; too concerned with others think of him or her to even consider his or her self-image. Yeshiva University is constantly reassuring itself and its peers that its academics and student life are just as good as any other larger university. Its ambiguous religious values are simply manifestations of what it thinks its values should be--that is, principles perhaps intentionally left vague in an attempt to please all yet end up only pleasing a minority. And finally, YU is fixated on the image it projects to the world, basing many of its decisions on what it thinks outsiders will find favorable, without pausing to consider what those who actually attend YU have to say about YU.

At the end of this past May, my peers and I received a somewhat sketchy email from a survey company called Toluna asking us to "please help Yeshiva University understand your perspectives on colleges" with the promise of a \$15 Visa gift card upon completion of a survey. Excited by the possibility of, well, free money, I took the survey and remember answering oddly worded questions about what I thought about YU's religious life and academics in comparison to other universities commonly attended by Orthodox Jews, like Columbia and Brandeis. Besides for the more specific class evaluations required at the end of every semester, this awkward survey is the only time I can recall YU reaching out to me about what I thought of the institution at large. And if this survey was sent out to the entire undergraduate student

body, it was a poor attempt to gather our opinions, namely because the sketchiness of the email and website almost led me to simply ignore the survey altogether--which I'm sure many of peers did. With this survey, though, YU is on the right track; a detailed annual questionnaire about the undergraduate student body's attitude about the school would not only provide the administration with insight, but it would also provide students with a sense of efficacy.

I'm aware that President Berman and other members of the administration meet with student council members to discuss multiple campus issues; as someone who respects, and is friends with some of the student council members, I am sure that these individuals represent the concerns of student body well and have productive and meaningful things to discuss. Student input is also taken into consideration when hiring important administrative figures, like deans. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that a full range of diverse student opinions are presented, and that every single aspect of academic experience and student life is discussed. A comprehensive annual survey, not only to get a feel for student morale but also to see which technical campus issues need to be addressed (issues regarding housing, facilities, academic advising, security, registration, etc.) would be beneficial for both students and administrators, and would make all involved parties aware of the generally lack of school spirit that seems to exist at YU (if they weren't already).

As admissions season rolls around, it is especially important that YU realize the importance of keeping its student morale high. We can all put on a smile and solely sing YU's praises for one Sunday a year to receive a free sweatshirt from the Office of Admissions, but wouldn't it be nice if everyone's smiles were genuine? Even though YU attracts a general undergraduate demographic that isn't necessarily dependent on the enthusiasm of current students, YU does its admissions department a disservice by failing to place enough value on its internal image. While there are plenty of student ambassadors who lead tours depicting YU as an Edenic paradise of ideal Jewish life, superior academics, and unending fun, there are also plenty of students like me who give prospective students honest answers about the university and are dissatisfied with many aspects of being a YU student.

I understand that development is crucial in running any university, and YU needs to attract new donors, maintain its current donors, and keep up enrollment. But when will YU shed its insecurity and realize that valuing what its students think is just as important?

The Yeshiva University  
**Observer**

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## Good Intentions, Bad Planning: YU's Labor Day Activities

Ailin Elyasi  
Senior News Editor

On Labor Day, Monday, September 3rd, the Office of Student Life (OSL) on both the Beren and Wilf campuses offered activities for students staying in school during the holiday weekend. Activities included biking in Central Park, a Brooklyn Cyclones baseball game, and a screening of Black Panther. Many students expressed positive feedback regarding the activities, but remarked that it could have been better organized and better planned.

Program Manager Zehavya Stadlan said the activities offered were meant to provide “options for those who decided to stay on campus this weekend, especially new students who are adjusting to the city and campus. It is a great way to meet other students while exploring the city.”

Being that this is the second year that YU has offered off-campus activities on Labor Day, the OSL arranged its trips based on the activities that garnered high interest last year. The activities last year included hiking at Bear Mountain, an arcade day, and a baseball game, with the baseball game and the hiking achieving the highest interest. As such, this year the OSL offered a similar physical activity and another baseball game.

As for the movie, Zehavya Stadlan remarked that the OSL “wanted to offer one indoor option for students who want to relax on a hot day, so we thought a movie in the city would be fun.” About 35 students from each campus showed interest in joining the activities; the most popular activities were biking in Central Park and the Brooklyn Cyclones game.

Many students appreciated the school's effort to offer free activities on a long weekend. Resident advisor Rachel Haber (SCW '20) expressed excitement at the opportunity to do something special on Labor Day weekend. “I've always wanted to go biking in Central Park. When I saw they needed volunteers to staff it, I jumped at the chance,” she commented. “Public holidays and long weekends can be hard for out-of-towners, especially so early in the year when people aren't totally settled yet.” An out-of-towner from Florida, Talia Korn (SCW '19) remarked, “[The activities] are a great way to make our school more of a community, and encourage students not to run away the second we have the chance!”

In terms of logistics, however, students expressed that YU could have done more on the administrative side

to ensure the activities progressed smoothly. Students who attended the biking trip reported that the original destination for the bus was Coney Island, until the resident advisors running the activity directed the bus driver to the correct location, Central Park. In addition, no designated meeting place was established for the men and women to meet and proceed to the activity. Since Central Park runs from 59th Street to 110th Street, the delay of the groups meeting was inevitable as both sides had no established meeting place between the 51 streets. Ilana Radinsky (SCW '20) commented, “the trip itself was fraught with confusion.”

“It's great that the school offers fun activities on a long weekend so that students can appreciate the city and spend time with their YU friends,” said Korn. “But the day could have been more productive if logistics were worked out before we nearly ended up in Coney Island instead of Central Park.”

Students appreciated the good intentions behind YU's Labor Day activities, but in the end, poor planning made for a confusing trip.

## A Flame Turns Into Wildfire: Leading the Charge for Gender Equality in Politics

Sara Marcus  
Staff Writer

On October 16th, the YU Feminists Club will be hosting a panel on women in government titled “Women and Democracy.” Esteemed panelists include Assemblywoman Aridia Espinal, Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa, and Assemblywoman Nily Rozic. Opening the panel will be Councilwoman Carlina Rivera, a celebrated political gender equality activist, with a speech of her own.

The panel consists exclusively of politicians leading the charge for gender equality in NYC. Councilwoman Rivera chairs the Committee on Hospitals and co-chairs the NYC Council Women's Caucus, an organization made up of female-identifying members who stand up for gender equality in NYC politics.

The first panelist, Assemblywoman Espinal, has a reputation of fighting for the people, as shown by her involvement in Carlos' Law, which holds developers accountable for accidental on-site construction deaths, proposed after Carlos Moncayo died on a Manhattan construction site in 2015. Assemblywoman De La Rosa and Assemblywoman Rozic are members of the specially-formed Task Force on Women's Issues.

“Women and Democracy” will be the Feminists Club's sixth event and its first to feature women in politics, according to its Co-President Atara Huberfeld.

Huberfeld shared that the focus of the event is “primarily about being a woman in politics, but it's also about being a woman in a public space. The women we are hosting are public figures; every aspect of their life is on display and under scrutiny ... How do you act in public as a woman when people are holding you as an example of ‘what it means to be a woman?’”

The idea for the panel began with the Feminists Club's Co-President Molly Meisels. As a political science major and intern at YU's Department of Government Affairs, Meisels remarked that she had always been fascinated by the intersection of gender and democracy. She noted that women are seriously underrepresented in the country's political representation, but that has begun to change, with women running for office in record-breaking numbers. “A candle has been lit, and it's turning into a wildfire,” commented Meisels. “I want these specific women, leaders and inspiring figures in New York politics, to speak about the trials and tribulations of a woman in the political and democratic system. I want these women to speak about the movement towards female representation in government, even on the local and

state levels - because that's where it begins.”

Jon Greenfield, YU's Director of Government Relations, told The Observer that “[The] participants in this event are true trailblazers, each with inspiring careers and a wealth of knowledge to share with the

Yeshiva University community. I applaud Molly and the YU Feminists Club for their hard work in organizing this event and highlighting the importance of female political empowerment.”

# Women and Democracy



**Introductory remarks by  
Councilwoman Carlina  
Rivera**



**Assemblywoman  
Aridia Espinal**



**Assemblywoman  
Carmen De La  
Rosa**



**Assembly-  
woman  
Nily Rozic**

**Tuesday  
October 16th  
7:30 pm  
Yagoda Commons,  
215 Lex**

## Educators, Pioneers, and Revolutionaries: Two Syms Students and their Blockchain Platform

Ailin Elyasi  
Senior News Editor

Menajem Benchimol and Jaime Gutt, two Sy Syms seniors, are twenty-two-year-old educators teaching the blockchain industry to an often overlooked population in technological innovation. These two young men are pioneers, introducing a simple educational platform on the overly convoluted subject and its revolutionaries, weakening the Venezuelan government's power.

Blockchain arose after the 2008 stock market crash that created Bitcoin, a digital currency supposedly immune to the ebbs and flows of national currencies. Bitcoin required a digital ledger that hackers could not alter; what good would Bitcoin be if it could be easily stolen or changed by any computer genius? Thus, blockchain was created to keep a record of all alterations on Bitcoin and maintain currency honesty.

Many people like Benchimol and Gutt, however, understand that Bitcoin is only the first application that blockchain can revolutionize; blockchain has potential to replace the way people buy goods and verify authenticity in areas like healthcare, banking, and real estate.

Therefore, Benchimol and Gutt have spent the past three years researching, investing, and creating new usages for the industry. This year, they launched a platform, entirely in Spanish, to educate the Latin American community about this new technology. In fact, Benchimol and Gutt have already given classes at the School of Banking and Commerce in Mexico City, educating the next generation of Latin entrepreneurs on the uses of blockchain, which they will continue to do with their platform.

Benchimol was born in Cali, Colombia and co-founder Gutt was born in Caracas, Venezuela, so their roots explain their reason for specifically targeting and giving back to the Latin American community. Though

both their families respectively moved to Miami when they were young children, their family and culture keep them connected to their roots. The two became fast friends at YU, with a shared interest in blockchain and cryptocurrencies.

After they both noticed Latin America's late access

**“Throughout history, we Latinos have always come to technology late. We want to make sure that South America is not coming late to [blockchain] technology. We want South America to be leaders in this industry.”**

to technology - Uber has just recently been introduced in Latin American countries - Benchimol and Gutt decided that they wanted to be the ones to introduce blockchain technology to the rest of Latin America. Benchimol said, “Throughout history, we Latinos have always come to technology late. We want to make sure

that South America is not coming late to [blockchain] technology. We want South America to be leaders in this industry. We want South America to be introducing the technology on top of blockchain.”

And from there, LATAM Blockchain originated. There are two parts to Benchimol and Gutt's services. One is their consulting services for established blockchain technologies and the other is their educational system, needed because “no one really knew what blockchain was, so we had to create an educational platform together with a Mexican start-up called Lumit,” says Benchimol.

The platform features interactive online classes with homework assignments, teachers, and short, specific lessons.

But perhaps the most impressive feat is the pair's work promoting financial stability in Latin American countries like Venezuela, where the Bolivar's hyperinflation has rendered the currency practically worthless. In places like this, as well as in countries like Argentina, the use of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin are a more stable option for storing money than the volatile national currency.

“We are working with the Pale Blue Foundation to raise \$300,000,000 to distribute free Bitcoin to people who hold Bitcoin wallets [in Venezuela] so they can start using Bitcoin more as a transactional form,” explains Benchimol. “As a censor-resistant cryptocurrency, Bitcoin minimizes the control of a corrupted government over the monetary supply, thus limiting the government's power over its people. We feel Venezuelans should experience financial independence from a government that has hyperinflated its own currency by over 1,000,000% in the past year and ruined its economic stability.”

## Unfazed by Fate: Professor Hill Krishnan Wins Big at International Speech Contest

Molly Meisels  
Junior News Editor

Armed with an oversized die and an abundance of confidence, Professor Hill Krishnan took the Toastmasters stage to share lessons learned from a life well lived. “We don't get to choose the country where we are born,” he announced to a captivated audience. “We don't get to choose the level of society into which we are born.”

Professor Krishnan is a force to be reckoned with. After attaining his academic goals with degrees from NYU and Boston University, personal goals with his 12-year marriage, and career goals with his love for teaching, Professor Krishnan has climbed yet another formidable mountain. As of August 2018, he is one of the top twenty public speakers in the world.

His public speaking journey began with the Toastmasters International Speech Contest in January of this year. The competition started with 30,000 contestants from 141 countries, each vying to earn a spot in August's Chicago semi-finals. The World Championship of Public Speaking commences with club contests, with the winners moving forward to the area contests, division contests, and district contests. Professor Krishnan triumphed in each of these levels, out-speaking his competition through sheer authenticity and passion. After winning the District 46 speech contest, he represented New York City, Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk County in the competition's semi-finals, along with 104 other competitors. Professor Krishnan vied for victory alongside contenders from Australia, Nigeria, Singapore, Thailand, and Mexico. After a day of competition, he emerged as the second place champion in his category.

This conquest was no easy feat, and it did not begin back in January. The victory began in Vadukachimathil, India when Professor Krishnan was born into India's “most backward” caste. His speech highlighted the inimitable struggles faced by a young man who dreamt of success in a world that placed too many obstacles in his path. By titling his speech “Roll It Again,” Professor Krishnan aimed

to motivate. He was expected to amount to little in his lifetime, because, as he puts it in his speech, “Fate rolls the dice when we are born.” But he did not allow fate to dictate his path. He did not allow fate to prohibit him from prospering. After meeting a motivational speaker in India, he realized that “fate is not the only thing that gets to roll the dice in our life. You get to roll your dice too.” His life was changed, sparking him to get into engineering school, obtain a US visa, and marry the woman of his dreams.

Professor Krishnan knew that merely speaking about his struggles and accomplishments would not lead him to victory. He says, “The best speeches ... [are] based on an eternal truth ... It gives credibility when you speak your own story. Who knows your life better than anyone?” Besides for focusing on the seriousness of eternal truths, he focused on perfecting his speech through humor. He wished to take listeners on a rollercoaster of emotions, so they'd feel a plethora of sensations. He did not want them to feel sorrow, but sorrow embedded with happiness, and happiness embedded with frustration.

Public speaking was always in the cards for Professor Krishnan. He used to compete in high school, and has been a performer all his life, using dancing as his artistic outlet. He chose teaching as a career because he found that cubicles stifled him and his creativity. His true essence emerges in front of others, allowing him to inspire them through his oratory skills. The Toastmasters competition strengthened his speaking abilities, teaching him how to project his voice correctly, move with purpose, and create an impeccable speech title.

He will utilize this experience to further enhance his skills as a professor. As a Political Science professor at Yeshiva University, Baruch College, and Fordham University, Professor Krishnan says that democracy and speaking are entwined, and he wishes to inspire his students



to enrich their speaking capabilities. He enthusiastically states, “Everyone has the capacity to share their story ... Nobody can find a flaw in your story. By saying your story, not only are you empowering others, but you get empowered.” He knows that the power of oration and communication are vital for success in whichever fields his students choose to enter.

He believes words are the most vital weapons we possess. Passion lights his eyes as he says, “When you speak the truth, grammar or accents don't matter. Say it from your heart. When you say it from your heart, people can hear it.”

## Tackling Tikkun Olam: OSL Introduces New Intersession Trips

Molly Meisels

Junior News Editor

The YU Office of Student Life recently announced its three winter break student trips; this year, students can travel to Israel, California, and Thailand with YU. “We try to provide various opportunities for students over their student break experience; chances to volunteer, chances to gain valuable workplace experience, and chances to meet other students,” commented Talia Molotsky, Assistant Director of Student Life. Each year, the Office of Student Life works tirelessly to plan educational and transformative winter break trips during YU’s January intersession. This year, the OSL team has gone above and beyond to provide the student body with opportunities to learn about their future career paths, giving them the chance to partake in the YU mission of tikkun olam (repairing the world). “I think it’s amazing that they are offering trips like these ... because it’s important to see other places in the world and how other people live,” says Kayla Plutzer, SCW ‘19, about the trips.

### Israel Hi-Tech Winter Trip

According to Molotsky, this trip is ideal for students considering entering the fields of tech and computer science, and will allow students to discover future internship opportunities. The time spent in Israel will revolve around Israel’s start-up culture, in a country on the forefront of technological advances in agritech, geology, and biotech. Molotsky says last year’s Israel trip was a success, prompting OSL to increase this year’s program from 12 students to 20 students. Last year’s trip inspired many students, including Tali Greenberg, SCW ‘19. Greenberg says, “The trip was both empowering and practical. Each speaker encouraged us to do great things with our careers and gave us the tips to do so. It also gave me confidence that I could have a career in Israel, which I hope to have one day.”

The cost of the trip is \$800 (including airfare) and will run from January 13th-20th (including travel days). While all the flights are included in the cost of the trip, last year the flights were via Moscow, causing many students to change their flights and pay the difference.

### Coast-to-Coast California Business Mission

Molotsky states that Yeshiva University runs a mission of this sort every year “for students wishing to stay within the country and do something meaningful and educational over their winter vacation.” OSL took students to the Midwest last winter break to teach them about building

have the opportunity to spend two Shabbatim in the local Jewish communities.

The cost of the trip is \$500 (including airfare) and will run from January 11th-20th (including travel days).

### Thailand Winter Mission

For the first time ever, Yeshiva University will partner with Justifi, a Jewish non-profit travel organization, to provide this phenomenal opportunity to students of our school. According to Justifi’s mission statement, they are a “new social activism program connecting Jewish students and young professionals who want to make a difference to circumstances, people, and places where they can.” Justifi coordinates trips to South Africa, Nicaragua, Peru, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand. Molotsky is especially looking forward to this trip, and says, “Students will also get the opportunity to explore Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai, all through a Torah lens with Torah educators and a program that caters to the needs of Yeshiva University students.” The mission will explore the pressing issue of human trafficking in the region, allowing students to meet with non-profit organizations that are on the forefront of Thai humanitarian aid work. Ashley Solomon, Syms ‘19, is impressed by the initiative taken by YU in regard to the new Thailand trip. She says, “While there have always been trips geared towards technology or business, I think it’s fundamental that YU offers a trip on social justice and humanitarian aid. This trip seems like a fantastic opportunity to expose YU students to foreign cultures and major world issues.”

The price for the YU trip is \$2,100, including airfare. Justifi’s usual price is \$1,849 + airfare, which can range from \$650-\$1,000 (some \$450 roundtrip flights were found). The trip will be taking place

from January 15th-24th.

For more information about these trips, please email Talia Molotsky at [talia.molotsky@yu.edu](mailto:talia.molotsky@yu.edu).



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Email [talia.molotsky@yu.edu](mailto:talia.molotsky@yu.edu) to sign up or for more details.

Price: \$2,100 including airfare



Jewish communities across the country. This year, the trip will be concentrating on the lucrative businesses of the United States. Students will be visiting Silicon Valley, and exploring San Francisco and Los Angeles. They will also

## Sushigate: The Removal and Revival of the 215 Lexington Sushi Salad

Shifra Lindenberg

Web and Social Media

Sushi salads: if you’re new to Stern College for Women, you might not be familiar with the popular breakfast, lunch, and dinner option. More experienced Stern students, though, know that this meal is one of the most popular food items on the Le Bistro menu. A sushi salad is essentially a deconstructed sushi roll which is served in a plastic poke bowl, and is a meal that on-the-go students find filling and efficient.

But when Stern students arrived at the Le Bistro cafeteria at the start of the Fall semester, they were told that the meal would no longer be made. Gabi Chutter, SCW ‘20, told The Observer, “It feels like they’re constantly taking more and more away from us. First, they take away the ‘Caf Daddy’ program [when we weren’t allowed to buy food for others on our caf cards], then they make us pay for water, and then the sushi salads? What’s next?”

Moshe Singer, Food Service Manager for the Beren Campus, originally said that the sushi salads were going

to return after the Sukkot break, but they came back earlier than expected. Right before the beginning of the holiday break, sushi salads were revived, but at what cost? A more expensive one. While they used to cost around \$12 (depending on which ingredients students ordered), sushi salads are now being sold for around \$16.

“I’m just happy that they’re back,” says Ahuva Wakschlag, Syms ‘20. While some students were overjoyed by the sushi salad’s return, others had mixed feelings regarding the new price for the popular dish. “It’s aggravating as an out-of-towner, who can’t go home for weekends and relies on the caf, that caf prices are ridiculously inflated. We pay so much for the caf only to waste it on extreme prices, which the new sushi salad prices are so reflective of,” says Elka Wiesenber, SCW ‘20.

According to Anat Jacobson, Syms ‘19, food liaison for the Beren Student Life Committee, the reason for the

short-lived suspension of sushi salads is the vendor’s decision to raise the price. “The vendor upped the price, which is the reason that there were no sushi salads at the beginning of the year. Since there was so much backlash, YU brought them back, knowing that people would have a problem with the price. [The price] is not up to [YU],” said Jacobson.

It doesn’t seem like the sushi salad price is going to go down anytime soon. If you’re one of those students who has too much money on their caf cards at the end of the semester, you’ll have a better way of spending your money more quickly. As for the students who tend to run out by the end of the semester, you might want to find another way to pay for this culinary masterpiece.

## A Concrete Jungle Playground: Yeshiva University's Campus Beyond

Avery Horovitz  
Staff Writer

New York City is one like no other. The quintessential concrete jungle is a hub for art, sport, culture- you name it. Over the course of the coming years that one will spend at Yeshiva University, New York becomes the apparatus for exploration; a giant playground that extends beyond the few blocks between 184th Street and 187th Street or Midtown's Murray Hill Neighborhood. I would argue that it would be a disservice to oneself as a student to fail to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the Big Apple outside the bounds of a palpable campus.

I must be bluntly honest. As a student at Yeshiva University, I have at times found myself lacking the motivation and inspiration necessary to move forward with my studies at various points in my YU career to date. Sometimes, it can seem as though the bland, sterile walls of Furst Hall are closing inwards on oneself, especially during a particularly long, yawn-inducing lecture. This became no reason to fret, however; I came to the realization that I am actually living in one of the most exciting metropolises on the face of the planet! "What about my next class?" one may ask. Don't worry about it! Get out there and make the effort to invest in some experiential learning to reignite your passion for learning. I have a distinct memory of exiting a

history lecture feeling lost and demoralized. The lesson made no sense, and at one point the professor started to sound like the adults in the Peanuts cartoons. Rather than let these negative sentiments linger, I decided to make my way downtown, as a sort of impromptu escape. I ended up on Canal Street, which turned out to be a fascinating cultural experience. It happened to be that in our history course that day, we were discussing immigration to New York City that occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century. I thought about the implications of such a collaborative and rich history of

diversity on modern-day New York City. The Big Apple truly exemplifies America as The Melting Pot, fusing cultures from across the world within each block and neighborhood.

Upon exiting the subway station, I was immediately surrounded by a conglomerate of different cultures. Various languages, sophisticated art pieces and food products filled my surrounding environment. I was abruptly thrust into another world, the one beyond the



more homogenous bubble of Yeshiva University. It was as if my seemingly boring history lecture from earlier in the day had come to life, as I interacted with the world of New York newcomers. This epiphany occurred simply as a result of choosing to take advantage of my wider surroundings.

The adventure outlined above was exceptional and integral in contributing towards my studies as a Yeshiva University scholar who is committed to academic excellence. Perhaps one need not travel particularly far to profit from all that being a student in "The City

That Never Sleeps" has to offer. Standing perched on the corner of Broadway and 165th on the other side of our very own Washington Heights, is the notorious former Audubon Ballroom. The venue's legacy was forever sealed in infamy when controversial political activist Malcolm X was assassinated at the site in 1965. It doesn't take a history master to understand the considerable impact that Malcolm X had on the movement for civil justice. Fittingly, X had a lot to say on the topic of education as well. In his personal essay entitled "Learning to Read", Malcolm X describes his fascinating path of transformation from an illiterate convict to a self-taught worldly mastermind. "Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened," X expresses as he relates his newfound joy in literacy. All this I was struck by from a simple walk outside in this incredible city filled with potential for education and inspiration.

As I implore all those who find themselves garnering less than enthusiastic motivation for their academic studies to engage New York City to its fullest, I would liken this exploration to a form of literacy as well. Many books can be studied and analyzed in a classroom setting, but the experiential arena for teaching that is New York is one that is unique. Whether it's in the form of a hard rock concert at Madison Square Garden, a stroll down the colorful Canal Street, or simply discovering the hidden historical significance of your very own neighborhood, perhaps others too can develop this exclusive literal sense and harness it to enhance and uplift your time at Yeshiva University, like I've succeeded in doing so far.

## Uniting Fellow Sephardim with Mega Selichot

Chayim Mahgerefteh

On September 4, 2018, the Sephardic Club held its annual "Mega Selichot" event in the Rubin Shul, bringing over 200 students from both the Wilf and Beren campuses. This gathering is one of the Sephardic Club's biggest highlights of the year, with people looking forward to being part of. Although this event was targeted more towards YU's Sephardic community, it still attracted some Ashkenazim that came to hear words of inspiration before Rosh Hashana, and to say selichot in Sephardi tunes.

An inspiring speech was given at midnight by one of YU's newly appointed Roshei Yeshiva, Rabbi Mordechai Benhaim, which was then followed by selichot. At the start of his speech, Rabbi Benhaim shared his thoughts on what it means to him to be part of YU: "I will tell you the truth, I feel honored and privileged, I really mean that... it is a zechut to be in such a Makom Torah where everyone has a true desire to grow. Each one in his level, each one in his way, and it is a place that breeds talmidei chachamim, Yirei Shamayim, people who strive to live based on the way of Hashem in a very special way, and it is admirable." Rabbi Benhaim's speech was stirring and heartfelt, with many positive and uplifting reviews. All the students who attended were highly impressed and gained tremendously from his words.

Although some people might view all Sephardim as "the same," there are several cultural differences amongst them. Sephardic Club co-president Meir Cohen described how the Mega Selichot is a unification of all

Sephardim, despite their differences: "No matter what your religious background is, or if you are Moroccan, Persian, Syrian, Bukharian, everyone is together as 'Am Echad ve Lev Echad' praying for Am Yisrael." Indeed, that is how it felt singing together with true passion and love for one another. Simon Afriat, the other co-president of the Sephardic Club, also reflected on the power of Mega Selichot and how it makes Sephardim one, saying, "The Sephardic community of YU is tremendously diverse and filled with students literally [from] throughout the world. The Mega Selichot is an example of a way that unifies all Sephardim alike, despite each one's upbringings and customs, singing and praying to Hashem in unison, 'Hashem give us life, grant us grace, and in Your name we will call out.'" The Sephardic Club also has co-presidents at Beren, Raquel Sofer and Leeron Chalamish.

The Sephardi programs and minyanim of YU are led by Rabbi Dan Cohen, the Edmond J. Safra Sgan Mashgiach for the Sephardic Community. Upon reflection of the selichot event he says, "This was my fourth year being part of Mega Selichot and every year it just keeps getting better and better." On a personal level, this was only my second year at Mega Selichot, and both years were a true pleasure being part of. Selichot is about becoming closer with fellow Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike, and becoming closer to God. May we all be blessed with a sweet new year, with everything that will help us become the best people we can be. Shana Tova!



## Student Spotlight: An Interview with Instagram Intern Racheli Moskowitz

Ellie Parker  
Staff Writer

Racheli Moskowitz is a senior at Stern College with plans to graduate in May 2019. She is double majoring in computer science and physical science and this summer, worked at Instagram as an intern.

**Ellie Parker: Can you tell us a little bit about what you did this past summer?**

**Racheli Moskowitz:** Sure! I worked in the Facebook office in Menlo Park, California. My job was specifically for Instagram, now owned by Facebook, as a social engineer working for their ads team.

**EP: What drew you to this particular field?**

**RM:** I've always really liked math and science and things that were intellectually challenging. I took AP computer science in 12th grade and loved it, so when it came time to declare a major at Stern, I couldn't decide between software and engineering (thus, the double major). At Stern, I fell in love with all of the coding that I was doing, and I found it really exciting. I love the problem solving and that feeling of accomplishment after I had been banging my head against the wall for an hour trying to figure out how to rework a problem.

**EP: This is clearly a highly sought-after and competitive internship. What steps did you take to get accepted?**

**RM:** I actually applied online. The year before, when I had little experience, I started the online hunt. I didn't begin looking until the summer of my first year on campus, and I quickly realized that I was a little late in applying. I applied over and over again to all of these different companies, and I wasn't accepted anywhere. I ended up working for a startup which I learned a lot from, but it wasn't the experience I particularly wanted. So, my second summer of college, I decided to start applying online really early, and to a lot of different places (probably around 25 or 30). I really didn't expect to, but I heard back from Facebook and they liked what they saw on my resume and called me in for an interview. I had two rounds of software interviews which are a little bit like tests; you work on a shared document with problems given to you by an engineer, and you sit and code for them. After the interviews, they reached out to me with an offer, which was really exciting.

**EP: Do you think Stern prepared you for this kind of internship?**

**RM:** Yes, and especially for the interviews. Professor Broder has a fantastic data structures course which is really great preparation for interviews. Though you can definitely learn a lot from your classes, it takes a lot



of work on your own as well. I did a lot of practice interview questions and took the time to review old notes before my interview.

**EP: Would you consider yourself a social media buff per se?**

**RM:** It's funny, I really am not at all. I didn't even have an Instagram before being accepted for the internship.

**EP: What was the coolest thing you learned about Instagram during the summer?**

**RM:** I hadn't really realized how widely used Instagram is since I had never used it before. This summer showed me the scope of the product, especially since I was able to witness Instagram receive its billionth user. It was incredibly exciting for me to see that a product which I didn't really know much about was being used by a billion people across the globe.

**EP: Was there anything that surprised you about**

**your internship?**

**RM:** I knew that it would be hard, but it was challenging in ways that I hadn't expected. For example, there were no specific hours. I could walk in and out whenever I wanted to. There were some days when I would be there super late trying to solve a problem, and I guess I hadn't prepared myself for that kind of a challenge, but it was ultimately super rewarding.

**EP: Do you have any advice for current students looking for internships in the social media field?**

**RM:** Start your search early, like right now. I started my Facebook application process during the first month of school. If you're doing applications online, apply to as many as you possibly can because it doesn't take so much time and it can't hurt. Also, practice the types of questions you know you might be asked and make sure you're really prepared for your interview.

## 4 More Productive Ways to Spend \$200,000 Than Taking Out Two WSJ Ads

Observer Staff

If you read The Commentator, you'll know that YU recently took out two full-page advertisements in the Wall Street Journal, hoping to attract the attention of "influencers" and employers. According to the article, the cost of the ads were in the six-figure range, which means YU spent at least \$200,000 for both ads. Here are four better ways this \$200,000 could have been spent.

**1. Booking Louis C.K. to perform at Chanukahfest.** According to celebritiespeakersbureau.com, Louis C.K.'s booking fee is somewhere between \$100,000 and \$1 million. Given his recently tarnished reputation, we're going to go ahead and assume that his current booking rate is at the lower end of the spectrum, which means that had YU not taken out the WSJ ads, they would have had ample funds to hire Louis C.K. to headline Chanukahfest. Yes, this would have been morally questionable of the student councils, but we'd just assume they were trying to increase turnout by ensuring that the students who no longer find him funny would at least show up to protest.

**2. Creating a Religious Studies Department.** For students whose religious curiosities aren't satisfied by Bible classes which are glorified lectures on this week's Parsha, YU could have hired one religious studies professor, cleaned out a storage closet for said professor

to use as an office, offered one Intro to World Religions course which would eventually be cancelled due to low enrollment, fired said professor before payday, and still have had enough money to hire four new Roshei Yeshiva.

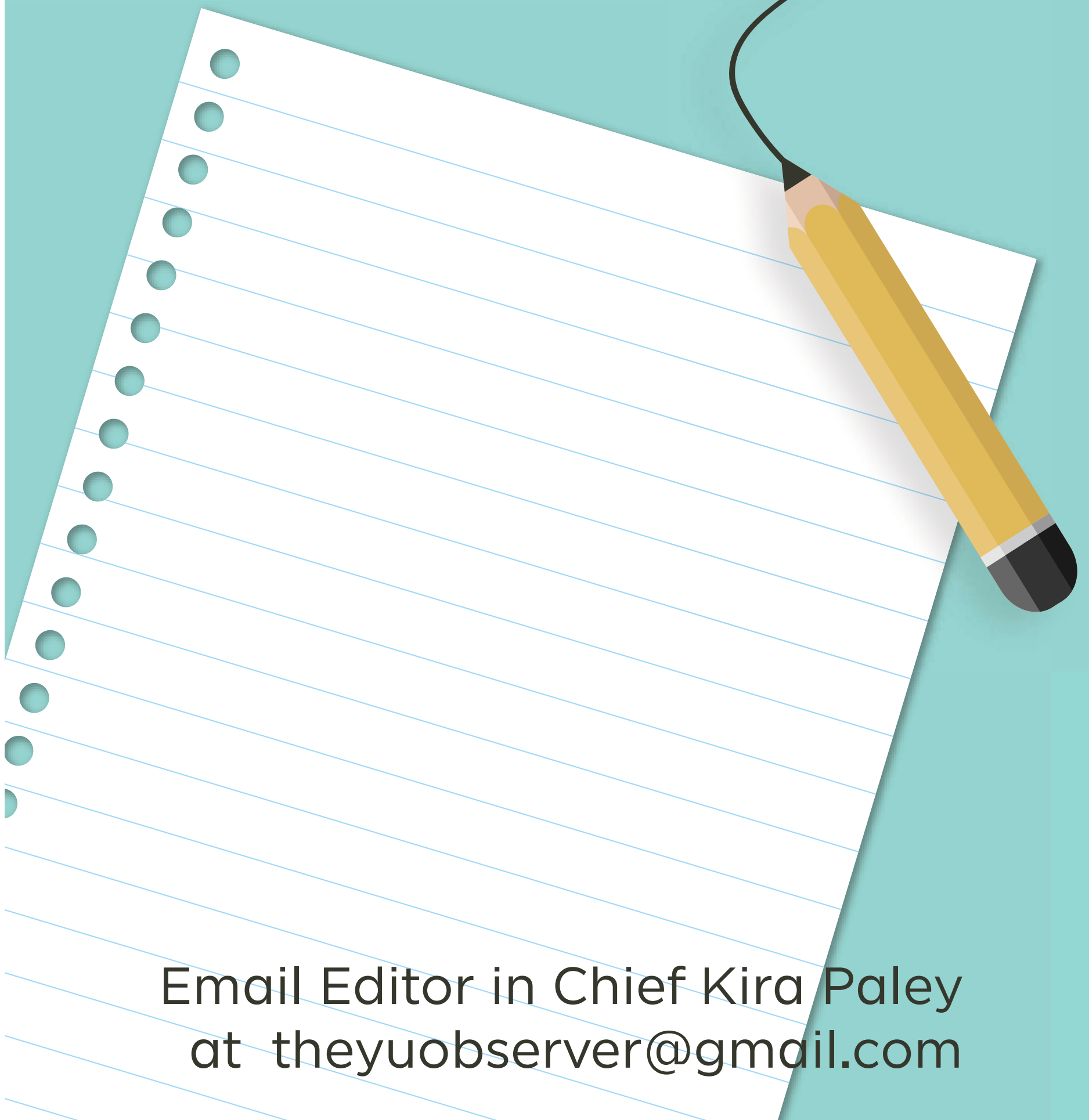
**3. Prank-calling President Berman 200,000 times.** With \$200,000, YU's marketing office could have bought 1 million tokens on prankdial.com. Assuming it costs about five tokens per automated prank call, the employees in that office could have prank-called President Berman 200,000 times. Students would probably never be in the marketing office during the calls to get in on the laughs, but the FOMO would not be as bad as the embarrassment of going to a school that needs to take out advertisements.

**4. Giving out 2 laptop batteries to every undergraduate student.** \$200,000 is not nearly enough to pay for every YU student's tuition. But following in the footsteps of Michael Gary Scott, the founder of Scott's Tots, YU could have at least spent \$200,000 on 6,895 Replacement Notebook Battery for Dell PRV1Y 11.1 Volt Li-ion Laptop Batteries (4400mAh / 49Wh), which is enough for every undergrad student to receive at least two. After all, "Online courses are a viable option to a traditional college experience. And the best

way to access those courses is with your own personal laptop...which is rendered useless without batteries."



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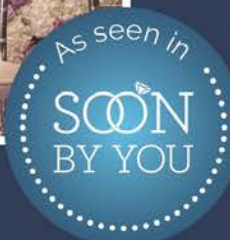


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## On Trend

What's hot and what's not this month on campus

### OUT

Joining a pre-existing club

Hugging your S.O. goodbye outside the shuttle

Wearing a baseball hat because you're married and you cover your hair

Scrolling through Instagram during class

### IN

Starting your own obscure club so you can put "founder and president" on your resume

Standing with your face uncomfortably close to your S.O.'s outside the shuttle

Wearing a baseball hat because it was drizzling this morning and you thought it looked cute

Peeping over the shoulder of the person in front of you to read their WhatsApp Web during class

## Letter From the YAS Club President's Desk

Dina Stein



The Yeshiva Activities Society, warmly coined “YAS” at its inception, initially launched four years ago. The goal of the club is to provide a setting for students to explore New York’s educational, cultural, and social opportunities. YAS has consistently proven to be a strong presence on both the Beren and Wilf campuses. The mission of the club is to unite the Yeshiva University community in a fun and social environment. YAS hosts events, both on and off campus, which appeal to a wide array of students.

Events have included glow in the dark dodgeball, which was a personal favorite of mine; a trip to the Federal Reserve Bank; and the Ringling Bros. Circus show, which was especially popular among attending students. Additional events comprised of stargazing on the highline, a beautiful park which had recently been converted from an old railroad; picnicking in Central Park; celebrating Purim with delicious hamantaschen baking; kayaking on the Hudson, which offered a new and unique perspective of the City to students who spend so much of their time inside of it. An especially creative use of YU space was “Screen on the Green,” an outdoor movie night on Wilf Campus which always has an enthusiastic attendance. One of the most engaging and educational events was the scavenger hunt in the Museum of Natural History where students had a blast exploring the famous museum, and were surprised at how much they learned simultaneously. These were just a few of the amazing and innovative club events YAS has hosted in the past.

Unsurprisingly, the club easily provides students with an opportunity to make new friends, build lasting bonds, and ultimately enhance each student’s college experience. Yossi Hoffman (YC 2017), the founder of

YAS, entered YU with immense enthusiasm to explore NYC and attempt to scratch the surface of its boundless offerings. He quickly discovered, however, that the school seemed to contain a void. It was one that he believed he could fill. Yossi wondered why there were scant school-organized avenues to venture into the City. He realized that YU is what he called a “commuter school.” He did not intend that literally; however, he asserted that many students matriculate with previous friendships from camp, seminary, yeshiva, or elsewhere. He felt there was a lack of opportunity to expand his social circle and viewed YU’s location as an incredible opportunity to do so. Yossi was determined to take action and change his university’s culture in a meaningful way. He declared that, “instead of complaining about it or relying on the administration, I decided to fix the problem and started YAS with friends to organize student events.” As a result, he established the club which quickly gained widespread popularity and has remained to serve an important purpose on campus ever since.

Personally, my experience with YAS has been nothing but positive. I discovered YAS my first year on campus at the Stern club fair and was instantly intrigued. I enthusiastically signed up and in no time at all I increased my involvement and began attending board meetings. The energy at board meetings was palpable and energizing as members spent their time brainstorming and bouncing a plethora of amazing ideas off of one another.

When I displayed interest in planning a picnic in Central Park, I received a tremendous amount of support and eagerness from everyone in the club. YU recognized the importance of such a club, and The

Office of Student Life generously provided funding to enhance the picnic with scrumptious snacks for all in attendance to enjoy. Astoundingly, over 50 students attended the event, and the feedback YAS received was overwhelmingly incredible. Amazingly, in the span of a few short months I had advanced from simply joining the club to creating my own event. After this positive experience, I found myself hooked on being as involved with the club as possible. I felt truly a part of what co-president Joshua Deutsch calls, “a YAS community for those looking to enjoy a NYC experience with one another.” YAS truly empowers every board member and provides students with a voice on campus.

One of YAS’s primary codes is to value every student’s opinion. A student’s idea is of utmost importance, and as a result, YAS attempts to not only listen to student’s suggestions but to enact them whenever possible. The events are made with the student body in mind, and witnessing a student’s idea come to fruition is an instrumental part of YAS’s success. The beauty of YAS is that it is not geared toward one type of individual. Any and all kinds of students at YU are warmly welcomed into the club with open arms.

YAS thrives the most when new faces appear at events and a diverse range of students are given dynamic opportunities to cultivate new friendships and enjoy new experiences. For students starting their journey in YU who are looking to branch out, or for veteran students looking for a venue to establish new friendships and spend time enhancing old ones, YAS is a no brainer. Make sure to be on the lookout for the awesome events which will be occurring this year and for all things YAS!

## The Hurricane Epidemic

Sarah Brill

Another hurricane? And another one after that? It seems like today all we hear on the news is how Mother Nature is throwing fastballs on the shore-lined states. Why is this happening all of a sudden? Why are we experiencing a massive outbreak of hurricanes? In 2016 there were 7, in 2017 there were 6, and this year there have already been 2 in the United States, and many more in Japan where typhoon season is at its peak. Going back to 1960, however, there were only 2 hurricanes, both of which were category 3. So, how can the amount of hurricanes, and the magnitude at which they occur, change so rapidly in the course of only 58 years?

We first need to establish how a hurricane is formed. The ocean, which needs to be at a temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, provides energy for the hurricane. The water in the ocean evaporates, creating humid air clouds. From there, winds form in an upward direction and branch off on either side of the clouds, to form a tree-like wind cycle around the hurricane. Then, winds from beyond the hurricane push it towards shore. If the water in the ocean is hotter, the storm will be more intense.

Despite the denial of many, global warming is a problem with scientific proof. Our atmosphere is slowly heating up due to the constant use of boats, cars, trains, factories, and other coal and carbon monoxide fueled

projects. In turn, this causes the water temperature to heat up more than normal, which causes a category 4 or 5 hurricane to occur. This, coupled with the constant evaporation of water from our shores (due to rising temperatures), causes massive storm surges which can wipe out entire neighborhoods.

The main cause of these problems is the carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide, in short, harms the ocean. It wipes out coral reefs, causes the climate and weather to change drastically, and causes an increase in oceanic temperature.

In the 1960s, when hurricanes only came about “once in a blue moon,” cars were not as accessible as they are today. The emission of carbon dioxide from our cars causes this drastic change in water temperature, which fuels the hurricanes, which subsequently causes more to occur. If you live close enough to work, then walk, and leave your car at home. In doing so you are taking one step closer to saving the environment.

We have established that Mother Nature is not a fan, so to speak, of the human population. Then again, by



our actions, we are not proving ourselves to be a fan of Mother Nature. We litter in our parks without thinking twice. We toss our trash into the Hudson because “it’s already dirty, therefore my trash won’t make it worse.” Mother Nature is not too happy. With the new year beginning, do a mitzvah for Mother Nature, and help make our planet a more cohesive and symbiotic place to live.

Source: <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/outreach/history/>

## Same Hate, Different Form: Is a Joke Just a Joke?

Tania Bohbot

Big Nose. Nickel Nose. Christ Killer. German Candle. Goldie. These are just some of the dozens of slurs a Jew has had to brush off or confront at one point or another. They have been screamed, tagged on the walls of cities, and even posted online for the world to see. Today, anti-Semitism is seen loudly in Neo-Nazis disguising themselves as white supremacists and nationalists. They walk through the streets declaring themselves as patriots, but while watching the ones who make the loud noise, do we ignore the passive aggressive anti-Semites who are using media as a weapon?

On August 30, many saw that their most trusted social media app's map feature had relabeled New York City as "Jewtopolis." "Jewtopolis" popped up on apps such as Snapchat, StreetEasy, CitiBike, the Weather Channel, and many more. All these applications have in common the use of the mapping software Mapbox. Used by over 400 million people, the anti-Semitic renaming of NYC as "Jewtopolis" managed to make its way into the system for several hours before being rectified.

Is "Jewtopolis" a laughing matter? When first reading that NYC had been replaced with the name "Jewtopolis", I laughed. Who cares? It's funny – why not see it as just a ridiculous joke? Some might say that there was too much focus placed upon the practical joke, and the best thing one could

do is to just ignore it; don't give power to the anti-Semite who clearly craves it.

However, is it even more dangerous to ignore these anti-Semites than to acknowledge what they've done?

When World War II ended and the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, reactions were not completely

did you follow like sheep?" were the criticisms made against the Jewish people who had suffered so tremendously.

Today, we hear and see these anti-Semitic slurs and think of them as nothing. It was probably just a bored twelve-year-old who graffitied that swastika onto the wall. Oh, these anti-Semitic people who throw around insults and walk around with swastikas won't do a thing. We stand by and read reports of Holocaust survivors being murdered in their homes as if it is just another day.

Worst of all, we make the same jokes. It may just be as small as poking fun at each others' noses, or it could be as grotesque as making jokes about the Holocaust itself. Someone reading this may roll his eyes and say that it should not be taken so seriously. Another would say that a Jew can not afford not to joke; history is too painful to not be able to joke about it. That might be true. However, as valid as it may be, are we then just letting others believe it is okay to make the same joke? Could you look at someone whose been given the worst that anti-Semitism has to offer and still make that same joke? It was just last year that hundreds of Neo-Nazis under the guise of white nationalists marched the



streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, where they raised the Nazi flag. Today, open anti-Semite, Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party, threatens to be Britain's next Prime Minister. Tomorrow a child will be going to school to face the harshness of being bullied over his or her personal religious beliefs.

streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, where they raised the Nazi flag. Today, open anti-Semite, Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party, threatens to be Britain's next Prime Minister. Tomorrow a child will be going to school to face the harshness of being bullied over his or her personal religious beliefs.

## The Wonder of Wonder

Yaacov Siev

As I sat down on the plane back to NYC and looked at the 3-hour flight ahead of me, I decided to flip through the movie selection offered on the entertainment system. Cycling through the choices, I discovered among them the movie Wonder. I had heard rave reviews about it and had decided months ago to watch it "when I had the time." Equipped with the perfect amount of time and a pair of good headphones, I settled in for the film. What ensued were two of the most emotionally charged hours I have ever experienced. I can say without a doubt that this is the most beautiful movie I've seen to date. I sometimes like to think of myself as a "manly man." I lift weights every day while listening to heavy metal, I enjoy trips to the gun range, and there's nothing better than a plaid shirt with a crisp pair of jeans. Despite this, I can say free of all shame that I have never cried as much while watching a film as I have while watching Wonder. My sweater was repurposed as a handkerchief to wipe away the streams of tears that emanated from my eyes over and over again as this film played my heartstrings like an octopus playing a harp.

Wonder is filled with spectacular acting, phenomenal dialogue, a moving original soundtrack, and a smorgasbord of devastating and uplifting moments that'll leave you needing a breather once the credits start rolling. The true power of this heart-wrenching film, however, lies within the touching messages it imparts upon the audience. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin famously says that "whoever saves one life is considered to have saved an entire world." That's because that is what each and every human life is: an entire world, with its own intricacies, complications, and challenges. Nothing shows that better than Wonder. Throughout the course of the film, each character's life and perspective is visited, giving us a glimpse into the challenges each and every one of them face. Where things once seemed so simple, we suddenly are enlightened to an entire complex world beyond that which our limited scope allows us to see just from the outside. We see each person face the unique circumstances and challenges of their lives and try as best they can with what they're given. It calls to our attention that despite how things may look on the

surface, there is so much more that exists within each and every person as we try to navigate this tricky little thing called life.

The message, though, that Wonder imparts more deeply and poignantly than anything else is one that we constantly need to be reminded of: the power and immeasurable value of interpersonal relationships. Time and time again, Wonder shows how the most profound moments in our lives are those that we share with those we care about. We can experience the greatest of joys doing the most trivial of things when we are surrounded by those we love, as well as feel the deepest of sorrows when we feel the void where they once stood. Throughout the course of the film, some characters triumph over their challenges through their own inner strength while others do so by drawing strength and inspiration from the people around them. They make each other realize the potential they had all along, they lift each other up when they're at their lowest, and they make the sweet times so much sweeter. Through their moments of courage and despair, the characters of Wonder show us that the most important aspect of life is really the ones you live it with. A Harvard study spanning

the past 80 years found that "close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives." It is the people in our lives that truly grant it the most substance, but that's something that we unfortunately often forget. We spend our days looking for all sorts of external drawings and trappings, with our heads lifted to the stars with ambition, when in reality, the thing that will bring us the most satisfaction is the person standing right beside us. Our angels aren't only in heaven, but rather, they walk among us here on Earth. Wonder calls that back into perspective and reminds us that our greatest treasures are the moments we share with the people we love.

To those who have not seen it yet, please, don't let this gem of a movie pass you by. Don't let it be one of the flicks that you'll watch "when you have the time." Make the time, watch this movie, appreciate the people in your life, hold your loved ones close, and remember that the greatest gift you could ever receive may just be the ones watching Wonder with you.



## Discarding the Default: Why YU Should Reevaluate Its Dress Code

*Continued from page 1:*

not consider students from all backgrounds,” one student anonymously commented.

While I understand that the dress code is the baseline of Modern Orthodoxy, it is not the baseline for Modern Orthodox women. Modern Orthodox women encompass a broad spectrum and many women identifying as Modern Orthodox would consider the dress code outside of their comfort zones. While many wish to be respectful in our university setting, especially in regard to rabbis, by telling our students that pants are less respectable than skirts and dresses we are telling them that if they wear pants, they are not reaching a Jewish ideal - that their modesty, something they must strive for, is lacking, and therefore, they are lacking. An anonymous student comments on this notion of an ideal, “They advertise the fact that they accept people from all different backgrounds, yet they expect us to dress in a way that we may not feel comfortable with.”

The dress code is not enforced at every juncture. Students at the university will attend class in pants, or skirts which do not reach their knees, but the code is enforced through other means. The first example is on the sixth floor of 215 Lexington, where the registrar, deans’ offices, and academic advising are located. Many students

I have spoken to will avoid walking on the sixth floor in pants lest a university employee spot them. Others have been told by administrative faculty that they should put on skirts. The policy is also enforced via shame. The students who dress in a manner which adheres to the dress code are treated as the Stern College for Women default. When one sees advertisements for Yeshiva University, one never sees a woman in pants or a short skirt - they see a woman with a knee-length skirt. These are the women Yeshiva University wishes to portray, even though a huge percentage of the student body does not dress in this manner. “The dress code does not consider students from all backgrounds. I particularly remember a girl on my floor freshman year panicking because she didn’t own any skirts,” says a student. Many times, women who do not abide by the dress code are viewed as irreligious or apathetic about Judaism. Yet this is not the case; Stern College for Women is composed of intelligent and beautiful deep thinkers from diverse backgrounds. They are religious in their own ways, and worship in ways which are meaningful to them.

This culture of Them vs. Us is toxic for the students at this university. It makes so many of us feel uncomfortable in our own skins. How can we learn when we are worried about a dean

reprimanding our appearance? How can we learn when we can’t express our Judaism in the way we choose to? The school will continue ostracizing individuals who wish to attend, solely because of a dress code. Our university has so much to offer, but it needs to remain an open environment, where those of all religious backgrounds can prosper. We cannot have a default. Stern College for Women is a phenomenal institution with dedicated professors, caring rabbis, and an extensive support system. However, these positive aspects of our school are shrouded by an intolerance towards religious diversity. Modern Orthodoxy is expansive and accepting. It is a movement which prides itself on our differences, instead of our similarities. Yeshiva University is the embodiment of “e pluribus unum,” out of many, one. We are different, but those differences should be celebrated, not shunned. Yeshiva University will continue to prosper as the leading US school for Jewish education when it opens its hearts and minds to those from all walks of religious life. Our learning and Jewish growth supersede our appearances, and it is time the university recognizes that.

\*I will be quoting many women anonymously in this article, due to the controversiality of this topic.

## Discarding the Default: Why YU Should Reevaluate Its Dress Code

*Continued from page 1:*

College: In The Know,” SCW’s key Facebook forum, requesting those in support of the student dress code to speak out and tell me their opinions. Most responses I received weren’t too outrageous and remained in line with what I’ve stated; one private poster even stated that ideally “Stern should enforce the dress code, though this would not serve as a solution and may not be very practical.”

However, what caused me to nearly fall off my chair that evening was another private poster, who chose to vent her frustrations with the dress code, indicating the following:

“I believe that the dress code is completely unfair because it goes against our rights as Americans. The First Amendment provides “freedom of expression,” and clothing is part of that. This is especially found in college, where you have the unique opportunity to find yourself. Therefore, Stern is doing an awful thing having a dress code, and I think in the 21st century it should be abolished.”

Though I had realized abstractly why this article needed to be written before I received this comment, it was that moment when I finally comprehended its practical need.

I understand if someone is uncomfortable with the standards of Stern. I can even attempt to relate to the fact that one may deem them “too strict.” But to say Stern is unconstitutional on account of its dress code is undoubtedly and universally ridiculous. The US Supreme Court has never implemented an official ruling that dress codes are against freedom of expression, and rightfully so. Even *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), the most renowned Supreme Court case regarding this issue, which stated that students were allowed to wear certain armbands and buttons for protesting purposes, clarified that these items would be against the law if they “materially and substantially interfere” with the school.

But more than just her “America” argument, what bothered me the most was something this student failed to mention: it was her choice to attend Stern.

It’s not only indecent to overtly lament about the

institution one attends; it’s disrespectful to question it when one clearly entered Stern knowing its standards. Sure, Stern doesn’t really enforce these rules so well (as proven by the fact that I didn’t know Stern had a dress code until this article). Nevertheless, I sincerely believe that that’s the beauty behind it all. One should enter Stern predominantly having some sort of idea of its Modern Orthodox philosophy. Just as one arrives to their first job all spick and span in their best business-casual attire, one should enter their chosen university the same way. As the student body of Stern, we chose to be part of a certain type of community. Dean Bacon asserted in last year’s Commentator article that the true goal of our school is to “get these surface and externals out of the way so that we can focus on what is important - learning, growing, studying [and] developing habits of the mind and heart that will make all of us better people in the future.”

And based on that simple statement, I imagine that this whole debate can be solved with a magnificent phenomenon I accepted when beginning my new chapter of college not too long ago: growing up.

## The Transition from Israel to Reality

Ariel Fox

High school was a continuous mountain of work, each year coming with an increase of pressure, studying, and obviously, more work. When I finally reached the top - that is, graduation - there was a sense of achievement and accomplishment because I knew for one year I was free of school-related responsibilities and ready to go to Israel. Everyone has their own unique experience during their year in Israel, but most of us can agree it is a year free of tests, homework, and any academic responsibility. It was a nice feeling to go to sleep at night not worrying about upcoming due dates or assignments, and to just learn for the sake of learning. The transition from spending a year studying in Israel to college, though, was a difficult one.

One can make the argument that summer break is a great way to prepare for the upcoming school year, but for many, including myself, there are so many factors that prevent this motivation. The first is that I, for one, like to procrastinate, and

summer is a great excuse for that. Second, many people work at summer camps such as HASC, Kaylie, Simcha, Moshava, etc. after their year in Israel. Most of these camps are two months long, and leave little time to prepare for school. Last, but certainly not least, most of us just want to enjoy our last hoorah before a year filled with stress, work, and exams. I certainly took advantage of my summer to be with friends, have fun, and to enjoy my vacation to its fullest.

When Stern orientation was over and classes began, the realization of being in secular classes and not simply Judaic ones was shocking because the reality of life was tangible. All my grades and anything I did in college would affect how I would fare in the real world. I personally felt a little taken aback because I loved learning Torah, especially in Jerusalem, and leaving my Kollel (full time Torah study) type life was a strange feeling. Obviously, I knew that one day I would have to go back to secular classes, but the actuality of not being in my

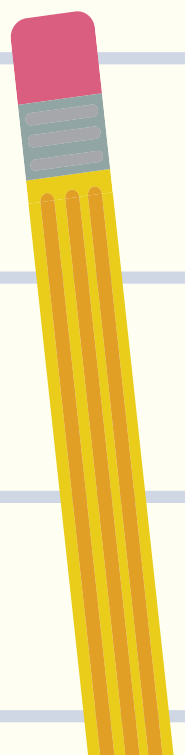
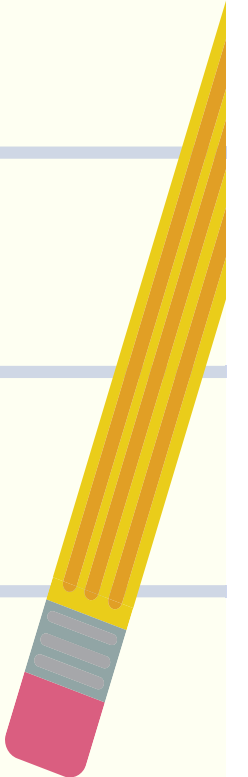
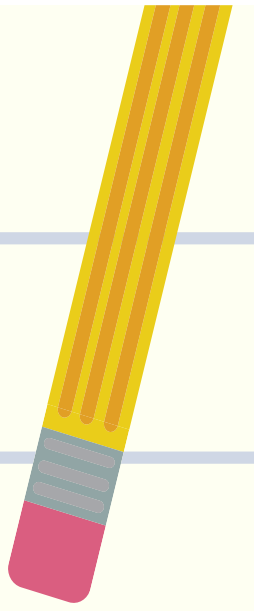
“Torah bubble” and having to work and study was something I was not fully prepared for.

After my first week, I was completely exhausted and looked forward to the weekend. I knew that I had to change my perspective from “chill” to “work” mode and start motivating myself to be the academic student I once was. It was not easy to change this mindset; however, it dawned on me that as a Jew living in a modern world, I had to learn how to balance regular work and my Torah life. As amazing as seminary was, and as much I as a recognize the importance of a gap year, I understand that it is not ideal to remain in the “bubble.” In the Bible, there are hardly any characters who lived a Kollel life; each person was able to fulfill their role in the physical world while maintaining their connection to God. I believe we can all benefit from this lesson, and as Jews we should all work to find a balance between our religious and academic lives.

THE OBSERVER

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## Self-Defense and Why it Matters

Rivki Levy  
Staff Writer

Getting punched in the nose is not an enjoyable experience, especially if it's before eight AM. Your eyes start to water, your nose is on fire, and part of you (or most of you) wishes you were back in bed and snuggled under the covers. But you remind yourself it is all worth it in the end. It's worth it because you are learning to defend yourself.

I first started taking self-defense classes when I was about ten years old, mostly because my siblings were doing it and it just seemed like the natural thing to do. I became a brown belt in karate, after which I started investigating other forms of self-defense like Krav Maga. Over time, it became something I enjoyed, unlike running or similar exercise. I do not find running stimulating, and I find myself extremely bored on the treadmill. Self-defense classes have multiple components to them that I found exhilarating. For example, there is one exercise in many of the classes I took where we stood in the middle of a circle of "attackers" and defended ourselves from all angles, which I found a lot more interesting and useful than running on a treadmill.

There are many advantages to going to a self-defense class in the early mornings before the school day begins, but waking up at six AM to get to the class by 7:15 is not easy. Your roommates will probably be sleeping and often it will still be dark out, which will make it even harder to get out of bed. When you finally manage to get dressed and you step outside onto the streets of New York City, though, you will have entered

a whole new world. The streets will be quieter than they are during the day, and in the winter, it will still be dark out. You will find it calming to be outside at that hour, and you'll get in a relaxing walk on your way. You will organize your thoughts for the day and just soak in the world. When you take the subway, you might even manage to squeeze in some last-minute studying.

The self-defense class itself is extremely rewarding. If you're like me and don't like the monotony of running or other typical exercise, a self-defense class can be a good substitute. Your blood gets pumping and your adrenaline gets moving and you complete your exercise for the day. According to Harvard Medical School, regular exercise improves your brain's memory and your ability to think things through. So not only will you feel great that you exercised, but now you'll also be able to concentrate better in your classes and do better on any tests that you have that day.

You will definitely benefit from the exercise, but you will also gain the most obvious benefit from the self-defense class: learning how to defend yourself. Just knowing how to defend yourself is very powerful for your confidence and safety. You will walk around knowing that you have the tools to be able to defend



yourself should a situation arise where you may have to. And as an added bonus, having a self-defense class on your resume looks incredibly cool. There are many self-defense classes to choose from: karate, taekwondo, Krav Maga, and many more. Pick one that you think fits your needs and get started on improving your physical and mental states so you can maximize your time in college and beyond.

## Let's Be Logical

Chemda Wiener

The first day I walked into my computer science class, my professor explained one of the reasons we should all become computer science majors. He pulled up a slide which listed the amount of positions open in the workforce for computer scientists and the amount of people who actually become computer scientists. The numbers spoke for themselves. There were so many jobs open, and so few people to take them. We were sure to make money. There could not have been a more convincing argument, right?

Right now, like many college students, I'm at that dangerous and anxiety-inducing crossroad: I'm trying to choose a major. Of course, as I consider my major, I'm also thinking a little further ahead and looking at what jobs this major might open up for me. I have a lot of interests and am trying to explore as much as I can this semester. I love English literature and I love physics. I love pretending that I have people figured out (much to my friends' annoyance), so I guess that makes me a lover of psychology too. I know I can't major in all these things, and I know I shouldn't major in some of these things, but I am trying to come up with a way to decide what to do. I want a way to feel that I am not sacrificing any of my interests but that I'm also not jeopardizing my future career.

As I think of the professional field I would like to go into, I consider the following two factors: I am looking for a job that I will feel interested in or passionate about, and a job that makes money. According to a study done by *ReviseSociology*, the average human spends about a fifth of his or her waking hours working over his or her lifetime, or a third of their waking hours working in a span of fifty years. It only makes sense to me that with such a significant amount of time spent working, I do something I am actually passionate about. The financial factor is, of course, a no-brainer. Money is a common cause of stress and therefore everybody, not only me, looks for jobs that will provide them with financial security.

As I indicated previously, I'm not alone in this decision. But as I talk to more and more people about their decisions and considerations, I notice that sometimes people are more focused on the second factor as opposed to the first - on the financial aspect rather than the passion aspect.

Sometimes we forget that our jobs should make us happy and content, and should be jobs that we can look forward to doing. We should not just sacrifice a fifth of



our lives because we think that is the only way we will have financial stability.

When we focus only on the financial aspect of our jobs (or future jobs) we may inevitably end up doing things we don't enjoy and do not find fulfilling. The Conference Board Job Satisfaction survey states that less than fifty percent of Americans feel satisfied with their jobs. At least fifty percent of us waste half a day doing something that is not fulfilling or satisfying.

Why do we do this to ourselves? We enter fields that we have little interest in but must dedicate lots of time to. We make ourselves unhappy with the claim that in the long-term we will be happier; we will have money. But what about right now? What about a fifth of life - should that really be sacrificed as a means to an end?

As I choose my major and ask for advice, I hear a lot of the following: "Well, let's look at this logically," by which people mean, "What makes the most money?" or "What has the most job openings?" Those aspects are definitely important, but why are there scarcely replies such as, "What makes you happy?" or "Well, you are passionate about x, and you will probably look forward to doing that everyday," or even "What type of person do you want to be, and what profession might be in line with those values?" Is it worth spending a significant portion of our lives, and expending a tremendous amount of energy, towards a practice that does not fulfill who we are or give impetus to who we would like to become?

It is not, however, only the financial aspect that might cause us to choose a career path that does not really interest us. Society clearly endorses specific jobs that it declares "logical" through advertisements and statistics, and even through day-to-day conversations. It is so much easier to just listen to society, to just continue through life without having to make that defining decision, without needing to actively choose to sacrifice one interest over the others. Defining who we are is scary and risky. What if the interest I focused on was the wrong one? What if I sacrificed my ability to do the thing that would actually make me happiest? It is too much responsibility to choose something that might lead to failure. And why should I do so, when society deems it so acceptable to simply go along with the mainstream?

It is so easy to get pulled into this practice, but we need to stand defiant and define who we are. We need to make logical decisions in the truest sense: what makes us happy in addition to what will ensure financial stability. We need to take risks and put our unique personalities out there and become the people we want to become. So, rest assured, if you hear of me majoring in computer science, it will not be because there are so many job openings (or at least not only because of that), but because I am truly passionate about the subject.

## How Reading The Observer Convinced Me To Attend YU

Michael Weiner  
Staff Writer



Way back in 12th grade, when I was considering whether or not to attend YU, I heard lots of comments from people - many of whom had never even stepped foot inside the institution - bemoaning its lack of diversity among the student body. It's too inwardly focused, too detached from the outside world, too provincial and small-minded, they said.

Just for the record, I had no concerns about the other garden-variety criticisms one often hears about YU: its uninspiring physical location, small humanities departments, or penchant for New York navel-gazing. That was all just fine from my end. A lack of diversity, on the other hand, really got to me.

Because lurking behind the obviously true claim that YU is a homogenous place was the scarier idea that YU students were actually just boring, with no interests or passions beyond what's deemed acceptable by convention. I had nothing against accountants or occupational therapists; rather, I was simply afraid that everyone at YU pursuing those careers wouldn't be interested in having the kinds of conversations I wanted to have. You know what I mean; the kinds that happen in the movies where a great teacher gets his students all fired up about philosophy, or about fiction, while they all stand on their desks, or something like that.

Was it true that no one stands on his or her desk at YU? I didn't know, but I needed to find out. My request was minimal: I didn't demand a Nicaraguan roommate or an African drumming club. I wasn't interested in diversity for its own sake. I merely needed confirmation that there were students at YU who thought about more than just their major and their dating lives, had some creative juices flowing, possessed passion about engaging with ideas for their own sake, and had some vulnerable self-expression to spare.

Urgently seeking clarity on this issue, I spent many hours discussing these questions with past and current YU students, as well as furiously fumbling around the web to find anything that could show me the heterogeneous, non-career-oriented side of YU.

At some point in this research process, I stumbled across The Observer. I don't recall exactly what led me there, but I somehow found a link to an article that sounded intriguing, and began to read.

Preparing myself to be smug about the poor quality

of the paper, I was in for a surprise when it turned out to be almost literally the opposite of what I imagined. I vividly recall the initial jolt of surprise that I got reading that first article and thinking, "This is actually really good."

**“But even just perusing the latest issue—or literally any issue—of The Observer is enough to undermine the canard that all YU students are boring automatons uninterested in deep thinking, creative writing, or bold self-expression.”**

Over time, and by reading more articles, I came to appreciate what I think really makes The Observer special. It isn't the writing or the editing, good as they are. Rather, it's the utterly unique kinds of stories that

it tells.

By way of example, ever since randomly finding that first piece back in 12th grade, I've read Observer articles covering topics ranging from a woman's chronicle of her love for baseball and the Mets to another's painful ambivalence about the Supreme Court's Obergefell v. Hodges decision; from opinion pieces weighing in on the latest feminism and halacha controversy to feature stories about the inner workings of YU academics and social life.

The first big idea here is that, going through the list, none of these pieces are about money or marriage. It's a shocker, I know. But even just perusing the latest issue—or literally any issue—of The Observer is enough to undermine the canard that all YU students are boring automatons uninterested in deep thinking, creative writing, or bold self-expression.

The second big idea here is that The Observer is unique. Say it with me: nowhere but here. Indeed, where else in the world can religious women express themselves so openly and so articulately about the thoughts and themes of their lives that matter most to them?

The Observer turns the whole narrative of what a Stern student is supposed to be upside-down. Within its pages, we find a whole symphony of voices making bold arguments and writing sharp rejoinders, taking unpopular stances and talking about sensitive subjects.

They speak for themselves, and show the world a portrait of YU that's far more than just a series of recurring stereotypes. Reading The Observer is an education, an opportunity to be confused and then enlightened about how observant women navigate the world so differently than I do. It's a trip to a foreign country that you've heard a lot about but don't yet fully understand. The challenge and the opportunity for learning is in the attempt to really understand this very different culture by seeing the world as they do, through their stories.

So there you have it. A big part of the reason why I ultimately decided to attend YU was actually due to reading The Observer. Thanks for sharing your stories with the world. You never know who might be reading.

Share your Observations.  
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