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EDITORIAL

On The Enforcement of COVID-19 Safety Precau-

By Fruma Landa, Editor in Chief

We all expect to feel physically safe on campus. The YU administration has emphasized countless times that our safety and health will be a priority and that safety precautions will be enforced to protect students and staff alike. Precautions such as mandated social distancing and face coverings, temperature checks, frequent COVID-19 testing, a pre-screening survey, the Covid-19 Code of Behavior, and the YU COVID Code of Conduct were instituted, with varying degrees of enforcement, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sadly, as the Spring 2021 semester progressed, I have noticed a decrease in the level of seriousness with which people are treating these precautions. It is not uncommon to find students in public, on-campus locations with noses uncovered, and the once-rare completely unmasked student is becoming increasingly common. Furthermore, aside from students not properly covering their nose and mouth, librarians, security guards, and other faculty members on both the Beren and Wilf Campuses are often improperly masked as well.

It is no surprise that students feel that they do not need to take these precautions seriously when the security guards scanning their ID and checking their temperature are not properly masked either. If the authority figures are often seen not abiding by the COVID-19 safety precautions they should be enforcing, it will lead students to feel that they are entitled to break these precautions as well. As many

students do not face repercussions for breaking these safety rules, they are more likely to repeat them.

The obligatory twice a week testing is well enforced — if a student misses too many tests, they will be notified and their ID may be deactivated, preventing them from entering campus buildings. This clear repercussion for missing COVID-19 tests encourages students to show up for testing. However, there is no such method put into place to enforce mask wearing.

Aside from the lack of mask

use a screenshot of a friend. To solve this issue, the survey results were updated earlier this year to display the name of the person who filled out the survey. Nonetheless, without making sure the name on the survey matches the name on the ID, people can continue to use outdated screenshots.

Temperature tests are not effective in detecting COVID-19. Students often walk into the library bundled up in hats and hoods which are not always removed before their temperature is scanned, unintentionally obstructing the thermometer's access. Moreover, I have encountered security guards who do not

When I walk on campus, I want to feel safe, and I am sure most students and faculty can relate. As an institution, we need to focus on enforcing masks in public areas, and the COVID-19 pre-screening test as well continuing the effective COVID-19 test enforcements. As individuals, we need to do our best to make sure we are not contributing to others feeling unsafe. If we are in a public space where people can walk by, we need to make sure our noses and mouths are fully covered, even if there is currently nobody walking by. You never know if someone wanted to walk by, but chose not to due to an improperly worn mask. As Rebbe

Eliezer says in the Ethics of our Fathers 2:10, "Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own." Regardless of whether you personally believe you should wear a mask, we can learn from Rebbe Eliezer to act in a way that honors those around us. It is imperative to consider whether our actions honor and respect the space and people we are around and consequently choose to follow the precautions put in place to keep us safe.



enforcement, the COVID-19 prescreening survey is not enforced well either. Oftentimes, I am waved into the building before showing my green smile, and when I do flash the smile, the security guards often don't take the time to check the date on the screen and to make sure the name matches my ID. Students have learned to hack the system and use an old screenshot of a survey they took, or even

read the number on the thermometer before allowing students into the building. Sometimes, the gun is pointed at a head and scanned, sometimes scanning a few people in a row before glancing at the results. I have even witnessed a few occurrences where the temperature gun was pointed at a forehead and put down before the temperature was read.

Yeshiva University 90th Annual Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2021 Announced to be Virtual with Potential for an In-person Senior-Only Celebration

By Shoshanah Marcus, News Editor

In an email sent to the YU community on March 11, 2021, Dr. Selma Botman, provost and vice president for academic affairs, announced that the Yeshiva University 90th Annual Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2021 will take place virtually and will not include an in-person component. However, “an in-person celebration just for undergraduate seniors, pending approval from local public health officials,” is currently being planned. The Commencement Ceremony will take place on May 26, 2021 at 1 p.m.

According to this email, this decision was not made lightly. Dr. Botman explained, “Unfortunately, following the public health and safety guidance of New York City and New York State, as well as guidance from our medical director, we came to the conclusion that we could not have an in-person event attended by thousands of people ... we feel this is the best and safest option that will allow for all graduates, families, faculty

and friends to participate in the celebratory event.”

Students of the Class of 2021 were confused by this reasoning considering that YU has been conducting in-person classes since the middle of the Fall 2020 semester. David Schmidt, SSSB '21, expressed that he “[j]ust [doesn't] know why a student only graduation would be less safe than anything the school already does in person, like class or Morning Seder [Talmud study].” Yosef Rosenfield, YC '21 shared his frustration: “It's absolutely something that can be safely done at this time. It's just 'safer' for YU to claim that it isn't.”

Some Senior students are hoping that the University will reconsider this decision. Sarah Brill, SCW '21, shared with the YU Observer, “As a senior, it is extremely disappointing that our school could not make any accommodation for this year's commencement. I am the first to advocate for safety and social distancing, but there are many options for graduation to accommodate a class this small.” She added, “Universities larger

than ours have considered all of the options and have decided on creative solutions so that their students can have a proper graduation. There are many options that our school has just passed by. I know our school is trying to do what is in the best interest of the student and our safety, but I feel like our school hasn't considered all the options.” Another student stated: “While I'm sure this was a difficult decision for the administration, and one they would prefer not to have made, I would appreciate if the commencement decision was reconsidered and if student leaders were given an opportunity to collaborate with administration to create a commencement with as much of an in-person element as possible” Benji Halpern, SSSB '21.

Many students are frustrated with the lack of financial compensation despite the fact that Commencement will take place online. One senior who wished to remain anonymous expressed to the YU Observer, “If commencement isn't going to be in person I'd like my graduation fee to be refunded ...

I don't see why I should have to pay to get a diploma that I already paid to earn. I don't know. I would appreciate more transparency. And if it's to cover printing/shipping costs, my dad knows a guy who could do it for cheaper.”

Other students in the Class of 2021 expressed their general frustration regarding this decision. “I'm livid about the committee's decision to make it virtual,” shared YSU President Zachary Greenberg, SSSB '21, “During our (student leaders) lone meeting with them, right off the bat they asked how we can make a virtual commencement a success tossing off the notion of in-person. At the time they told us they're looking into outdoor venues and we stressed that having a hybrid commencement is of the utmost importance to the students. I don't understand how fans are allowed to attend Knicks games indoors, but we can't have a safe, socially-distant outdoor graduation. I haven't seen a lot of my friends in months and want one last goodbye as my time in YU reaches a close.”

YU Counseling Center Announces Three New Student Support Groups

By Mili Chizhik, News Editor

On February 4, the Yeshiva University Counseling Center announced that there will be three new support groups for students on both campuses. There is a group for LGBTQ+ support, a group for anxiety and stress management support, and one for COVID and college support. These confidential support groups will be run by the counseling center staff and will be held over Zoom.

The email sent out described that the LGBTQ support group is for “students who identify as members of the LGBTQ community,” and if any student is interested, they should email Shira Silton, LCSW at shira.silton@yu.edu. Similarly, the anxiety and stress management group “will focus on learning practical skills to manage anxiety and stress, based on the evidence-based principles of DBT [dialectical behavioral therapy]

and CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy],” and students should contact Dr. Rochel Ausubel at rausubel@yu.edu. Lastly, the group for COVID and college “will learn mindfulness-based techniques for dealing with the challenges of being a college student today,” and those interested should email Dr. Robert Ogle at Robert.ogle@yu.edu.

Dr. Yael Muskat, the director of the YU Counseling Center, said that “When one is facing a challenge, or needing emotional support, groups are a wonderful way to connect and learn from others who are going through similar experiences. The Counseling Center has run groups in the past and it is always an enriching experience. In the past, it was often challenging with busy schedules, to gather enough students at the same time and place. One of the silver linings of the [Z]oom era is that we are

able to use the virtual platform to gather in more flexible and convenient ways.

“We saw this as a great opportunity to run some more groups, with specific, relevant topics, and began with a Stress Management group and a LGBTQ support group and we are very excited that they [are] in the beginning stages. The formation of the LGBTQ support group was inspired both by a high level of student interest as well as a strong desire by the Counseling Center to provide this valuable outlet as a platform for students in the LGBTQ community to communicate and share, learn and support one another with the guidance of a caring professional.”

Additionally, the Pride Alliance board shared that “As part of our mission to provide a supportive space on campus for all students, the Pride Alliance has met with

members of the YU Counseling Center with the goal of improving LGBTQ+ students' access to mental health resources at YU. The recently announced LGBTQ+ peer support group is a great, significant step towards this goal, and we are confident that it will provide much-needed support and improve the lives of many YU LGBTQ+ students. We look forward to continuing our work with the YU administration to move on to the next step, and establish an official club at YU to further provide crucial support and resources.”

Continued on page 3

Rising COVID-19 Cases on the Undergraduate Campuses After Purim; YU Suspends Pre-Passover COVID-19 Test-

By Erica Rachel Sultan, News Editor

After the Purim celebration on February 25 and 26, there has been a rise of COVID-19 cases on the YU undergraduate campuses. Through accessing the New York State's dashboard, cases in YU between the dates of February 13 to February 26 jumped to 18 confirmed cases from the previous period from January 30 to February 12 which only saw eight confirmed cases. The following period, February 27 to March 12 (the weeks following Purim), saw 25 confirmed cases.

On-campus students were encouraged to stay on campus for the holiday with many events planned. Multiple Megillat Esther (Book of Esther) readings were scheduled on both campuses so as to keep in line with social distancing guidelines. Other activi-

ties, such as the breaking of the fast and celebration with music and crafts, were held inside. An email sent to all Beren and Wilf Campus undergraduates on February 18 asked that students who are not staying on campus for Purim to follow specific guidelines to keep the community safe including but not limited to: maintain social distancing and mask wearing when in public places and when giving out Mishloach Manot (Purim food package), as well as requested that one should not attend a large Purim Seudah (feast). A Purim Seudah with one's family or roommates is ideal and all other seudah gatherings were discouraged.

Students who would not adhere to these guidelines were asked not to come to campus for a week after Purim and suggested to continue with remote class-

es. On February 28, Dr. Nissel sent a reminder to all YU undergraduates that if students did not abide by the social distancing guidelines during Purim, they should stay away from campus until March 7. Currently, between the period of March 13 to March 26, there have been 13 confirmed cases on the undergraduate campuses.

Mandatory COVID-19 testing will be suspended as of March 19 until the end of Passover break — April 8. Optional testing was available on March 18 for students who wanted to know whether they were COVID-19 positive before traveling for Passover break.

YU Announces New COVID-19 Safety Regulations with Regard to Passover Break

By Mili Chizhik, News Editor

On Friday, March 12, an announcement was made by Assistant Dean of Students Sara Asher to the YU student body that COVID-19 safety regulations on campus will be changing due to the changes to the NYS travel quarantine regulations.

Quarantine will not be required for domestic travelers starting April 1. However, international travelers will still be required to quarantine and those students must quarantine as part of the Hotel Quarantine program after the Passover holiday. These students would be required to do this regardless of past infection, tests,

or vaccinations, and they would be able to get out of quarantine after seven days if they receive a negative test three to five days after they traveled or they can simply quarantine without tests for 10 days. In order to travel to the U.S., according to the CDC, all individuals must provide negative test results no more than three days prior to travel or proof of a positive COVID-19 test result within the previous 90 days.

Students who will be in the Hotel Quarantine program should be arriving by April 5 in New York and YU will provide COVID-19 tests for those in the hotel from

the third to fifth day so students can leave on quarantine day seven. Those who have questions should contact Rabbi Josh Weisberg at josh.weisberg@yu.edu for more information about the Hotel Quarantine program.

All students, whether vaccinated or not, must submit a negative COVID-19 PCR test prior to their arrival onto campus even if they do not travel. However, students (not including those traveling internationally) who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days are not required to submit a negative test result and must provide proof of a positive case.

All students' IDs will be deactivated over the Passover break and individual IDs will be reactivated once the negative COVID-19 PCR test results have been submitted to covidstudentline@yu.edu.

All shiurim and classes will be remote from the beginning of Passover break and in person classes will resume on Monday, April 12. The residence halls will be closed from 10:00 a.m. March 25 to 10:00 p.m. April 4.

continued from page 2: YU Counseling Center Announces Three New Student Support Groups

“We hope these groups will positively impact our students and cultivate an even greater sense of belonging, education and ongoing social support.

To make an appointment with the Counseling Center please email counseling@yu.edu.

“It is important to note that support groups are designed to foster trust and the fundamental building block for that trust is that membership and content discussed in the group is confidential. Group facilitators and group members discuss and agree upon all the ways in which this is maintained and guarded.”

During the current academic year, YU had a few events that were directly related to the LGBTQ+ community and mental health, such as the “Mental Health and LGBTQ: What Helps and What Hurts” event with Dr. Sara Gluck and the “Being LGBTQ in an Orthodox World” panel where one can hear “personal narratives of LGBTQ+ individuals who have attended or are currently in YU,” as was advertised.

Dr. Muskat continued further, saying that the “Stress Management groups were brought back at this time, with the recognition of the high levels of anxiety and stress students are feeling due to COVID and in general, during this exciting but demanding time of their lives.





Maccabees Men's Basketball Team Enters D3hoops.com's Top Five Teams of the Week for First Time in Program History

By Shoshanah Marcus, News Editor

In a recent poll posted on D3hoops.com on March 1, 2021, the Yeshiva University Maccabees men's basketball team made program history by earning the fourth rank in the top five Teams of the Week.

The YU Maccabees men's basketball team extended their winning streak to 35 games in their recent win against the University of Saint Joseph. In D3hoop.com's weekly honor roll poll, senior forward Gabriel Leifer's (YC '21) performance in the game against the University of Saint Joseph earned Yeshiva University a spot

in the top five Teams of the Week. According to D3hoop.com, "Leifer averaged 17 points, 15 rebounds, and nine assists as Yeshiva extended their winning streak to 34 games. Against St. Joseph's (Conn.), he just missed a triple double, with 13 points, 13 rebounds, and nine assists. He also had four blocks in the game and led the defensive effort."

The 35-game winning streak for the YU Maccabees men's basketball team is groundbreaking. According to an article posted by the YU Maccabees on March 2, this streak is the "third-longest unbeaten streak in Division III men's basketball history."

This ranking, however, is not only historic for the YU Maccabees men's basketball team, but it is also record breaking for the senior forward, Gabriel Leifer. "Leifer is just the fourth men's basketball player, and seventh overall, in the 24-year history of D3hoops.com to be named to its Team of the Week in four separate seasons," explained the YU Maccabees article.

The YU Maccabees men's basketball team is set to play the Stevens Institute of Technology, a fellow reigning NCAA Tournament team on Monday evening at Canavan Arena.

OPINION

Michael Che...That Was Seriously NOT Okay

By Sarah Brill, Science & Technology Editor

On February 20, 2021, Saturday Night Live (SNL) aired as usual. The Weekend Update section kicked off with hosts Colin Hanks and Michael Che, the show's comedic "news reporters." Both men were cracking jokes about the pandemic and the coronavirus when they got to the segment on the vaccine. Michael Che stated, "Israel is reporting that they've vaccinated half of their population, and I'm gonna guess it's the Jewish half." This joke received scattered applause from audience members, however, on the other end of the screen, hundreds of Jewish watchers stared in disbelief at their screens. Many of the comments made on the Weekend Update section are based in fact and truth and usually based on real events that happen throughout the week. This comment and "joke" was not only an assumption, it was baseless and highly unanticipated.

The claim that only the Jewish half of the population in Israel is being vaccinated is not only factless, but it is also

laying claim that the Israeli government is being discriminatory against other religions. Because Che specifically said "guess it's the Jewish half," he is automatically singling out the Jewish community as discriminatory and inhumane, quite frankly. It is common knowledge that Israel, while being the Jewish home state, is also home to many Muslims and Christians, so to insinuate that those populations are not getting proper healthcare

from "the Jewish half" is ignorant and wrong.

According to the Washington Post, quoting Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, "Saturday's deeply offensive joke about Israel's COVID-19 vaccination process not only missed the mark, but crossed the line — basing the premise of the joke on factual inaccuracies and playing into an antisemitic trope in the process." In choosing his joke, Che

has set the stage for more jokes, using Jews as the punchline, to occur.

Of course, this is not the first time that someone has stated inaccurate information regarding either the Jewish or Israeli communities, but to have it come from a comedic outlet on NBC is just ridiculous. The American Jewish Committee has asked Michael Che to reply and apologize but the comedian has yet to do so.

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Sources:
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So, Like, Basically, Speech Should Be Taught Earlier

By Zipporah Spanjer

Note: I'm an SCW student, and this is an SCW issue.

Within the "General Education" component of SCW's graduation requirements, under "Modes of Expression," there are two required courses: English Composition and Speech Communication, of which English Composition must be taken within a student's first two semesters at Stern. It's a great course in its own merit, but there is a reason students have to take it early: you have to be able to write essays for other classes in order to succeed.

Speech Communication is also a core requirement, but there is no two-semester deadline. As a result, each semester, Speech Communication classes are full of senior students. Due to priority registration, the courses are full before most students can sign up, particularly underclassmen. This semester, there are seven slots for the Speech Communication class requirement — amounting to a 140-student total capacity.

During my first semester at Stern, one of my classes required an oral presentation, which was worth 10% of my grade. My second semester, there were four classes with presentation requirements. Regardless of whether a student has taken Speech Communication, the ability to give a presentation is an expected skill in a student's wheelhouse.

I was not able to take Speech Communication until last semester — my fifth semester at SCW (ironically, I had already developed many of the other skills taught by the class, such as how to make an effective visual presentation, through experience) — and it taught me vital strategies for success in public speaking, such as confidence, how to structure a speech, and how to maintain audience interest. I believe students should have access to learning these types of strategies as early in their college experience as possible.

Further establishing the need for access to Speech courses are the number of students at this institution that are involved in extracurricular activities that involve public speaking:

participating in SURGE or START, leading clubs, getting interviewed for jobs, and so on. Most students come to college with little to no public speaking experience, which can lead to poor performance on important presentations.

What can we do? From a student's perspective, not much. Something that I can do personally is write this article. We need the administration and professors to step in. I believe that, just like English Composition, Speech Communication should be required within the first two semesters. The shift to this system will take time, and, yes, (gasp!) money, but it is necessary. We will also need more Speech teachers, at least until all upperclassmen have taken speech, to accommodate the influx in speech-taking students. It may be a complicated transition, but I think the benefits Stern students will reap will far outweigh any difficulty in achieving it.

Mental, Physical, Spiritual: A Call For Mental Healthcare Reform in Gap Year Institutions

By Shayna Herszage, Managing Editor

For many people in Jewish communities, it is a rite of passage to spend a gap year in a yeshiva (for men) or seminary (for women) in Israel before college. However, behind the smiling brochures and cleverly captioned Instagram posts is an often hidden reality: these students, still in their adolescence, are uprooted from everything they have known for the past eighteen years of their lives, placed in a foreign situation in a foreign country, and told to learn Jewish text and thought for the year. While this is often a positive transformative experience, it is more than understandable that seminary and yeshiva students frequently struggle with mental illnesses during their gap year. However, these institutions often are unable or unwilling to address students' mental illnesses in a healthy manner. In a world that is moving toward acceptance and destigmatization of people with mental illnesses, it is imperative that Israel gap year institutions reform their mental healthcare protocol.

It is not uncommon for Israel gap year institutions to expel their students who struggle with mental

illnesses. For example, "Esther"* arrived at her dream seminary on one condition: the administration told her she may not talk to her classmates about mental health. For the first ten days, everything seemed to be going well. However, when her psychiatrist told Esther's seminary she was struggling



choice: “[The school] never made it clear what their stance was on mental health ... I didn’t really feel comfortable speaking with anyone unless I knew they wouldn’t judge me [or] have a stigma against me.” Hanna realized that many institutions are not understanding of mental illnesses, so she did not tell her school. While Hanna, thankfully, was able to access relevant resources on her own, her experience begs the question: how can dozens, often hundreds, of adolescents be placed under the care of these institutions if the institutions in question perpetuate such strong stigmas that students are uncomfortable with disclosing such an important part of their healthcare?

In addition to the stigma and carelessness characteristic of many institutions, gap year students whose struggles with mental illnesses are disclosed to institution administrators are often treated as if they have breached a disciplinary regulation. When “Ariella” told her seminary administrators that she was seeking resources to help with her depression, anxiety, and eating disorder, the administrators took actions such as placing her under a degrading 72-hour suicide watch of her own peers (despite not expressing suicidal thoughts or behaviors), temporarily banning her from attending classes, and threatening her with an expulsion which was never actualized. Five years later, Ariella looks back on the experience in a negative light: “I was young, scared, and looking for support. Instead of getting that support, I was treated like I had done something wrong. I didn’t drink, I didn’t miss curfew, I didn’t even skip classes until I was banned from attending

— my offense was that I struggled with mental illness and sought help. That coldness and isolation was the opposite of the warmth and kindness I needed.”

Like Ariella, Esther experienced the same coldness and sense of feeling like she had broken a rule as she left her seminary following her expulsion. “I was at my lowest point and it felt like they were just pushing me lower. It was very dehumanizing and when I got back after my appointment, no one spoke to me. I felt contagious; they just told me to pack my stuff and leave,” Esther expressed. Instead of showing empathy toward a student struggling with mental illness, the administration deepened her feelings of loneliness by treating her like she had done something wrong to deserve expulsion.

The experiences of Ariella and Esther being treated as rule breakers shed light on the immense levels of mental health stigma rampant in many gap year institutions. Gap year institutions would be unlikely to expel a student for a physical illness; if they did send a student home due to a physical need such as medical treatment, it would likely be with warmth and care. Their treatments of students with mental illnesses should not be any different, but the unjust reality is that Ariella and Esther’s stories are not the only ones of their kind. Several students in gap year programs every year are treated as if their mental illnesses are inherent disciplinary breaches, instead of diagnosable disorders. It is time for these institutions to reform the way they perceive their students and their students’ mental wellbeing,

for the sake of the Jewish young adults of the past, present, and future.

Luckily, some institutions have acted in ways that show that they are equipped and willing to support their students in their mental health journeys. For example, “Avi” attended a yeshiva in Israel for two years. During that time, he experienced bouts of depression, and he sought help from his rabbis. Many of the rabbis in his institution had a background in psychology or otherwise had experiences with addressing mental health in productive ways. As such, they understood what Avi needed: they helped him adjust his course schedule to fit his needs, they helped him find a therapist in Israel, and they facilitated Avi’s discussion with his parents about beginning therapy. When Avi reached out to his institution for help, the rabbis considered the needs of the individual student, and they acted accordingly to provide the support he needed.

The case of Avi’s institution provides an image of a likely solution to the problem plaguing many gap year institutions: educate the gap year educators about mental health, and equip them with the background necessary to handle mental health topics in a healthy and productive way. With more in-depth mental health education, gap year educators will not so strongly perpetuate stigmas against mental illness and, as a result, they will not be so careless in the ways they address or ignore mental health struggles among their students.

When a young adult is placed into the trust of a gap year institution,

the institution is expected to care for the student and provide the support that is needed — whether that need is physical, emotional, or spiritual. However, while these institutions make strong efforts to support students in their physical needs and spiritual journeys, many of these institutions have exhibited stigma, coldness, and carelessness in the faces of students struggling with their mental health. In order to support the wellbeing of the thousands of young adults who take part in gap year programs in Israel each year, measures must be taken to reform the mental health protocols and perspectives within gap year institutions. Educating administrators and faculty members more rigorously about psychology, mental health, and mental health support will provide these institutions with the knowledge and understanding to address these matters in a way that is healthy and beneficial for the students and their peers. The lack of mental health education in such institutions has already caused trauma and turmoil for countless people with actions that they can not undo; in the present, it is the responsibility of these institutions to ensure that these actions do not happen again.

*Names have been changed

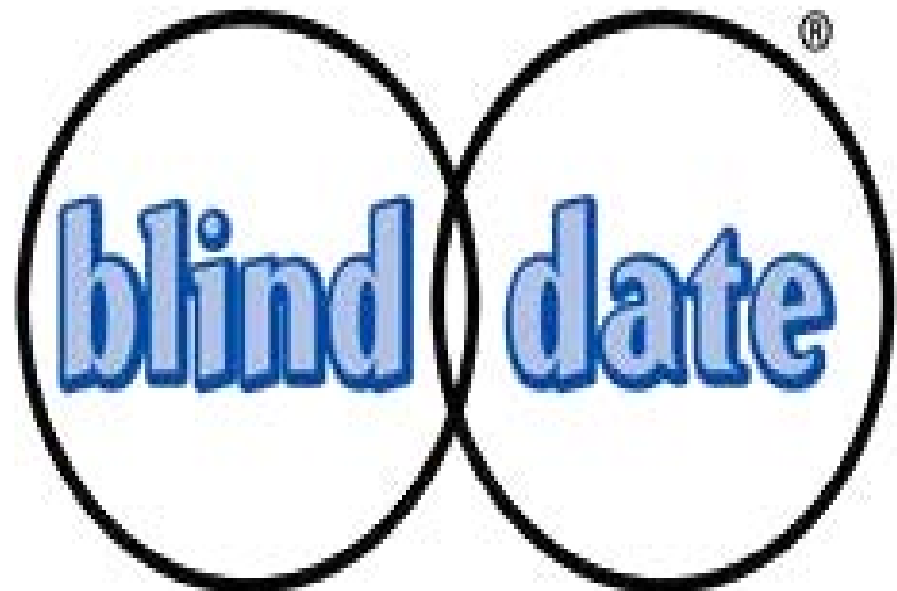
It’s Time to Stop Telling People to Date Your “Nice” Friends

By Shifra Lindenberg

“Hi! Would you be interested in dating ‘insert person’s name here’?”

You may have been asked this question from a multitude of people. Your friends, your roommates, random people in your classes, someone from your shabbat meal, or even your matchmaker from YU Connects.

After being asked this question, you’re suddenly curious and intrigued. “Someone thinks that I should date someone?” you think to yourself. Your first instinct is to be excited that this random person may have found the perfect person for you and that you’re actually going to get engaged before



you graduate. You start thinking about how long it will be until the proposal and where the wedding will be located. But this fantasy soon comes to an end. You search

this person up on Facebook and Instagram and your first thought is, “oh no.” This person isn’t a bad person, nor have they done anything to hurt you. To put it nicely,

they just weren’t the person you imagined them to be. They might have one, maybe two pictures on Facebook. If they’re a girl, their only pictures are taken at someone else’s weddings and if they’re a guy, their most recent pictures are from their TABC (Torah Academy of Bergen County) glory days — their Israel glory days if you’re lucky.

Once again, this person isn’t a bad person, just not the person you’re looking for. If I’m going to be perfectly honest, you are not attracted to this person.

This person isn’t an ugly person, just not your type.

Continued on page 7

continued from page 6: It’s Time To Stop Telling People To Date Your “Nice” Friends

You’re into people who do NCSY and go on adventures with their friends. Or you’re into people who frequent Israel and have friends. You’re not into someone who awkwardly poses and posts cars on their newsfeed.

And that’s okay

But it isn’t to your friend, acquaintance, or matchmaker.

“What do you mean you’re not interested? He/She is a nice boy/girl, you should give them a chance”

If you don’t give this person a chance, you’re a shallow jerk who’s only interested in looks.

But when you do give this person a chance, and I say this from experience, you find yourself disappointed as predicted.

Don’t get me wrong, there are many couples out there who have worked out because someone gave the other person a chance, but this isn’t what this story is about.

I’m talking about the “nice guys” who’s opening liner is “so why did you agree to date me” and then follow it with a dash of “I don’t understand why girls wear all that makeup” and a sprinkle of “looks aren’t important to me.”

That type of “nice” person.

Honestly, I’m personally insulted when people insist that these people are my bashert (soul mate). But I’m really insulted when people see me as just another “nice” girl.

I’m not a “nice” girl, looks are important to me.

For those who are empathising with this article, you get it. You see yourselves as an intelligent, ambitious, and talented individual, full of confidence and zeal for life. So of course you’re insulted when someone insists you date someone without the passion you seek —because that person doesn’t see you for the qualities you possess.

They see you as a single guy/girl that they can convince to date their “nice” friend.

While we shouldn’t judge someone based on their looks, I believe that a picture is worth a thousand words. You can tell someone’s confidence in their posture, how comfortable they are with their smile; if they smile, and if they like to have fun based on how goofy they allow themselves to be. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg.

I’m sure these “nice” boys and girls will find someone at the end of the day, even if it isn’t you or me.

And I’m okay with that.

After all, I’m not a “nice” girl.

JOY

JQYU (JQY UNIVERSITY)

IS A CROSS-CAMPUS NETWORK FOR

LGBTQ Jewish

COLLEGE STUDENTS.

JQYU SERVES AS AN UMBRELLA COMMUNITY FOR QUEER JEWISH CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES.

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FEATURES



Staff Writer Profiles: Abigail Grigoryan

BY YOSEF ROSENFIELD ON BEHALF OF FEATURES STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight some of the YU undergraduate students who have written articles for us over the course of the semester. For the March edition, the YU Observer is highlighting Abigail Grigoryan.

Name: Abigail Grigoryan
College: Katz School
Major: Political Science
Year: True Freshman, second

semester on campus.

Where are you for the COVID-19 pandemic? With Whom?: I am currently on campus in the Brookdale dorms with my awesome friends and great roommate Leeor Savin!

Currently reading: “11/22/63” by Stephen King

Currently watching: “Get Me Roger Stone” (on Netflix)

Currently listening to: “The Mysterious Mr. Epstein” podcast on Spotify

Favorite way to social distance with friends: Going for an outdoor brunch!

Any cool things you’ve done/hobbies you’ve picked up over the COVID-19 pandemic?: Instead of hitting the treadmill at the gym, I started running in the evening to relieve stress after a long day. What do you miss most about your pre-COVID-19 life?: Festivals like Rolling Loud and the Governors Ball!

What is your favorite thing about YU?: The learning opportunities! Coming from a public school and having absolutely no Jewish social or educational background, I love learning in the Beit Midrash (Torah study hall) with my chavruta

(study partner)!

What’s a quote/thought/piece of advice you have for your fellow students?: Practice what you preach, both socially and politically. Whatever you advise others to do, you should do yourself.

Read her past articles here:
<https://yuobserver.org/2021/02/beren-campus-adds-new-faculty-to-the-judaics-department/>
<https://yuobserver.org/2021/02/the-death-of-the-s-a-t-subject-tests/>

Club Profile: Jewish Activism Club

BY BINA DAVIDSON ON BEHALF OF FEATURES STAFF

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the March issue, the YU Observer is highlighting “Jewish Activism Club”

Club Name: Jewish Activism Club
Heads: Shayna Herszage
Relevant Campus(es): Wilf, Beren
What is your club’s mission statement?: We are a club that seeks to raise awareness for important social issues that pertain to the Jewish community. By educating students, we want to bring more unity and inclusiveness to the Jewish world.

Why is this club important?: Focusing on social justice issues within the Jewish community is important because, while we can often confront how these issues exist on a global scale, it is so important to also confront them in a place that is closer to home, so to speak. When we acknowledge that these issues are closer to us than we like to admit, we can begin to enact change.

What was your pull to get involved in the club?: I started this club with a friend (Phillip Nagler, YC

’20) in my second semester at YU. We saw the politically active and socially active clubs on campus, and we wanted to form a club that would focus on these issues within the Jewish community, and without a politically affiliated agenda; we just wanted to perpetuate an agenda of equality and inclusion. It sounds cheesy, but that’s exactly the vision

When we acknowledge that these issues are closer to us than we like to admit, we can begin to enact change.

Phillip and I formed when we had our first meeting together about the club in the Brookdale lounge back in late 2018.

What are some things your club has done in the past?: We have worked to address a wide range of topics since starting the club. For example, we have addressed racism, misogyny, environmental issues, and homophobia, and how these topics all pertain to the Jewish community.

What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters?: We have lots of topics and ideas in the works! One event for this March, in partnership with the YU Feminists Club, is a panel of “Monologues from the Makom” contributors who will be discuss-

ing their experiences in gendered spaces.

What is your favorite OSL-provided food for club events?: Pizza — it’s a classic!

With COVID, how is your club adjusting?: We do events fully online now. While I miss the aforementioned event pizzas, it is actually very convenient in a sense that we no

you want to see. Why not you?

Anything else to say about your club: We thrive on community involvement! If there is a topic you are interested in seeing addressed, don’t be afraid to reach out!

Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us at theyuobserver@gmail.com with your club name and the names of the club heads!



longer need to worry about details like having speakers who are not from the New York area. Despite the many hardships, it’s nice that we’re able to have more diversity of speakers by not being limited to a local radius.

What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus?: If you’re passionate about something, don’t be afraid to take action about it! Starting a club in my second semester was daunting, but cultivating this club and what it stands for has been an incredible experience. Whether you are passionate about a hobby, a topic, or even a TV show, if you want to see more acknowledgement of it on campus, don’t wait around for someone else to enact the change



Stomp Out The Stigma: Four Students Share Their Stories

BY AMALYA TEITELBAUM,
BUSINESS EDITOR & SOCIAL
MEDIA MANAGER

Trigger Warning: The following article mentions anxiety disorders, depression, panic attacks, sexual assault, and suicide.

“The biggest challenge you get in life is that of your own brain”
- Rav Nachman Breslov

On February 17, 2020, four students chose to share their mental health journeys at Yeshiva University’s 10th annual Stomp Out the Stigma event organized by Active Minds. There was not a single story that didn’t end in unanimous applause. Stomp Out the Stigma is a YU event that aims to normalize speaking out about mental health issues and encourages students to speak about their mental health experiences. As Etan Neiman, SSSB ’17, stated the evening of the event, “The word hero gets tossed around pretty easily these days. It was a privilege to get to meet four of them tonight.”

Mental health, up until recently, was a subject rarely touched upon. It was and still is, common to hear comments such as “act normal” or “get over it” in response to hearing someone’s mental health experiences. People were hesitant to hear about mental health problems and people were even more unlikely to speak about them. As if not speaking about it would just make the issues disappear. As if feelings of anxiety, depression, and worthlessness were just “over-dramatic” emotions. That it is just something “every teenager goes through.” Each and every word that the speakers said attacked the toxic idea of “ignoring” mental

health. While they were speaking, it was as if they were telling every single student at the event that they were not alone.

Hannah Adler, SCW ’23, one of the incredible speakers from that night, later summed up mental health in a statement everyone should hear: “One of the hardest things about mental health struggles is that your brain can actively tell you that you are alone and are undeserving of help. Depression and anxiety can spend years weighing you down with intrusive thoughts and toxic flawed thoughts. I can honestly say that now, given the opportunity to speak at Stomp Out the Stigma, that I am even

While they were speaking, it was as if they were telling every single student at the event that they were not alone.

further in understanding that no matter what my insecurities might tell me, nobody who struggles is beyond repair or broken, and I hope this can be an opportunity for others to relate to this message as well.”

Hannah spoke about the fear of vulnerability. There is a stigma that expressing any sort of vulnerability makes us a burden. Hannah spoke about how she used to consider it a success when people did not know what she was struggling with. But the problem is, people can’t help you unless you help yourself first. As Hannah so eloquently stated throughout her story, the lies we tell ourselves about being worthless are just that: lies. There was another overarching message to her story: the only person who can take us off our self-destruction path is ourselves.

When Rivky Terebelo, SSSB ’21, one of the Active Minds

co-presidents, was questioned regarding the goal of the event she stated, “We hoped that the event would accomplish the student body coming together to open their hearts and minds to understand more about mental illness. For so long, the subject has been taboo in a way that is so damaging to so many people. This event helps stomp the stigma that surrounds mental illness and I think last night showed that.” Shoshana Berger, SCW ’23, shared, “The only thing I can say about this even is that it was absolutely perfect. It accomplished everything it was meant to accomplish. It was perfect” and should leave the Active Minds heads with no doubt

that the event met and exceeded its expectations.

When the event ended it was clear that the same question was present in every student’s mind. What can one do to combat the stigma? When asked about this, Terebelo answered, “Over 350 people watched the event and the feedback was beyond incredible. I think that’s one of the most important ways in combating the stigma. Talking and continuing these conversations leaves room for people to acknowledge and talk about their own struggles without the worry of judgment from their peers. That’s a simple way that we can make all those around us feel more comfortable.” As she said, it is simple: All we have to do is make people around us feel like they don’t have to hide, that they don’t have to pretend like they are okay. There are so many ways to do that. Because in reality, it is

infinitely easier to walk down the path of stability, or happiness, or even be okay, when you are no longer hiding in the bushes.

The subject of medical treatment for mental illnesses and its supposed stigma was another topic of the night’s speakers. More specifically, the feeling that if you are on medication, you are incompatible with the rest of humanity was addressed. When Max Engel (YC ’21) spoke, he verbalized this exact feeling. He spoke about his experience, going from therapist to therapist trying different doses of different types of medication, experiencing side effects such as fatigue and loopiness. He explained how these side effects were tough to balance in social environments in school. He stated, however, that eventually he reached the right combination, and it had a tremendous positive impact. To quote Max, “I never thought I would be someone who went to therapy and took medication. But these things don’t make you weak. True strength is acknowledging your weaknesses and Being able to ask for help when you need it.” Again, having a weakness in no way makes you weak. Within those weaknesses there is strength.

“On the day that I wanted to die, I wrote a poem. This poem is not a happy one. I was stuck in a frustratingly familiar spiral, everything needed to be done in a delicate order but I have no energy. I’m hungry, tired, my hands are cramped from writing. I want it done and over with, I want to be done with my body, and life is too hard for me to deal with right now.” Zippy Spanjer, SCW ’21, our third speaker, opened up her

SEE STOMP OUT THE STIGMA,
PAGE 10

Stomp Out The Stigma

FROM PAGE 9

story with this poem. As she took us through her story she educated us on passive suicidal ideation, when a person desires death but has no specific plan to commit suicide. She talked about her struggles with this along with struggles of worthlessness, panic attacks, and a complete lack of motivation. Towards the end of her story, when she described her current state, Zippy said: “There are still days when I don’t want to get out of bed when I don’t want to brush my teeth. I told my story, not for pity but to make you all understand something. You are not alone; none of us are.”

Sometimes it is we who needs to figure out that we are not alone. Emotions have a way of shattering stability. Guilt is a powerful emotion. It is so hard to dig yourself out once you are in the pit of “everything is my fault.” Elisheva Zahatz, SCW ’21, the event’s fourth and final speaker, talked about feelings of guilt stemming

from a car accident, her parents’ divorce, and from being sexually assaulted. She spoke about blaming herself, she should’ve seen the car coming, she should have said something, or done anything, to protect herself. She spoke about the lawyers pressuring her to make the right choice regarding her parents’ divorce and having no idea what that choice was. Elisheva said when she began therapy it was hard for her to open up because she didn’t want to feel like a burden, but it was therapy that helped her come to terms with everything she went through. Elisheva highlighted an extraordinarily powerful message from her therapist, “you are not powerful enough to be responsible for everything you feel guilty for.” She highlighted that a singular person cannot control everything that happens in life. There are too many unknowns. But one thing everyone should know is that people are, and always will be, here for you.

“The bravery and courage displayed by the speakers worked to tackle such a sensitive topic, especially in this university. The

event was incredible and everyone truly gave a voice to many others out there.”
- Josh Segal (YC ’15)

“The event was powerful and inspiring. It’s incredible how brave all of the speakers were. As someone who suffers from anxiety, I know how hard it can be to publicly acknowledge it. Kol HaKavod!”
- Zachary Greenberg (SSSB ’21)

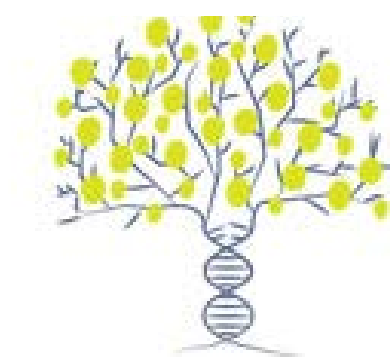
“I just want to say that I related to so many of the things which were described without even knowing I felt these certain ways. I guess that just hearing it out in the open really opens one’s mind to accepting that it’s not so uncommon.”
- Jonathan Berger (YC ’14)

“Stomp Out the Stigma is arguably one of the most important YU events of the year. The jar filled with notes from the audience I got after I spoke one year sits on my bookshelf and I go back to read the notes often. It is important to see first hand how important and impactful this event is.”
- Yael Nissel (SCW ’20)

Even though mental illness is an “invisible illness,” it does not mean suffering has to be invisible. A person does not need to suffer alone. People not only deserve to feel validated but have a right to it. Needing help in no way makes anyone a burden. Everyone is loved and valued and people will always be there for support.

“Only as a community can we validate, strengthen each other and grow together”
- Rabbi Ari Berman, YU President

If you ever need help, do not hesitate to call the following numbers.
Counseling Center: (646) 592-4210, (646) 592-4200
National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255



JScreen
Genetic testing just got easy

Jscreen: Genetic Testing Just Got Easy

BY LEIA RUBINSTEIN

The annual JScreen Genetic Carrier Screening at Stern College looked a little different this year. Despite the pandemic, JScreen was determined to hold a drive at Stern, and this was accomplished by creating a virtual screening event. Participants were encouraged to order genetic testing kits to their house or dorm room and join others via Zoom while they performed the test. A special thank you is due all the student councils from YC and Stern for their generous donations that

allowed the cost of the kits to be reduced to \$54, making it much more affordable for YU students.

JScreen is a genetic screening and education program, in association with Emory University, that offers comprehensive, at-home saliva tests. JScreen’s goal is providing every individual with the necessary knowledge to determine the risk of passing on genetic diseases to their children. JScreen tests for more than 200 genetic diseases, including those that are commonly found within the Jewish population (Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Mizrahi) and may be absent from other standard

genetic tests. Someone with a recessive gene for a given condition would likely not exhibit signs of being a carrier for that condition, but the person is still at risk of passing it on to his/her offspring if his/her partner is also a carrier. JScreen provides the opportunity for couples to know ahead of time if they are “at risk,” enabling them to take the proper steps toward having healthy children.

JScreen makes it easy to get genetic testing from the comfort of your home. All you have to do is request a kit online through the JScreen website, and a saliva collection kit will be sent to you.

(JScreen explains exactly what to do in this short video.) Upon sending back your completed kit, you will receive your results and get a chance to speak with a genetic counselor to discuss how to proceed. By giving a spit, you’ll be better prepared to have children in a smart and safe way.



Daf Yomi At Beren: Freedom On The Job And The Treatment Of Essential Workers

BY SHAYNA
HERSZAGE, MANAGING
EDITOR

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, essential workers, such as those working in food services, have been placed in positions of significant risk due to frequent exposure. As we hustle about our daily lives with masks on and social distancing precautions taken, it is easy to forget to be considerate of essential workers.

This disregard for essential workers exacerbates the vulnerability of people in such positions. In order to maintain a living, they must often work long hours and have exposure to many people throughout the day, all the while receiving lower pay than people working in similarly high-risk fields such as healthcare. These factors, combined with what is often suboptimal treatment on the part of patrons, place essential workers in the food industry at risk.

The Talmud addresses the importance of kindness toward workers in several tractates. One

of these points is raised in a recent page in the Daf Yomi (daily Talmud study) cycle, Pesachim 108a, which states:

“A dilemma was raised before the Sages: What is the halakha with regard to a waiter? Is a waiter obligated to recline? The Gemara answers: Come and hear a solution, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A waiter who ate an olive-bulk of matza while reclining has fulfilled his obligation. The Gema-

... serves as a reminder of the humanity of food service workers and other people who are often forgotten and ignored.

ra infers: If he ate matza while reclining, yes, he has fulfilled his obligation; if he was not reclining, no, he has not fulfilled the obligation. Learn from this that a waiter requires reclining. The Gemara concludes: Indeed, learn from it that this is the case.” (translation by Sefaria)

This source states that, during a Passover seder meal, a waiter is required to recline while eating just as someone who is not working is required to recline.

While this source primarily serves to answer a question about Jewish practices during Passover, it also serves as a reminder of the humanity of food service workers and other people who are often forgotten and ignored. While we are celebrating our freedom, we must also note that others around us, even those working at that moment, are free as well. Similarly, even when we are not “free” of stress during times such as the current

pandemic, we must also take into account that those around us are at risk and under stress as well.

On February 12, New York City resumed indoor dining, with social distancing restrictions in place, after a month of indoor dining being banned due to COVID-19. Many have taken this opportunity to return to restaurants or to the Yeshiva University cafeterias once again. However, it is important to keep not only the wellbeing of our socially-dis-

tanced peers in mind, but also to keep in mind the wellbeing of food service workers. For example, if a waiter is approaching a table, customers should place their masks on their faces to prevent unnecessary risk of virus exposure. These small gestures help to make such spaces safer for everyone involved. Additionally, customers must remember to be polite to those who are working, even if they are frustrated with new COVID-conscious changes in place. Taking measures to ensure the wellbeing of essential workers and to treat them with proper kindness is the least we all can do as we adjust to the many changes we are experiencing in the world around us.



Forgotten Female Scientists: “Miss” Maud L. Menten, B.a., M.b., M.d., Ph.d.

BY SARA VERSCHLEISSER,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
EDITOR

Every student who has taken biochemistry knows the Michaelis-Menten equation, but not many bother to learn about the researchers it is named for. I myself only googled Menten because her name is often dropped from the title of the kinetic rate constant (Michaelis constant, K_m), and I guessed that probably occurred because of sexism. Dr. Maud Menten, however, was a woman whose accomplishments are so astonishing, they deserve to be shared.

As described by famous narrative science author Rebecca Skloot, Dr. Maud Menten was a woman who knew no limits. Born in 1879, she spent her life defying expectations, unapologetically enforcing her will on the male-dominated world around her. She was one of the first women to graduate from an advanced Canadian medical school, earning not just the degree necessary to practice — which in Canada is a Bachelor of Medicine (M.B.) — but also an M.D., which is effectively a Ph.D. in the study of medicine. Dr.

$$v_0 = \frac{V_{\max}[S]}{K_m + [S]}$$

Menten also got an actual Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in the study of biochemistry. She served as a medical school professor at the University of Pittsburgh and became the head of pathology at the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. She learned to speak seven languages and went on an expedition in the Arctic. Most famously, she helped develop the fundamental equations of

in a municipal hospital. Of the 40 researchers who were attracted to the lab, it was Dr. Menten who was able to work with Dr. Michaelis to find the equations which would explain the rates of enzyme activity.

Since their work, the Michaelis-Menten equation has been used to better understand biological function, and to conduct all kinds of biochemical experimentation.

...it was Dr. Menten who was able to work with Dr. Michaelis to find the equations which would explain the rates of enzyme activity.

enzyme kinetics.

When Dr. Menten completed her second medical degree, she wanted to further explore the world of research, but as a woman had limited opportunities in Canada. She therefore decided to explore research internationally and ended up in Berlin, in the laboratory of Dr. Leonor Michaelis, a German Jewish biochemist. Menten was fascinated by Dr. Michaelis’s early work on enzyme kinetics, and accepted the financial and social difficulties of traveling alone to Berlin just to work with him. Due to rampant anti-semitism in Berlin, Dr. Michaelis would have been prevented from attaining a lasting position at the University of Berlin, so he opened his own laboratory

The equation was even found to apply to ion channel conductivity. For any biochemist and most pre-health students, an understanding of their work is essential. The lack of knowledge and recognition of Dr. Menten’s life and achievements are therefore all the more saddening.

Her dedication to research lasted her entire life, until her health forced her to retire at the age of 76. Her students recalled her as persistent and hard-working, often spending 18 hours a day in the lab. She had high expectations of all scientists, whether or not they were her students. When a Nobel Laureate was mentioned in her presence, she’d reply with “What has he done since?” Her students remembered

her as a force of nature. She expected everyone to share her drive and love of research.

Despite her astounding accomplishments and expertise, Dr. Maud Menten was underappreciated during her lifetime. Notably, even in the paper written with Dr. Michaelis, Dr. Menten was denied recognition of her degrees, and was referred to only as Miss. Maud L. Menten. Dr. Menten died five years after her retirement, at the age of 81, but it was only 40 years after her death that she was inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. Dr. Menten’s achievements would still be incredibly impressive now, let alone the fact that they occurred in a world which still denied women the right to vote. At the very least, her struggles and achievements should be discussed whenever her equation is taught.

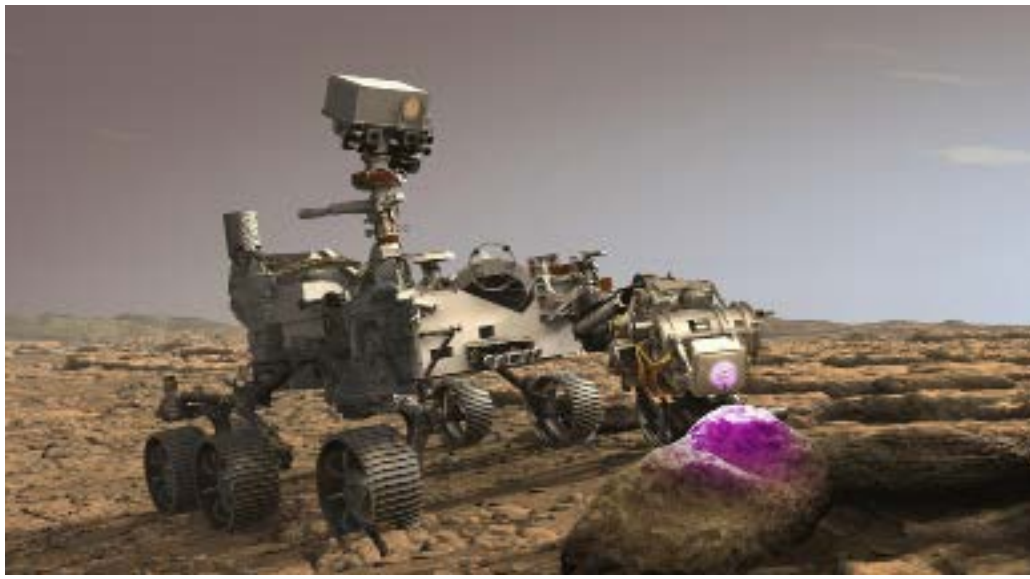
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Mars Rover Landing

BY SARA MUHARREMI,
STAFF WRITER

After a seven month journey from planet Earth, on February 18 2021 NASA's rover, "Perseverance," landed safely on Mars' surface in the Jezero Crater. NASA sent Perseverance to the red planet as a direct study in order to find out whether or not there are any signs of previous life on Mars.

The race for finding out more information about Mars is on. European and American spacecrafts have already been studying the planet from space, and now China along with the United Arab Emirates have joined the studies from space as well. What is special about Perseverance is that it didn't need to go into orbit first (as the spacecraft from the other countries did), but rather it was able to take a direct

path onto the surface at a speed of more than 12,000 miles per hour.

The entire Perseverance rover project cost NASA almost \$2.7 billion. The robot is almost the size of a car, has lasers that can analyze chemical makeups of rocks on Mars, 23 high-tech cameras, microphones, and can also use a "ground-penetrating radar to identify the chemical signatures of fossilized microbial life that may have thrived on Mars when it was a planet full of flowing water."

There is a lot of hope for Perseverance. The remarkable machine will be responsible for looking for any signs of habitability. We know that there have been a couple of wet and previously potentially habitable areas so the rover will try to identify any environments that could've been capable of supporting microbial life. It also has the tools to be looking for these habitable signs

within rocks that are known to preserve such signs. According to Dr. Williford, "We're looking for lifelike shapes, and lifelike compositions. Chemical compositions - so the elements, the minerals, the molecules, the organic molecules that we know are associated with life - we're looking for all of those things occurring together."

Perseverance will hopefully be able to collect samples so it can be brought back to Earth for further analysis. The rover will seal the rock samples into tubes and release them onto Mars' surface. Then a rover from the European Space Agency will pick up the sample-containing tubes to a small rocket which will then be transferred to another spacecraft that will take them back to Earth for studying. This however isn't projected to occur until roughly 2030.

Perseverance, the rover ro-

bot, has a long and lonely mission to accomplish on Mars. We don't know too much about our red planet neighbor, but this spacecraft will hopefully change that. Perseverance has even already sent its first audio recording from the planet. No, unfortunately we cannot hear any aliens, but you do hear the gentle 'whoosh' of Martian air. By the time Perseverance collects all of its data, perhaps it'll find that humans can live on Mars and the Perseverance rover can tour us around the Jezero Crater one day.

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Save The Elephants

BY SARAH BRILL, SCIENCE &
TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

In Hindu cosmology, there is a beautiful concept about the origins of the Earth. Before humans came and infested the world, elephants roamed around, paving roads and canyons, acting as the keepers of the Earth. They held the most wisdom, and today we still recognize that elephants are some of the smartest creatures on this planet.

Elephants play a vital role in our ecosystem. They trample the massive grasslands so that small creatures can make their way through the maze of grass and weeds towards water sources. Not only that, but elephants dig water holes when the rainfall is low, allowing both them and

smaller creatures to access water. For a creature so wise, beautiful, and significant to our ecosystem, it is painful to say that they are on the brink of extinction.

According to World Elephant Day Elephant, the number of elephants "have dropped by 62% over the last decade, and they could be mostly extinct by the end of the next decade." This massive decline is due to the ivory industry. Ivory trade, while being illegal, still earns a high profit on the Chinese market. Even with this illegal trade, there are still some places around the world where the ivory trade is legal.

The United States, for example, has significantly limited the entrance of ivory in this country. However, there has not been a complete ban on the trading and selling of this product.

The reality remains; an estimated 100 elephants are killed each day by poachers looking to make a profit from elephant skin and body parts.

The good news is that it is not too late, and there is hope for these ancient creatures. The solution is to implement tight regulations regarding the trade and selling of ivory. Just as countries have tight regulations around murder and crimes, there also needs to be as tight of a regulation around the selling and trading of these elephant products. These ancient creatures deserve a place on our planet. They should not suffer at the hands of humans.

There needs to be regulations and laws in place, or we risk the survival of these creatures.

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Livio Edge Hearing Aid

BY ZIPPY SPANJER

You've heard of Siri and Alexa. You might have a FitBit or an Apple Watch. Meet the new-comer in artificial personal assistants, now with added disability mitigation: the Livio Edge AI hearing aid.

The basic purpose of a hearing aid is to magnify sound for individuals who have some degree of hearing loss but also some degree of residual hearing. According to the National Institutes of Health, one in eight Americans over age 12 has some hearing loss in at least one ear. Hearing-assist devices have existed for over four hundred years, dating back to ear trumpets in the 1600s. Electronic hearing aids have been around since the 1900s.

Now, Starkey, Inc. has come up with a breakthrough technology in hearing assistance: the Livio Edge AI hearing aid. It has all the sound-amplifying capabilities of a basic hearing aid, plus some novel

AI features. It has rechargeable batteries and can be calibrated to muffle background noise, which is a huge challenge for hearing aid users. Its built-in AI system can analyze surrounding sounds to determine the best volume and processing mode, such as boosting speech sounds from people wearing masks.

It can also connect to a cellular phone via

It has all the sound-amplifying capabilities of a basic hearing aid, plus some novel AI features.

bluetooth, where it can be used for talking on the phone, streaming music, and more. For those who download Starkey's Thrive Hearing Control app (available through the Apple App Store and Google Play), there are even more options. A user can use their phone to find lost hearing aids or use their hearing aids to find a lost phone. The app has tech support for those who want to make the most of

their hearing aid usage, as well as a health tracker, reminder list, and translate and transcribe options. That is, the phone can translate or transcribe sounds heard by the Livio Edge AI hearing aid. The app also has a fall detection system, which is useful because 25-50% of senior citizens have hearing loss.

As can be expected, this technology does not come cheap. The Livio

Edge AI hearing aid costs \$3,500 without insurance, but payment plans are available and it may be covered by some insurance plans. For comparison, a basic hearing aid costs between \$500-\$1,000. This is obviously a huge expense, but the hearing aid is a daily-use device that improves quality of life and can last for many years.

Disability assistance technology is growing in leaps and

bounds. While other multi-feature hearing aids exist, the Livio Edge AI hearing aid is the first to combine hearing assistance with artificial intelligence. Starkey, Inc.'s contribution to the assistive technology world will help improve the lives of thousands.

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Mishenichnas Purim Marbim B' Cavities

BY SARA KNOLL

Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated the holiday of Purim; a time of joy and happiness for the Jewish people. On Purim, we read the Megillat Esther (scroll of Esther), give charity to the poor, have a religiously obligated meal, and give and receive mishloach manot (gifts of food). According to our tradition, one needs to give at least two foods different to one person in order to fulfill the obligation. While healthy foods could be given in order to fulfill this commandment, many times this commandment involves the giving and receiving of lots of candy and other sweets.

While candy, such as lollipops, chocolates, taffies, cookies and cakes are delicious treats to eat, eating too many of these sugary sweets can lead to the formation of tooth cavities. According to Mayo Clinic, a cavity, also known as tooth decay or caries, can be caused by a host of different factors that lead to the damage of tooth enamel, which creates tiny holes in the tooth. Some of these factors include the presence of oral bacteria that shouldn't be present in the mouth, eating and drinking sugary foods and drinks, or improper oral hygiene and tooth brushing. Foods, like candy, cakes

and cookies, are sugary and chewy and tend to stick to teeth for an extended period of time which can lead to more severe dental caries.

If a person doesn't visit their dentist every six months, and brush and floss properly, cavities can go unnoticed for months. This can lead to severe damage in the deeper levels of the tooth, which can lead to tooth pain, infection and total tooth loss. Some symptoms of cavity presence include toothache without a cause, pain upon occlusion (blockage of blood vessels) varying levels of pain when eating or drinking a sweet, hot or cold beverage, visible holes in a tooth, and black, white or brown staining on tooth surfaces.

While many people get cavities, there are certain risk factors that could increase the chances of developing a cavity. One of these factors is that there are certain foods and beverages that will cause greater tooth decay because they are not washed away by saliva as easily as other foods. Some of these foods include milk, ice cream, cake and other sugary substances.

Another risk factor is the location on the tooth where the caries are located. Dental caries happen most often in the molars and premolars in the back of a

person's mouth. This is due to the fact that these teeth have many grooves and pits where food particles can accumulate, and because they are found in the back of the mouth, it may be difficult to access and remove the caries-causing agents. A protective coating called a sealant, can be applied to the occlusal and chewing surfaces of the posterior teeth. Like its name suggests, dental sealants seal the grooves and pits in molar and premolar teeth where caries causing food particles likely remain. This allows the tooth's enamel to be protected from plaque buildup and decay. According to the

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), all school-age children (who also happen to be the ones mainly eating the sugary sweets from the mishloach manot) are recommended to get sealants to help prevent decay. It is better to prevent decay in childhood to limit the effect on the future dental landscape.

One more factor is improper oral hygiene. It is imperative that each person, adult and child, brush twice a day, and brush again after consuming sugary snacks. The best kinds of toothpaste contain the chemical fluoride which is a naturally occurring mineral that can be found in the Earth's crust.

According to Colgate, fluoride is a protective agent against bacteria that cause the demineralization and thereby weakening of tooth enamel. Therefore, drinking water that contains fluoride and using fluoride toothpaste can help protect against the buildup of dental caries.

While one should typically try to stay away from consuming too many sugar containing foods, moderation is key. As long as you brush your teeth after consuming these sugary sweets and see your dentists for checkups, you can enjoy the holiday without worrying too much about your oral health.

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Spotify Is About To Know Way More About You Than You Think

Amalya Teitelbaum,
Business Editor & Social
Media Manager

According to the Statista Research Department: "As of the third quarter of 2020, Spotify had 144 million premium subscribers worldwide, up from 113 million in the corresponding quarter of 2019. Spotify's subscriber base has increased dramatically in the last few years and has more than doubled since early 2017." Basically, everyone and their goldfish's babysitter uses Spotify. When people are walking down the street, sitting on the subway, or driving in the car, they are unanimously united by the buds in their ears.

It is already a pretty fair guess that Spotify knows a lot about you. This is seen just by look-

ing at any Spotify user's main screen and seeing five customized daily mix playlists, a "Discover Weekly" playlist, and many recommended playlists along with so much more. Spotify knows listeners' names, billing information, where they live, their age, what music they like, the other shows they enjoy, who they're friends with on Spotify, what devices they use, and plenty of other data. While this is less than the knowledge Google or Facebook has about you, it is still very sufficient. However, this knowledge is about to expand exponentially.

Lydia Polgreem, Spotify's managing director, stated in an interview, "Our goal is to get people into the habit of listening to content on Spotify that's not music." Spotify is now working to use "Daily Drive," Spotify's recom-

mendation service, to promote podcasts using their algorithm. This algorithm will be used to filter what you do and don't like based on your previous listening habits and history. This is even more personal than music recommendations since those are just based on the artists you listen to. Spotify can then use your podcast history to estimate what fields you are interested in and even your job.

But that is not all that Spotify is doing. Spotify wants to dominate the podcast network. In November 2020 Spotify bought Megaphone, a podcast hosting company that also sells and inserts ads for millions of dollars. Back in January 2020, Spotify said that it would begin inserting ads into its shows in real-time based on what it knows about its users, like

where they're located, what type of device they use, and their age, similarly to how the broader web operates. Spotify already automates dynamic ad insertion on the music side of its business, but it is now expanding and improving that tech for podcasts. This new technology is called Streaming Ad Insertion (SAI). Because Spotify bought Megaphone, SAI will now be offered to shows outside of Spotify's network, for a price of course. In order for shows to reach Spotify's millions of subscribers, they will have to pay Spotify to do so, therefore increasing Spotify's domination over the podcast market. If this continues, who knows how many more subscribers Spotify will gain.

SSSB Club Profiles: YU Real Estate Club

By Nathan Hakakian
on behalf of the
YU Observer

Each month, the YU Observer aims to highlight one SSSB club available to the YU undergraduate community. For the March issue, the YU Observer is highlighting "YU Real Estate Club."

Club Name: YU Real Estate Club

Heads: Aryeh Halpert, Zach Lyons, Josh Hirt, Daniel Rosenberg

Relevant Campus(es): Wilf, Beren

What is your club's mission statement? To help students find opportunities to excel in CRE.

Why is this club important? It helps people find jobs and teach them how to succeed at said jobs.

What was your pull to get involved in/start the club?: I am passionate about CRE.

What are some things your club has done in the past? Networking events with professionals, speakers from assorted backgrounds.

What are some plans you have for this semester/future semesters? More networking events, mock interviews etc.

With COVID, how is your club adjusting? All Zoom events.

What is your advice to someone looking to get involved on campus? Reach out, people want to hear from you.

Anything else to say about your club? Our job is to help you, if you have suggestions, let us know.

Are you a YU undergraduate club head interested in seeing your club featured in a future edition? Email us

at theyuobserver@gmail.com with your club name and the names of the club heads!



BMPL: Biting Off More Than We Can Chew?

By Jake Shekter,
Staff Writer

If you're like most of us, your shopping habits have changed drastically over the last year. Whether it was a result of brick-and-mortar retail shutting down or just a means of coping with monotonous quarantine, the shift towards online retail and e-commerce has taken an exponential leap. As Fintech companies such as Square (NYSE:SQ), PayPal (NASDAQ:PYPL), WePay, Stripe, and many others have been soaring since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many online Fintech businesses are providing increasingly enticing deals as a way to establish their competitive advantage.

A recent service called "buy now, pay later" (BNPL) has been growing in reputation and gaining traction in the e-commerce market. BNPL products are being used as an alternative to credit cards, fueled partially by millennials who don't like taking on new cards, and have exploded in popularity throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Brought to the spotlight by companies such as Klarna, a Swedish start-up, and Affirm, BNPL services allow customers to spread out the cost of their purchases over

a period of (often) interest-free installments. Affirm Holdings Inc (NASDAQ:AFRM), a BNPL firm based in San Francisco that had their IPO on January 13, enables shoppers to split their purchases with terms that range between 6 weeks and 4 years and with interest rates of 0 to 30%. With other companies such as Afterpay Ltd (ASX:APT.AX) and PayPal Holdings Inc joining the BNPL space, customers are finding it increasingly easier to find their dream payment deal. But with all this payment structure freedom, have we bitten off more than we can chew?

Consumer groups and regulators around the world have warned that customers, especially younger online-shoppers, could be lured into a debt trap. The U.K consumer and product review company "Which?" believes BNPL products can encourage people to spend more than they can afford, being blinded by great payment plans and flexibility. Just over a month ago, Britain announced they would be cracking down on the (British) \$3.7 billion BNPL industry, with the U.K Treasury stating that BNPL firms would fall under the supervision of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This announcement reconfirms regulators' opinions that certain Fintech companies should

be treated more like banks, and less like online payment facilitators.

According to a study by Credit Karma, "nearly 40% of U.S. consumers who used BNPL have missed more than one payment, and 72% of those saw their credit score decline." The resulting lower credit score can warn lenders of a higher risk, making borrowing more difficult. This can have a negative cascading effect on trying to secure a mortgage, applying for a credit card, setting up utility accounts, and even finding housing as landlords often conduct credit score checks before renting. "When you make something so convenient, people may not be really thinking, 'Do I have the budget? Can I afford this payment?' You get more of that impulse-shopping behavior that leads to realizing they may not be able to make the payment," said Gannesh Bharadhwaj, general manager for credit cards at Credit Karma.

This regulatory attack on BNPL firms has pushed several Fintech services to defend themselves and offer pre-emptive plans to reduce customer risk. Australia's Afterpay has established precautionary measures, such as barring customers from using their services after missing a payment. The company

says that 95% of its global transactions are paid on time and that late fees count for less than 14% of the company's total income. As of now, officials are unclear how the push for BNPL regulation will affect the United States BNPL industry. This lack of clarity results from numerous factors; these companies don't have bank charters, some don't charge interest, and ultimately because certain e-commerce laws vary per state.

The expanding world of buy now, pay later firmly demonstrates how far retail sellers will go to facilitate a comfortable payment structure for their customers, even if that creates potential for consumer debt, damaged credit scores, late charges, and even bank overdraft fees costing more than the deferred payments themselves. With the increased financial freedom BNPL firms provide, we must also keep in mind the importance of reading the fine print and maintaining responsible spending habits to ensure we aren't causing our wallets and financial reputations unnecessary harm.



Nu, what are you waiting for?

To join us, contact theyuobserver@gmail.com



Interview with Dean Pine

By Aliza Leichter on behalf of the YU Observer

Debra Pine is the assistant administrative dean of Sy Syms School of Business as well as an accomplished Wall Street professional. The YU Observer had the honor and opportunity to interview Dean Pine about her illustrious career, initiatives at YU, and her advice for current students.

YU Observer: What was your background before you came to YU, and what led you to YU?
Dean Pine: I have an MBA in Finance from NYU and I worked on and around Wall Street for over 25 years in a variety of roles including bond trader, analytics developer, QA manager, project manager and COO of a front office technology department. In addition to gaining skills and experiences during those years, I had a front row seat for some significant historic events. I was at my desk in the World Financial Center across the street from the World Trade Center when the first plane hit it on 9/11/2001 and I worked at Lehman Brothers during their bankruptcy in 2008. When I left Barclays and came to YU in 2013, I did so with the goal of giving back to and helping the next generation of my community. This was a major career and lifestyle decision and one that I find very fulfilling.

O: What led you to become interested in advising students?

P: One of my favorite responsibilities during my time at Lehman Brothers was coordinating the summer internship program for my department. In that role, I screened resumes, interviewed and selected college juniors for the program, augmented and customized the firmwide summer program for our department and then participated in the decision process for extending full time offers. I truly loved working with and mentoring the college students. When I was looking for the next chapter of my career, coming to YU and working with business students seemed like a natural fit. When I started at YU, my role was split between Sy Syms Advising, the Career Center and Admissions. This broad early involvement helped me build close relationships with those teams at that time.

O: As Administrative Dean of Sy Syms School of Business, what are some initiatives that you have helped create?

P: That's a tough one to answer for a couple of reasons. Firstly, many people are involved in the important decisions that are made and much of what I do is behind the scenes. One of the initiatives that I pushed forward was the use of electronic waiting lists for

registration. When I started at YU, the waiting list process was completely manual. Students had to fill out forms requesting overalls and those forms were reviewed and processed manually. I convinced my colleagues to "try out" the Banner waiting list system and we've never looked back. This past spring, we piloted a block schedule registration process for incoming Sy Syms students to ease the stress surrounding first semester registration and ensure that every incoming Syms student is taking the right courses. Though there was some hesitation about it, in the end, it went smoothly and was well received.

O: What problems are you seeing with the online program, and what advice can you give to students on how to deal with virtual learning?

P: At first, it was hard to separate the problems of online learning from the problems of transitioning to any new method of instruction as quickly as we did. Now, with the perspective of these many months, I see the absence of informal contact as one of the most difficult challenges. Speaking personally, I miss the informal chats with students in the hall, outside of my office and between classes. My advice to students is to seek out opportunities to connect with other students, professors, advisors and deans! Two of my students from last spring asked

me to have "lunch" with them over Zoom. It was great to catch up and chat without an agenda. It was almost normal. OK, it wasn't normal, but it was still a great way to connect.

O: What questions do you wish students would ask you about your experiences that you feel they would benefit from?

P: I love talking to students about major selection and career choices. I believe that figuring out what plays to your strengths and what energizes you and finding a career path that involves the intersection of those attributes is ideal. My prior work experience includes roles which would be suited for Finance, Business Analytics and Strategy & Entrepreneurship majors, so I'm always happy to chat about all of that. Additionally, I spent many years of my career navigating the challenges of being an Orthodox Jew in the workplace and juggling parenting and career responsibilities and can speak about those topics as well.

O: What advice can you give to students who are entering the workforce during COVID?

P: My advice during COVID is not different than it would be during normal times. Use your connections. Be focused but be flexible. Be persistent, but not annoying. Don't procrastinate.



iZombie's Role in the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Conspiracy Theory

By Rachel Gilinski, Social Media Manager

iZombie Spoilers Ahead!

"Life imitates art." The phrase is simple and commonly used, a shorthand way to allude to humanity's malleability and the great influence art and culture have had on societal values. I've been rewatching the show "iZombie" recently, in the midst of a modern pandemic, and in viewing it, the phrase takes on a new meaning. Life may imitate art in terms of, say, cultural values, but for art to predict an entire pandemic, not to mention the rising political and social tensions that this past year has both brought to light and exacerbated, feels unprecedented.

I don't mean to imply there's currently a zombie apocalypse going on, of course. But the parallels between the show and reality are certainly unnerving.

In one of the earliest scenes in the show's first episode, main character Liv Moore's boss Ravi Chakrabarti finds out she's a zombie. He's not afraid, or even all that surprised. Instead, he tells her he's suspected as much for weeks, and that he's feared the spread of a virus like this one — the "zombie virus," he calls it — for even longer. "The most urgent issue facing humanity," according to him? A plague. (For any conspiracy theorists reading, I'll add that he actually specifies manmade plague, as a form of biological warfare.) He argued that we weren't prepared for a pandemic. Watching the conversation unfold on-screen while in real life in the middle of

a pandemic we were thoroughly unprepared for would have been almost comedic if it weren't so painful.

Throughout the rest of the first season and into the second one, Ravi and Liv are preoccupied with finding a cure for the zombie virus. For as long as she's a zombie, she'll never be able to live a normal life or have a normal relationship with any of her loved ones. In the middle of a pandemic, when most of us have to be careful in all our interactions and where relationships have evolved to include the least physical contact possible, that hit hard. In the show, Ravi then manages to develop a cure for the zombie virus: when injected, the zombie in question becomes human again. Finally. You had the zombie virus, you were a zombie and couldn't live a normal life, but now that's all over. Anyone with COVID-19 antibodies knows how freeing it is; nobody wants to get the virus itself, but the virus itself serves as its own "cure," so to speak, and you can live a relatively more normal life now. The relief is only temporary, though. Reminiscent of COVID-19 antibodies, which can only protect you for so long, the zombie cure only worked temporarily, with the patients eventually reverting to zombieism.

It isn't until the show's third season, though, that the parallels to reality become jarring. Season three begins with the secret of zombies' existence on the verge of coming out. Only conspiracy theorists believe zombies are real at this point, but the truth is slowly being revealed. At one point, a tabloid newspaper runs a story on zombies, and although it's all true, most people dismiss it as nothing

more than fake news. Nowadays, in a social environment where the lines between "real news" and "fake news" are prone to blurring, where anything you don't like is immediately dismissed as "fake news," this minor plot point felt especially apt.

Another plot point, this one more significant than the former, is the outbreak of a virus. It's a new strain of the flu, originating somewhere outside the U.S. and making its way in on a packed airplane. "Just a flu," it seems, but officials and scientists immediately catch on to its gravity, with one scientist calling the virus deadly and contagious, likely to fill up the city's hospitals quickly and leave sick people on the streets. (I doubt I have to draw the parallel here.) Officials and law enforcement bicker and debate in an attempt to figure out who's behind this flu outbreak. Fingers are pointed, tensions run high, trust dwindles. Everybody is suspicious the flu was brought over purposely, and everybody blames a different person. I can't help but think of the responses to the coronavirus, and how many people still look for somebody to blame. From the very beginning, fingers were pointed as to whose fault the virus' existence is, and even now, politicians on all sides of the political spectrum are blaming others and being blamed for COVID's worsening effects. Right up until the city-wide vaccine mandate, and later, when zombies are more widespread and a "quarantine zone" is defined, this entire subplot feels like a direct predictor for the past year.

Lastly is the connection I first made between the show and reality. In June 2020, Seattle became

a self-declared autonomous zone. Barriers were set up, barricades were constructed; Seattle, or the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, as it was called, branded itself as no longer a part of the United States. It was governed internally, and only few outsiders were permitted entrance. In iZombie, similarly, the city becomes an autonomous zone, with a private military seizing control, walls being constructed around the city's borders, and designated areas where only specific officials could enter. No one was allowed in or out without permission and tensions were high. The plot is too close to reality for comfort — and where, you may ask, is iZombie set; where has it been set ever since its release in 2015? Nowhere else but the fair city of Seattle, Washington.

To conclude, I'd like to clarify that I'm not theorizing that iZombie or The CW caused COVID-19; I'm not claiming they engineered it so as to parallel the show's own plot points. If I would claim as such, I wouldn't argue that they did so in order to gain viewers en masse out of the shock value and to boost profits — I'd likely get sued for defamation if I tried arguing something like that. But, of course, I'm not not saying that. Reading this much into a show like iZombie may be pathetic, but I'd argue it certainly is prophetic, at least regarding the pandemic. (...Sorry, I felt poetic.)

Art and Culture



Curtain Call: My Last Solo Concert

By Yosef Rosenfield,
Features Editor

On Sunday, May 2 at 3 p.m. EDT, I will livestream via Zoom my last solo concert as a singer-songwriter. Following this performance and my graduation from YU, I will no longer be active as a solo writer and musician except on Patreon, releasing all songs, covers, podcasts and other music-related content to my newly launched artist page. The upcoming show is titled “Curtain Call,” as it marks the end of a series of nine YU musical performances in which I participated; this goes back nearly four years to May 14, 2017, when I played at Schottenstein Theatre with my family rock band, The Dorons, before I was even a student at YU. I then spent three semesters as the lead vocalist of the YU Rock Ensemble — founded in 2014 by my brother when he was a Yeshiva College music

major — before going solo to perform a Maroon 5 and Panic! At The Disco tribute concert in September 2019. As a junior, I performed my own songs for the very first time at my January 2020 “This Is Satire” concert — followed by my senior recital in December, which once again featured my band, The Dorons. I continued performing original songs for my February “Road to Recovery” show, and I now look ahead to my final performance on May 2.

The “Curtain Call” setlist in May will consist of original songs only, at least eight of which I have never played live. Among these are “Spare Me” — which will be featured on The Dorons’ upcoming debut album (“The Doronic Verses”) — and “Jaded,” a song that confronts my love-hate relationship with music. Furthermore, “The Painful Sound of Your Voice” speaks

about my lingering desire to maintain friendships long after they’ve faded. Although I am most excited to perform my newer material, I also look forward to playing a few older songs of mine from earlier concerts. (Follow this link to view a sneak peek at the setlist for my upcoming show, along with a complete list of the 100+ songs that I will have performed at my nine total YU concerts.) “Good Enough for You,” for example, is a song that still resonates with me a year and a half after writing it, because it reflects our natural tendencies to try to impress or compare ourselves to others — even when doing so is unwarranted and/or unhealthy.

I expect this final show to be pretty bittersweet for me. As a senior music major, I’ve put in years of theory, practice, writing and performance toward something that is so much more than

an area of study. Music has been my lifeline; it has pulled me through some of the most depressing periods of adolescence, brought me countless moments of joy and provided me with endless opportunities for creative expression. While I recognize that my upcoming concert likely represents my last hurrah as a musical performer, I am comforted by the fact that Patreon has offered me an outlet to share my endless passion for music. I would love to hear your feedback from my livestreamed concert on May 2 at 3 p.m. EDT, so be sure to check out my Patreon page and let me know what you think of my new content. I’ll see you on the other side...

Concert Zoom link: <https://yeshiva-university.zoom.us/j/97357025980>

It Was Wanda All Along: WandaVision Review

By Sarah Brill,
Science & Technology Editor

WandaVision Spoilers Ahead!

On January 15, 2021, Disney+ released the show-stopping mini-series “WandaVision”. Instantaneously, “WandaVision” captured the hearts of Marvel fans across the globe integrating a plot line consistent with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). This show not only provided viewers with intrigue, but it left each episode on a cliffhanger so encapsulating that it was impossible not to return the following week.

The show follows two Avengers, Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olson), a superhuman who can shape reality and use her powers to control objects and people, and Vision (Paul Bettany), a synthezoid with incredible knowledge and powers formed

from the mind stone. In the show, these Avengers are living idealized suburban lives in the fictional New Jersey town of Westview which, quite unfortunately, turns out to be a facade. As the show progresses, we see the town of Westview move quickly through time starting in the 1950s and moving through the decades. Not only that, but the audience soon learns that all the citizens of Westview are trapped inside of this reality, created by Wanda, broadcasted on television.

Directly outside of Wanda’s reality in suburban New Jersey, SWORD agents attempt to solve the happenings inside of the town by recruiting help from Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris), who had been stuck in Wanda’s reality for many days, Agent Jimmy Woo (Randall Park) and Dr. Darcy Lewis (Kat Dennings).

Monica serves as Wanda’s advocate throughout the series, championing her innocence and calling out SWORD’s Director Tyler Hayward’s (Josh Stamboord) lies about the Avenger. Unfortunately, she, Woo and Lewis, are expelled from SWORD headquarters after questioning the Director’s motives.

Soon into the series, the viewer is introduced to Agnes (Kathryn Hahn), a nosy neighbor who reveals herself in later episodes as the infamous witch Agatha Harkness. After her reveal as the witch, Agatha leads Wanda to the conclusion that she is indeed

the Scarlet Witch and not some super-powered human as once thought.

This show is packed with tragedy, loss, comedy, action, and everything else a Marvel fan could ask for. Each episode progressed in a way that kept that viewer trapped and begging for more. The finale of the series aired on Friday March 5, 2021 concluding with an epic battle between the now Scarlet Witch and Agatha Harkness. The show ended with a cliffhanger end-credit scene setting up another Marvel wonder.



Art and Culture

Female Power As Seen in Avatar the Last Airbender

By Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

Avatar the Last Airbender (ATLA) aired in 2005 on Nickelodeon, and became an instant hit for the children of our generation. The show follows a young boy named Aang (Zachary Eisen) on his journey to master the art of bending all four elements; water, earth, fire, and air. The story not only tackles themes such as bravery, heart, and hope, but it also embodies the female power, and it does so in an elegant way.

Katara (Mae Whitman), for example, has grown up in the Southern Water Tribe with her bordering-on-sexist brother Sokka (Jack De Sena). We view Sokka initially as a sexist mansplainer. But, as the story progresses, we see him grow into a compassionate and caring man not only towards his sister but also for his friends. He develops into the kind of man that respects women and never underestimates their power.

Toph (Michaela Jill Murphy) is an embodiment of a female warrior. She shows power unlike any other male character in the show, and she does it with ease in con-

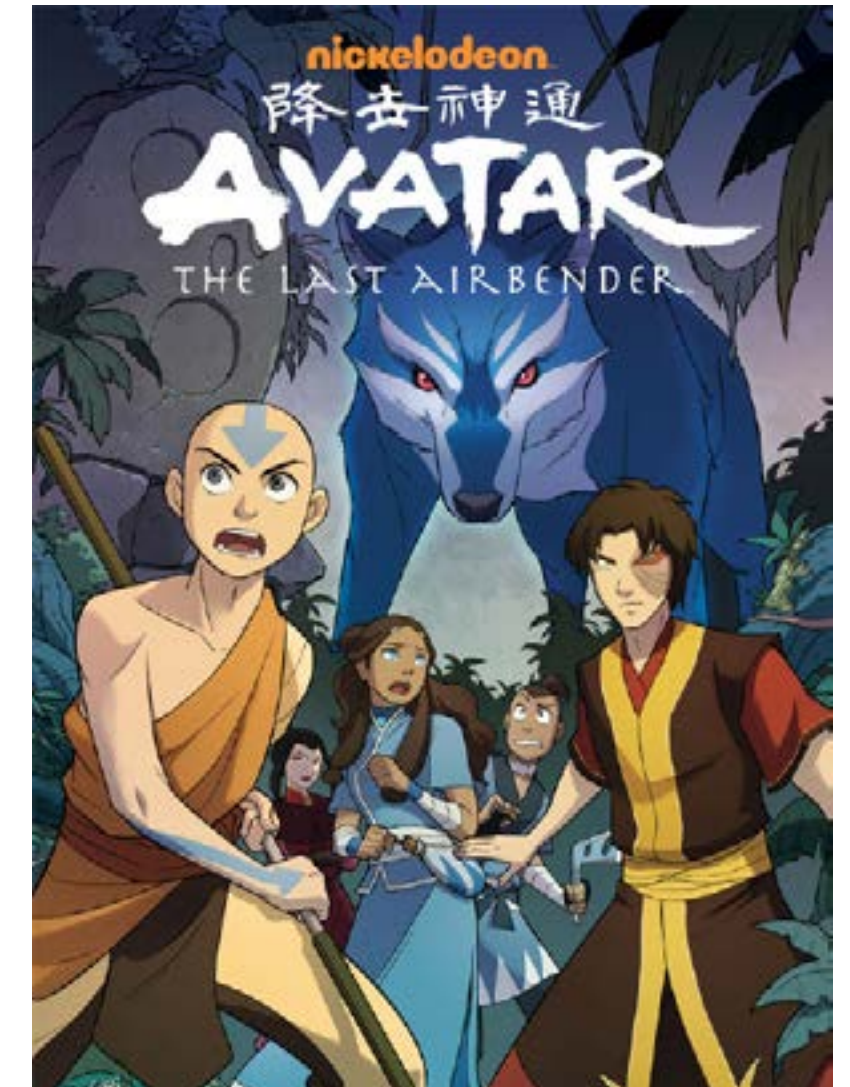
fidence. When Toph is captured, we see her use bending never seen before, metal bending, to escape from a metal prison. While she may seem closed to criticism, she takes any critiques she is given and applies them, making her the best earth bender in the Avatar universe. When Toph is kidnapped, the capturer states, “You might think you are the greatest earthbender, but you are nothing more than a kid.” Later on, when Toph escapes and imprisons her capturers, she states, “I am the greatest earthbender; and don’t you two dunderheads ever forget it.” She shows physical strength and she proves anyone who doubts her wrong.

Other characters such as Suki (Jennine Kwan) prove that one should be careful not to underestimate a woman. When she captured Sokka on Kyoshi Island, not only did Sokka think that men ambushed him, but he was in disbelief when he learned it was Suki. Suki, like Katara, taught Sokka that women are capable of anything. We see this again when Sokka and Zuko (Dante Basco) are arrested and taken to a fire nation prison, and it is Suki that defeats the Warden (Wayne Duvall) without breaking a sweat; followed by a

panting Zuko and Sokka.

If anything, this show depicts female characters in a light previously unseen in film or television, it is quite beautiful how the integration of the feminine power is embodied through the women in the Avatar franchise. Recently it was announced on ATLA’s

Instagram account that Avatar Studios will soon be established with the hope of releasing new content relating to the universe. I am excited to see what masterpieces they come up with; the future of Avatar is looking bright.



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