Yeshiva University Celebrates the Ordination of the Classes of 5775–5777 at its Chag HaSemikhah

Sy Syms Student Population Overtakes Yeshiva College, Beren Enrollment Down Nearly 200 Since 2013

By Avi Strauss

According to the latest data revealed by YU’s Office of Institutional Research, the Wilf Sy Syms student population has surpassed Yeshiva College’s for the first time ever, becoming the larger of the two undergraduate programs on the men’s campus. This follows a five year trend of the Sy Syms student body increasing in size. As per the report, there are 525 undergraduate men in Sy Syms and 500 in YC. The numbers in the data set indicated diverged slightly from the numbers released by the Office of Student Life for student council elections, to be held later this week. Candidates are required to collect signatures from a third of the student body they seek to represent.

The report also indicated total enrollment at the Beren campus is currently 885, down from 1,092 in 2013.

Why the Student Constitution Is Invalid

By David Rubinstein

This year's student election ballots will ask you to ratify an amendment to the constitution. As you cast your vote, keep in mind that the constitution, and as a result, any amendment to it, is invalid.

The student constitution of the Wilf Campus is invalid for three reasons.

First, we have no official record of its ratification. A constitution is valid only if it is accepted by the people it’s supposed to bind. Did a majority of the student body vote to accept the constitution? There’s no way to know.

As far as we know, it could be that some years ago, three assorted student council buffs seeking to pad their pre-law resumes and parcel out political power to their favorite rising seniors sat down in the old basement lounge of Morgenstern and concocted the document that is supposed to be binding on all male undergraduate students of Yeshiva University for all of posterity. After they saved their work as a PDF, they may have laughed about how they pulled the wool over their schoolmates’ eyes.
Defending Rav Schachter From His Defenders

By Doron Levine

Passion carries greater risk than apathy. An indifferent stoic may find himself guilty of callous insensitivity, but passivity has limited destructive potential. A riled zealot, on the other hand, if he fails to think through the implications of his ire, is a roaming hazard, not only to the objects of his wrath but to the very ideology he professes to champion. By jealously defending his views with an ardor not governed by wisdom and prudence, he does his own religion a disservice.

I’m speaking of individuals who leveled a certain sort of criticism against The Commentator for its coverage of Rav Schachter’s actions concerning Rabbi Klapper’s appearance at YU. Under the pretense of defending the honor of an outstanding talmid chacham, some eagerly excoriated The Commentator for publishing Rav Schachter’s opinion in a pair of news articles.

In so doing, these people ignored the words of Rav Schachter himself. When I approached Rav Schachter on behalf of The Commentator to inquire about his taking down a sign for Rabbi Klapper’s shiur, he agreed to be interviewed for the newspaper, willing to “speak on campus” “even stating that the criticism was unfair to me on that if you want.” The claim that The Commentator disrespected Rav Schachter by performing an action that Rav Schachter explicitly permitted is outrageous.

You cannot criticize The Commentator for quoting Rav Schachter without disputing Rav Schachter’s attendant permission to publish his statement. So unless you neglected to think through your righteous anger to its proper conclusion, your characterization of The Commentator “as disingenuous” is patently insulting to Rav Schachter than it is respectful. Does a talmid chacham need to be defended from his own opinions? Can’t he express them without his very talmidim denouncing their publication? This attempt to defend Rav Schachter is double-talk motivated by an admirable impulse to guard the Torah’s honor by defending one of its preeminent expositors against the perceived perennial scourge of journalistic brachery. But even if skirmishes between journalism and traditional authority do occasionally erupt, in this particular instance any conflict is wholly imagined.

In a speech to the Glueck Beit Midrash about this controversy, Dean Ben H. Stein of YU’s Rabbi Menachem Penner seemed to absolve all relevant parties of responsibility other than the newspaper itself. According to Rabbi Penner, Rabbi Klapper “was set up for failure” since he was probably invited to lecture on this controversy without the knowledge of the administration. If ever the rabbi had pure motivations (Rabbi Penner clarified this in a brief second speech to the Beit Midrash); and Rav Schachter, provoked by the presence of the signs on the doors to the Beit Midrash, “said nothing publicly—The Commentator did.”

I cannot emphasize enough that Rabbi Penner’s evaluation of Rav Schachter’s statement is mistaken – if telling a newspaper reporter that he may quote you does not make your statement public, I lose any grasp I had on the parameters of that classification. By erroneously claiming that Rav Schachter’s statement was not made publicly, Rabbi Penner shifted the responsibility for this controversy away from the parties directly involved and onto the shoulders of the newspaper that simply published the facts.

Rabbi Penner then urged the Beit Midrash crowd, “Let’s not talk by reading The Commentator…… Why don’t we actually talk about the issues?” This statement alone is odious. Granted, reading and conversing are two independent activities, but often what we read provides ripe material for fruitful conversation. In this case, discussions about this matter would most probably not have transpired if not for The Commentator’s coverage. So Rabbi Penner’s call to discuss these issues but avoid reading The Commentator is as counterintuitive as it is alarming.

More to the point, though, Rabbi Penner’s exhortation to “not talk by reading The Commentator” further fueled the perception of some that the newspaper was somehow the antihero of this drama. If we must play the blame game (though honestly I’d prefer to sit this round out), it seems to me that indicting only the newspaper for causing this kerfuffle is, considering the evidence, unjust and untenable. While it is true that Rav Schachter might not have offered his statement had The Commentator not approached him, it is also true that Rav Schachter would not have offered his statement had Rabbi Klapper not come to speak at YU. And it is also true that had Rabbi Schachter not approached us we would have offered his statement had Rav Schachter not offered his statement. The Commentator made the decision to publish an article about these events, but there would have been nothing to write about had the events not occurred.

This situation touches on fundamental questions about our religious leadership. Why are many Rav Schachter talmidim upset with The Commentator, and why did Rabbi Penner feel the need to address this situation at all? There seems to be a widespread perception that something bad has happened here, something problematic. But what is so concerning about our religious leaders expressing his opinion?

To the extent that theological issues are at play here, I am no theologian; and to the extent that halachic issues are at play here, I am no halachist. But it is clear even to us laymen that Rav Schachter meant what he said; he unequivocally and unabashedly expressed an opinion which, if we took it seriously, would have had practical relevance to university policy. So unless you think that what Rav Schachter said is wrong, what exactly is the problem here? Every ideological community has its boundaries, and Rav Schachter stated where he thinks ours should be. It seems incongruous to turn to our rabbineim for matters of serious halachic import but then to fall into disoriented turmoil when they offer pertinent socio-religious advice. People with respect for Rav Schachter “as an intellectual” not only would excuse his religious leader’s religious leadership should be pleased rather than bothered when his opinions become public knowledge.

One segment of Rabbi Penner’s speech touched on this matter. He asked, “Can you have alternative views and still be a part of the YU community? And can you even perhaps speak on campus if you have a different view?” He answered, “The answer has been, and remains: yes.” He qualified, “Roshei Yesiva do not insist that you agree with them. But if you ask them what they think of something, they might just answer you. If you ask them for their opinion, then you may have to deal with whatever that opinion is if that’s what you asked for.”

In apparent disagreement with Rav Schachter’s position that Rabbi Klapper should not be allowed to speak at YU, Rabbi Penner maintained that even “if you have a different view” you can still “speak on campus.” His subsequent qualification, that if you ask for a Rosh Yesiva’s opinion “then you may have to deal with whatever that opinion is if that’s what you asked for,” raises myriad questions. Does it imply that we should “deal with” Rav Schachter’s opinion in this instance, given that I asked for it? Does dealing with an opinion entail accepting and complying with its directives? Can dealing with the opinion of a Rosh Yesiva involve rejecting it? And why shouldn’t we eagerly approach our religious leaders to ask for their advice on all matters of spiritual import instead of grudgingly moving to “deal with whatever [their] opinion is” on a post facto basis?

Rabbi Penner explained that he is “often in the uncomfortable position of being the boss of the people who are the Roshei Yesiva.” His discomfort is quite understandable since our university doubles as a religious community with an ancient tradition of viewing its premier Torah scholars as authorities on matters of communal policy. So what exactly is the relationship between the authority of the administrators and the authority of the Roshei Yesiva? Does the boss of the Roshei Yesiva just serve as a point person, directing questions about YU’s religious policies to their rightful arbiters? To what degree can and should administrators use their personal assessments. People with respect for Rav Schachter’s religious leadership should be pleased rather than bothered when his opinions become public knowledge.

The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 81 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduates’ ideas, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities. The Commentator staff advocates students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.

We are united by our passion for living according to the ideas of Torah u-Maddah, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.
1 Birkat Hachama
Remember when we had that on Erev Pesach like 8 years ago? No? Okay.

2 TAC Presidential Race
No one is running for Stern’s Torah Activities Council seat (but actually). So here are our recommendations for write-in candidates: Mickey Mouse; Cabey (the guy who grills up a mean burger in the Wilf Caf); Debbie Beaudreau; Akiva Marder; Rabbi Aryeh Klapper; and Dean Chaim Nissel.

3 #NotMyProblem
Listen, President Joel, whether you like it or not, nothing tops the foreboding #PJ’sLastShabbat.

4 Recent Canvas Notifications
These dope emails consistently arrive in our inboxes every day between 6:00-6:15 PM. I went through some serious withdrawal over Pesach without this daily fix.

5 Gary Feder
Shoutout to the world’s greatest gabbai. This tazzilik always ensures that our tired and weary 8:30 Miynay Morg-ers get from Birchot HaShachar to Shema to Morning Seder safely and without any trouble.

6 Post-Pesach Bochrim
Okay, we all know how funny it is to offer them wrong directions or bad registration advice, but give these guys a break. They just got back from learning in Netiv for two and a half years.

7 Pink Flowers in Front of Rubin
Much like your expectations on your first day at YU, they’re bright and beautiful, but wither away and die within two weeks.

8 7 UP 7 Down
United Airlines Scandal
And the award for the biggest public policy disaster this year so far goes to… those guys who dragged a bleeding man off a plane! Way to go, United.

9 Starting Tachanun Again
It’s gonna be tough, but, luckily, we have Gary Feder to help us through these difficult times.

10 Construction on 185th
We’ve had this as a 7down twice already, but we’d like to propose a new theory for this absurdly long project: Right under the noses of the Roshei Yeshiva, YU is building a tunnel leading directly to Stern. You heard it here first.

11 Westboro Baptist Church
Comes to YU (except six blocks away) and chants some anti-Semitic nonsense during heavy rain, before proceeding to be forgotten about forever.

12 Fidget Spinners
Judging by the amount of Syms students using them, there’s no way that these toys are helping anyone focus in class.

13 Really Complicated Wi-Fi Passwords
It’s actually just one universal password, and here it is: jg34flaFwGWD8l6jo6kmqUat4FKk2j4

14 Huge Pile of Snow in Front of Rubin
Much like your expectations on your first day at YU, it started out kind of interesting, but quickly became a pile of gross annoyance that took forever to melt away, and, even when it did, left a sight that isn’t all that pretty.

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**No Date for Expected 16 Handles Opening**

By Nathan Feifel

Anticipation has grown in the recent past about the prospect of a 16 Handles branch opening in the Washington Heights area. The store will be the latest addition to the list of kosher eateries in Washington Heights. Currently, the closest 16 Handles to YU’s Wilf Campus is located on the Upper West Side.

According to the frozen yogurt company’s website, the new store is going to be located at 400 Audobon Avenue, NY 10033. However, when asked about the status of the upcoming store and its expected opening date, 16 Handles’ Community Manager Sean Gunner stated, “At this point, we don’t have any new information to share.”

Jack Ganchrow, a Syms junior majoring in Marketing, expressed his excitement for the new location to open. “When I heard 16 Handles was coming to the YU area, I got so excited. It will definitely be a popular spot for friends to hang out. I guess I will have to remain patient.”

Gunner added that he would reach out when new information was confirmed, but that at the moment, there is no update on the anticipated store.

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**Yeshiva College Core Updated Again with Expanded Exemptions for NAWO and EXQM**

By Avi Strauss

The Yeshiva College Core Curriculum received another update on March 29, with changes made to the Natural World (NAWO) and Experimental and Quantitative Methods (EXQM) requirements. The change was made after a YC faculty vote, and means students will be able to fulfill those requirements with a broader range of courses.

For NAWO, this means students can satisfy their requirement with either a specific NAWO course-offering or a college-level natural science course. Students will be able to fulfill their EXQM requirement in a similar fashion, either with an EXQM offering or one designated college-level course in experimental and quantitative methods.

“I was pleasantly surprised to hear that they lifted the NAWO requirement for science-majors,” commented YC Junior Akiva Schiff. “Although, in general, I have enjoyed the Core courses, most science majors seem to have considered this one as an unnecessary burden given their strong background in the subject. With one less requirement, I plan to take an elective course which, otherwise, I would have been unable to take.”

Both NAWO and EXQM are the more science-heavy interdisciplinary requirements of the seven-course secular studies Core, which also includes requirements in areas like contemporary world cultures, the creative arts, and social institutions, all of which sit at the intersection of multiple fields of study.

This update is just the latest fine-tuning to take place in regards to YC’s Core. Last spring, several changes were made, including updates to the Bible requirements and the substitution of the First Year Seminar requirement in favor of a writing-intensive course within a student’s chosen major.

While the news was welcome among students yet to take NAWO or EXQM but now in position to gain exemptions from those requirements, other students felt the decision came too late for them.

One YC Senior, majoring in Biology, explained, “It’s great for future students who won’t have to expend extra credits on a redundant class. I only wish this happened sooner so I could have taken an additional advanced science elective.”

From the time of the Core Curriculum’s inception, many science majors felt that the NAWO course was redundant and merely a simplified version of their other courses. Conversely, non-science majors complained that the science majors, many of whom had already mastered these science concepts at much more advanced levels, made the caliber of the courses too demanding and exceedingly difficult by driving up the grading curve.

This attitude has persisted, so the recent NAWO policy update will surely soothe these common complaints about the course.

To combat this problem while it still existed, several semesters ago NAWO course-offerings were split – one section for non-science majors and one for science majors. This change, however, proved short-lived in light of the latest revision to the Core.

During the current semester, there was only one NAWO course offering. According to MYYU, that section is at capacity with ninety students.

The Commentator will provide updates on this story as information surrounding these changes becomes clearer.
President Joel Addressed Community in Final Town Hall Meeting of Presidency

By Elan Vann

The next student asked about the perception that Beren students often feel second class to their uptown counterparts. President Joel responded that he believes that this is a false sentiment, and that both campuses have their own advantages and disadvantages. He particularly highlighted the differences to be the separate Judaic and secular tracks which exist uptown whereas downtown has a mixed schedule. In addition, he noted that Beren does not have the same presence of Marshakim and other Torah scholars as Wilf. President Joel also stated that he wished that that night seder would grow on the Beren campus.

Following that discussion, a student asked if the President who would uphold the promises that he set forth after he leaves office, including the Stern College Dramatics Society’s being able to use the Schottenstein Theatre. President Joel replied that he was confident in the administration’s ability to take place, as all other support staff is in their current positions.

President Joel interrupted the next inquirer mid-sentence, denying he ever said it was important for an incoming president to “clear house.” The student insisted, saying “several sources” reported that President Joel expressed that it was important to clear house when he took office over a decade ago. The president denied the veracity of those sources.

Another student asked about the apparent recent rise in violence in Washington Heights against YU students, and whether the administration feels it should be addressed. The President responded that the crime rate is actually quite low, and that they don’t feel that they have to implement new policies. He did assure the students that YU is in touch with local law enforcement, and that the campus perimeter is heavily monitored to avoid any issues.

A student then asked about the university’s approach to LGBTQ students in light of the Westboro Baptist Church’s recent demonstrations. The President responded that the WBC is a hate group and the University strives to make all Jews feel accepted on campus. He declined to comment further.

The next question asked was how hopeful President Joel felt for the future of YU under his new president. President Joel went on to discuss how he felt Rabbi Berman would lead YU towards a great future.

Following this question, the President was asked regarding the decision process by which certain outside speakers are allowed to speak at YU while others are not. President Joel informed the room that 99% of speakers are vetted through the University.

As a related point, a student asked about what the President felt about Rav Schachter’s removal of signs for Rabbi Arey Klapper’s shiur, to which the President responded that he didn’t know enough information on the subject, that Rabbi Klapper was a musmach of RIETS, and that in all these discussions, we should be civil and moral to set an example for the world to see.

Towards the conclusion of the question session, Rabbi Dr. Herbert Dobrinsky, Vice President for University Affairs, gave a heartfelt praise of the president’s term in office and the impacts he made on the Jewish community not just of YU but of Hillié and other Jewish organizations as well. Following one more question, President Joel ended his last town hall meeting quoting each of his three predecessors (Drs. Revel, Belkin, and Lamm) on a different statement which he felt made an impact on his life, and added his own lesson as well to finish with four rules for YU students: be a Jewish role model, make a difference, see as God sees, and do as God does.

After the meeting, President Joel said he felt that students at the meeting were “real and respectful”, and that controversial questions are supposed to be asked in a university. When asked if he knew whether Rabbi Berman would want to continue the town hall meetings, the President responded that he did not know, but that he knows that Rabbi Berman will be committed to the students.

Midnight Run Helps Clothe, Feed Homeless

By Judah Stiefel

With the recent snowfall a week later. The clothing will hopefully prove useful for many of the homeless men and women's shoes, belts, skirts, dresses, and toiletries. For next year, the volunteers learned that the homeless recipients of the clothing would be happy with the high quality of certain items, and practical is more important than sharp and fashionable when you need to stay warm in the cold.

Midnight Run has changed the way that I relate to homelessness. Now, the term ‘homelessness’ does not only evoke a picture of human beings living on the street. Now, the term also stirs up a more visceral, emotional response. It recalls that sense of yearning and anxiety that I sensed in the individuals who we served.

Through the University.
Bnei Akiva Club Gives Back on International Good Deeds Day

By Ilana Kisilinsky

On April 2, Yeshiva University’s Bnei Akiva club participated in Good Deeds Day, an international day of volunteering. The group spent the day volunteering and giving back to the Murray Hill community.

This is the second year that the Bnei Akiva club has joined in on Good Deeds Day. This year 30 students from both Stern College and Yeshiva College volunteered for the organization DOROT, whose mission statement explains that “DOROT alleviates social isolation among the elderly and provides services to help them live independently as valued members of the community.”

The students delivered Passover food packages and visited the homebound elderly of the Murray Hill area. The group met at the Central Synagogue on the Upper East Side for an orientation run by the DOROT staff. They watched a video and then the volunteers split into groups of two and three and were assigned to a senior to visit. The volunteers then picked up their packages and were on their way.

Many of the students came back from the event feeling happy and fulfilled with the day’s work. “We went to visit an old lady in her home and before we went in we were slightly nervous it would be awkward,” said Ilana Leggiere, a junior at Stern College. “But when we got there she was the most outgoing and interesting woman we had ever met. We spoke about family and politics and it was amazing how much we had in common,” she continued.

“The students were able to see the direct effect they were having on their beneficiaries. “Good Deeds Day was a great experience,” said Eli Goldberg, a senior at Yeshiva College. “I brought food for Pesach to a beautiful elderly man and spent some time talking to him. He said he loves Pesach and was super happy that we brought him food, because he would not have been able to do it himself. And when we asked for a picture he even suggested we take a selfie, it was a great moment,” he said.

Not all students, however, were so successful. Some seniors were not expecting them or did not want a visit. “I wasn’t sure what to expect from our visit to our senior,” said Shira Krimsky, a junior at Stern College. “And I was a little bit nervous but also excited to talk to someone who could probably teach me a lot. When we showed up, however, she took the package from us but did not invite us in, as she only had a small apartment. I’m glad we still got to deliver a package for Pesach to her so I hope she appreciated that,” she continued.

Bnei Akiva is a worldwide organization that teaches leadership, Zionism, and the idea of Torah V’Avodah (Torah and labor). “Bnei Akiva of the US and Canada provides high quality religious Zionist education and programs for North American Jewish youth along with their families and communities. Basing ourselves on the principles of Torah V’Avodah, we encourage principles of love of the Jewish people, and love of Israel,” says the mission statement on Bnei Akiva US and Canada’s website.

The Bnei Akiva club looks to emulate that mission in every event that they organize. “Bnei Akiva focuses on fostering a love of Torah, Israel and the Jewish people, and included in that framework is the responsibility to do chessed,” said Maia Wiesenfeld, president of the Bnei Akiva club at YU. “We thought that Good Deeds Day, which was started in Israel and has now expanded to become a global movement, would be a great opportunity to help those in need. It was meaningful to see the difference we made even in just a few hours!”

Bnei Akiva Club Gives Back on International Good Deeds Day

By Doron Levine

Editors’ note: This article was published online on March 29 as events related to this story unfolded. It has been slightly modified from the online version.

On the morning of March 29, YU Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Hershel Schachter took down posters announcing a shiur that Rabbi Aryeh Klapper would deliver that night in YU’s Rubin Shul. Titled “Lo Ra’inu Eino Ra’aya: The inference from ‘haven’t been’ to ‘ought not to be’ in Halakhah,” the shiur is scheduled for 10:30 PM tonight and is sponsored by SOY.

On the night prior, a student hung signs for the event on the doors of the Glueck Beit Midrash. Posters for events sponsored by RIETS or SOY are commonly posted on these doors. But on March 29, at around 11:00 AM, at least two students witnessed Rabbi Schachter take down the signs on the left-hand door to the Glueck Beit Midrash. He then crumpled the posters into a ball and tossed them into a nearby garbage can.

When asked why he removed these signs, Rabbi Schachter responded, “Chatzakah, the guy’s a meshugenah. He’s going to attack all the rebbes in YU. It’s like inviting a Reform rabbi.”

Rabbi Schachter’s words.

The student who hung these signs on the right door of the Glueck Beit Midrash also put up a number of signs in the Muss dormitory, in the Glueck stairwell, and on bulletin boards in Klein Hall and Zysman Hall. These signs were also removed either on the night prior or on the morning of March 29, though it is not clear who removed them.

A similar incident occurred when this same student put up signs advertising Rabbi Klapper’s Summer Beit Midrash Program. Some weeks ago, he hung fliers on bulletin boards in Muss and on the door of the Glueck Beit midrash to promote Rabbi Klapper’s program, and these signs were similarly removed within a day.

A seudah shelishit in the YU cafeteria earlier this year, Dean of RIETS Rabbi Menachem Penner delivered a speech in which he rebuked the attitude that leads students to deface signs. Rabbi Penner explained that he noticed that a flyer for an event that would be happening on Shabbat had been graffitied with a large X. When asked to comment about Rabbi Schachter’s removal of the sign for Rabbi Klapper’s speech, Rabbi Penner wrote, “I believe there is a difference between defacing signs (childish) and removing them and between students acting out and long-time Roshei Yeshiva taking action.”

Rabbi Klapper holds an MA in Bible from the Bernard Revel Graduate School and received his ordination from RIETS in 1994. He is currently the Dean of the Center for Modern Torah Leadership and a member of the Boston Beit Din. He previously served as Associate Director for Torah Education at Harvard Hillel and Talmud Corrigan Chair at Maimonides High School. He has published articles in Tradition, Meorot, Dinei Yisrael, and Beis Yitzchak.
Rabbi Aryeh Klapper Speaks at YU: Community Reacts to Rabbi Hershel Schachter’s Harsh Criticism

By Benjamin Koslowe

Editors’ note: This article was published online on March 30 as the result of two articles covering the unfolding events related to this story. It has been slightly modified from the online version.

On the night of March 29, Rabbi Aryeh Klapper delivered a shiur in Wilf campus’s Rubinshul. The shiur was titled “Lo Ra’inu Eino Ra’aya,” which operates for several weeks every summer at the Glueck beit midrash at around 10:15 AM. Speaking to the crowded room of Yeshiva Program students, Rabbi Penner addressed the controversy directly for around six minutes. He said that “there are lessons to be learned about what I believe didn’t have to happen in any way yesterday.” Rabbi Penner added, “I actually feel very bad for Rabbi Klapper, because unless he insisted that he come to YU … and I have no reason to believe that he did, and insisted that he speak only about a topic of paskening halakhah, and that he’d come to YU and only speak about a topic of paskening halakhah that has to do very much with the women’s rabbi issues at a time when many of the Roshei Yeshiva here just wrote a tshuvah about those issues … I actually feel bad for him. Because I believe that he was set up for failure. And I believe that the story isn’t about Rabbi Klapper or Rabbi Schachter, but it’s about signs that are put up a day before for a lecture that’s going obviously to be controversial and wasn’t discussed with anybody.”

Rabbi Penner continued to explain how it is not his place to discuss what a Roshi Yeshiva can and cannot do. He described how he is “often in the uncomfortable position of being the boss of the people who are the Roshei Yeshiva.” He told that “taking down signs is a provocative act. But putting up signs is also a provocative act. There is perhaps a lack of respect in taking down the signs, but it can also be a lack of respect putting up a sign.”

Rabbi Penner insisted that YU is a place that welcomes alternative views within its community. “Roshei Yeshiva do not insist that you agree with them,” Rabbi Penner explained. “But if you ask them what they think of something, they might just answer you. If you ask them for their opinion, then you may have to deal with whatever that opinion is if that’s what you asked for. Will you be blasted for having an opinion that is different from the Roshei Yeshiva? It may very well depend on how and where you voice that opinion.”

“I’m not up to defend Rabbi Schachter,” Rabbi Penner asserted. “I’m nobody compared with both of those individuals, to be honest. I’m not putting Rabbi Schachter and Rabbi Klapper on the same level and they would both agree with that.” Rabbi Penner continued, “Something needs to be clear here. Rabbi Schachter did not want anyone publicly … Rabbi Schachter said nothing publicly.”

The Commentator did.” The Commentator reporter who approached Rabbi Schachter on March 29 to ask why he had removed signs for Rabbi Klapper’s event explicitly asked Rabbi Schachter for permission to interview him on behalf of The Commentator. After agreeing to be interviewed and then commenting harshly about Rabbi Klapper, Rabbi Schachter told the reporter, “you can quote me on that if you want.”

Rabbi Penner proceeded to call for a forum where parties sit down and talk. He suggested that it would be preferable for Rabbi Klapper to speak with Roshei Yeshiva rather than to converse directly with students about controversial topics. He emphasized that “I don’t blame [Rabbi Klapper] for any of this.”

Rabbi Penner concluded with a call to talk as a community. “Let’s not talk by reading The Commentator,” Rabbi Penner requested. He suggested that we avoid talking about semantics and fliers, and ended his speech with these words: “Why don’t we actually talk about the issues? Why don’t we talk to each other rather than at each other? … Let’s drive forward, let’s push. Let’s sit down and talk. You might be shocked to find out that if you sit and talk, you can talk to Rabbi Schachter.”

Around 30 minutes later, Rabbi Penner took to the bimah again for around 20 seconds and apologized for impugning the motives of the organizers of the shiur in his previous speech to the beit midrash. “I didn’t hear Rabbi Penner’s sicha,” wrote Rabbi Yosef Blau, senior Maschiach Rachani at YU. “It isn’t clear yet what Rabbi Klapper said or what motivated Rabbi Schachter’s reaction. It will take time to calm the situation and reduce tensions. There are people I trust working on it. The latest developments in social media move too quickly for those of us who are trying to lower the heat of conflict.”

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper (YC ’89, Revel, RIETS ’94) is a well-known Modern Orthodox rabbi who is currently the Dean of the Center for Modern Torah Leadership. He taught at the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts from 1994-2003, and has been involved as a Talmud Curriculum Chair since then. He has been a member of the Boston Beit Din since 2001. Since 1997, he has been Rosh Bein Midrash of The Summer Beit Midrash, which operates for several weeks every summer at the Young Israel of Sharon in Sharon, Massachusetts. He has published in Tradition, Meorot, Dinei Yisrael, and Beis Yitzchuk.

Rabbi Klapper garnered significant attention early in his career when he published an article titled “Ha-Zaken ha-Mamar beGilboar ha-Masoret” in Beis Yitzchak (Vol. 28, No. 1), a YU student Torah journal which has been published since 1952. In this Hebrew article with classic lomdus style, Rabbi Klapper describes a scenario in which a member of the Beis Din finds himself stuck between disobeying his colleagues and being a Zaken Mamre (rebellious elder), versus obeying them and violating something which, according to his view, is an aveirah that is geulose shel va’eruvur (the halakhic requirement of “let him be killed rather than transgress”).

The article resulted in some strong disagreement at the time, largely because of its suggestion that a Zaken Mamre, who is typically understood to be an evil person trying to undermine the halakhic system, might be a champion of tradition.

In March 2008, Rabbi Klapper and Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Orayta in Jerusalem, co-authored a letter to the Jewish Week criticizing Rabbi Schachter’s speech to a group of post-high school students at Yeshivat HaKotel in Jerusalem. Rabbi Schachter told these students that “if the army is going to give away Yerushalayim, then I would tell everyone to resign from the army – I’d tell them to shoot the rosh hamenasbah [prime minister].”

In a recent article on the Center for Modern Torah Leadership blog, to which Rabbi Klapper regularly contributes, he writes, “My goal in this essay, the first of an intended series, is to begin tracing the history of a phrase that lies on the fault line between halakhic radicals and halakhic conservatives.” The article, which is titled “Does ‘It’s Never Been Done’ Imply ‘It Should Never Be Done?’” – the same title as his recent YU shiur – deals with the attempt to prove halakhah via negative evidence. “It’s never been done that way, so it must be wrong to do it that way,” he asks, “Does that argument have force in Halakhah?”

Later in the article, Rabbi Klapper writes: “It should be clear that any such suggestion has significant implications for contemporary conversations about women and Orthodoxy, and I expect to draw those morals explicitly in the course of this series.” Later he explains that “Whether Modern Orthodoxy is a safe haven for halakhic radicalism, then, should depend on whether our community is halakhically sophisticated. I think that by historical standards it surely is.”

Many were wondering why Rabbi Schachter took issue with Rabbi Klapper to warrant his tearing down the fliers. When asked on March 30 if he thinks that Rabbi Klapper is an apikores, Rabbi Schachter explained, “I don’t think he’s an apikores.”

Rabbi Schachter continued, “I don’t have to be insulted in my own institution. I have rabbanin in New Jersey who are always attacking me, always attacking all the faculty here in the Yeshiva. So it’s bad enough that they attack us in New Jersey, in the newspapers, and so on. We have to invite them into the Yeshiva to be mevazeh all the rebels? They give an opinion that none of us do anything, they know better than all of us – I think that’s a chutzpah. Congress wouldn’t invite a colleague to speak in Congress to explain communism. We’re not interested in communism. So we shouldn’t invite Avi Weiss to speak over here.”

Rabbi Schachter continues, “I don’t think that someone publicly discussing something like that, and then blog about it later, is the best way to do it.”

SEE CRITICISM, CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
Westboro Baptist Church Protests Near YU, Community Responds with Counter-Protest and Charity Campaign

By Doron Levine

On March 27, the Westboro Baptist Church held a brief protest near Yeshiva University. From 9:30 AM until around 10:08, five members of the church stood in the rain between metal police barriers on Amsterdam Avenue between Laurel Hill Terrace and 181st Street. A number of NYPD officers were present securing the scene.

Based in Topeka, Kansas, the Westboro Baptist Church has achieved notoriety over the years for its aggressively anti-homosexual positions. Categorized as a “hate group” by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Church publicizes its travel schedule on its website called “godhatesfags.com.” The Church maintains that homosexuality is the primary sin of American society and that its normalization in mainstream American culture has incited countless acts of divine retribution including the 9/11 terror attacks and the deaths of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The church announced via Twitter on February 27 that it would protest at YU in order to denounce the university’s acceptance of homosexuality. In its press release, the church asserted that the American Jewish community, YU modern orthodoxy apparently included, “was the earliest and most forceful group to spread the soul-damning lie of It’s Ok to be Gay.” Westboro chose to picket YU in particular because YU “encapsulates the perverse state of both modern Judaism and the American university system,” the press release said.

Despite inclement weather—a steady rain during the entire protest—five church protesters showed up on Amsterdam Avenue on March 27 for the scheduled demonstration. The protest itself seemed less focused on homosexuality and more focused on the church’s belief that the Jews are responsible for killing Jesus. Each member of the church held one or two colorful signs with messages such as “GOD HATES CHRIST REJECTING APOSTATE JEWS,” “GOD HATES SIN ENABLERS,” and “JEWS WILL MOURN FOR CHRIST, WHOM THEY PIERCED.”

One church member wore a sweatshirt with the words “Bring your gay, lesbian, trans, and all of the above loving kippa, urging one YU student to “get rid of the beanie.” At various points during the protest, church members sang songs condemning Jews set to the tunes of various Jewish songs such as Hatikvah, Hava Nagila, and Sabbath Prayer from Fiddler on the Roof.

Other church protesters were not members of the Phelps family. Two young protesters from Phoenix described how they discovered the church on YouTube two years ago, explaining that the message of the church “pierced our hearts.” They insisted that the church’s message is one of love. “People today don’t know what love is,” one young protester said. “Love is telling people what path they’re going down. I don’t want you to go to Hell.” At the same time, she qualified, “We’re not out here to save people.”

When asked if protests sometimes require members to miss church services, she explained that protesters do sometimes miss Sunday services but they just read the sermon online.

In response to this protest, a number of people organized a counter-protest to denounce the Westboro Baptist Church’s anti-homosexual message. When the Church announced via its Twitter page that it would visit YU, a Facebook event called “Yeshiva University Welcoming Committee for the Westboro Baptist Church” was created, inviting hundreds of people to “Join us in welcoming the Westboro Baptist Church to The Heights!!!” Scheduled for the morning of the protest, the event urged participants to “Bring your gay, lesbian, trans, and all of the above loving Jew selves over to say a hearty howdy do to our visitors from the great state of Kansas.”

Though the rain might have discouraged some from attending this counter-protest, the event still garnered a significant showing. Around thirty-five counter-protesters showed on the opposite corner of Amsterdam Avenue and Laurel Hill Terrace, including approximately ten YU students and at least one YU faculty member. The counter-protesters arrived with signs of their own displaying messages such as “Hate is NOT a Yeshiva Value,” “LGBTQ Students are Welcome In Yeshiva U.,” and “Chosen People Choose Love over Hate.”

Asher Lovy, organizer of the protest and one of the hosts of the Facebook event, attended the counter-protest. He explained that the purpose of the event was “to make sure that the LGBTQ students of Yeshiva University wouldn’t walk out and see a message of hate that wasn’t countered by a message of love. The Westboro Baptist Church is a crazy fringe group, but there are plenty of people in the Jewish community and in the country in general who also hold this anti-LGBTQ message and are more than happy to spread a message of hate not connected to the Westboro Baptist Church.”

Despite the rain, Lovy was still happy with the turnout. “We were expecting a couple more people,” he said, “but given the weather this was a good a turnout as we could expect. And we definitely had more attendants than the Westboro Baptist Church did. So we’re very happy about this.” When asked if he had any reservations about the counter-protest giving the church more attention than it deserves, Lovy said, “It’s not just about the Westboro Baptist Church. It’s about countering the message that’s espoused by more than just the Westboro Baptist Church. If we get to use the Westboro Baptist Church as a springboard, great.”

On the other side of the street, Westboro Baptist Church member Shirley Phelps-Roper had mixed feelings about the attendance at the counter-protest. “I’m happy,” she said, “because the only way they’ll see the words is if they come out here and look. I’m thrilled that they’re here.” On the other hand, she said, “I’m so sad to see the awfulness of these children of Israel,” explaining that “The rest of you Jews will die with hearts of stone.”

In an announcement sent to students via email and posted on its Facebook page, Yeshiva University denounced the church protest: “We want to state in the strongest terms that Yeshiva University rejects and condemns the targeting of Jews and any human being based on religion, political affiliation or sexual orientation.”

The university also discouraged its students from engaging the protesters. “We urge you not to engage with the WBC; their success depends on the media spectacle created through counter-protests, as well as lawsuits against those who interfere with WBC members. For your safety and to deny the WBC what they seek, we should shun them with silence and peace,” the statement read.

Students wishing to comply with the university’s wishes but also wishing to counter the protest’s message decided to organize a fundraiser for the Jewish Board of Family Services. Volunteers sat at stations around campus where students could make donations and a link was set up specifically for this response to the church. The decision to respond to the Westboro Baptist Church with a fundraiser was made at a meeting held on Monday, March 20 which was open to all students and led by TCSA President Tzvi Levingston along with Executive Director of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs Dr. Paul Oestreicher. Other charities suggested at the event were the Wounded Warriors Project and Jewish Queer Youth.

Zvi Teitelbaum, who spearheaded the fundraising efforts, said that the students behind the initiative wanted to see Westboro Baptist, continued on page 8
Academic Integrity Dialogue Opened Between Deans and Students

By Avi Strauss

On April 5, YU’s new academic integrity initiative was launched by the Dean’s office in concert with student leaders and campus stakeholders to prevent against problems that they’ve witnessed. The forum was intended to be the first of several in an open and honest discussion to curtail the issue on the uptown campus.

The hour-long, midday meeting featured all five deans of the university, as well as Dean of RIETS and Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Menachem Penner, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, the majority of the academic advisors and a select group of students from a cross-section of the Wilf undergraduate population. Professors were intentionally not invited to the meeting so that students could be encouraged to participate freely.

The forum opened with a brief introduction by Associate Dean of Operations and Student Affairs Fred Sugarman, who thanked students for reaching out to him for ongoing issues. He stressed that “academic integrity here should be beyond reproach,” as we are in a yeshiva.

Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Levitin then led the transition to the open forum part of the meeting, mentioning that “the act of cheating itself may be wrong while rationalizing the act can be implicitly blaming the students for not being more in tune with the issue.”

Levitin then led the transition to the open forum part of the meeting, saying cheating “makes people question academics. She also bemoaned the deterioration in the image of our school, both within and outside the academic world.”

Professors were intentionally not invited to the meeting so that students could be encouraged to participate freely.

Lastly, before the forum shifted to an open floor for student remarks, Rabbi Penner framed the context of the conversation, saying cheating “makes people question what our mission is.” After listing several biblical prohibitions involved in the act of cheating, he called for creating “a culture where we show we are serious about these issues.”

Rabbi Penner continued, declaring, “the university has responsibility to prevent people from cheating” and that we must be concerned with the long-term consequences that cheating might have for people in the workplace. Starting to cheat while in college, he said, only makes the proposition of cheating in business more likely.

Yeshiva College Student Association President Trvi Levovitz then led the transition to the open forum part of the meeting, mentioning the “cognitive dissonance” students may experience in recognizing that the act of cheating itself may be wrong while rationalizing the act in specific instances.

The students who were present contributed by relaying their experiences of witnessing cheating in their classrooms, expounding on the thought processes of students who engage in the act, and offering possible solutions to the problems that they’ve witnessed.

“ACADEMIC INTEGRITY HERE SHOULD BE BEYOND reproach” —DEAN FRED SUGARMAN

Levitin then led the transition to the open forum part of the meeting, mentioning that cheating was not simply confined to the classroom on test day. He divided cheating into two categories: that which happens in the preparatory stage before a test or paper is due, and the in-classroom instances of cheating.

Various types of in-class cheating were detailed by students, including sharing answers when professors were attending to questions from other students and texting during tests and questions to accomplish. One student even mentioned students turning in “decoy phones” to skirt cell phone collection rules.

Other students mentioned the issue of test banks and did not elaborate about the difficulty in defining a definition of cheating itself. Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Joanne Jacobson cleared the air, saying accessing information that is readily available online, like test bank tricks, allows “cheating being lying and stealing” and gives the perpetrator an unfair advantage over other students.

The deans responded to the various statements and concerns of students in the meeting proceeding. Many comments referenced the campus “culture” that provides for such things to occur.

As a matter of culture, outgoing Dean of the Sy Syms School of Business Moses Pava stated that he didn’t think that the act of cheating was more rampant at YU than at any other university, whereas Syms Associate Dean Michael Strauss remarked that an undergraduate at Princeton University told him that students don’t even let their eyes wander during examination at the Ivy League university, out of fear of expulsion.

In response to this, Syms Academic Advisor Debbie Pine stressed, “we might not have more cheating than other colleges. But we need to remember, we aren’t other colleges” — a point that aimed to gain universal acceptance from all corners of the forum.

At times there was even more tense, with some implicitly blaming the students for not being more active in combating cheating as it occurred during tests. However, Academic Advisor Sara Schwartz emphatically pushed back against this notion. “It’s not the students who are making a job to maintain academic integrity. It’s not their job to police each other in the middle of an exam,” Schwartz said, arguing that students are under enough pressures in a testing environment as it is.

At one point, Pre-Health Advisor Lolita Wood-Hill from the School of Public Health asserted that the university’s reputation of cheating has on graduate admissions. Citing discussions she’s had with admissions officers at medical schools, she explained that when admissions panels believe Yeshiva students’ grades are inflated due to cheating, they look more critically at all Yeshiva applicants’ GPA’s when considering admissions. This long-term consequence of cheating makes it all the more important for the issue to be dealt with in the present.

At one point during the session, Dean of Students Chaim Nissel pushed to shift the conversation to practical solutions that can be enacted to prevent some of the instances of cheating.

A flurry of suggestions targeted at different types of cheating were offered. Many students agreed that more proctors and a midterm system that mimicked the finals process would go a long way towards suppressing instances of classroom cheating. One student noted a marked difference between his first and second semester science lecture in this regard, with extra proctors added for test days and dividers placed between students during laboratory examinations.

Others called for greater awareness about the short and long-term consequences of cheating, with one suggesting the implementation of a program similar to the “Alcohol-Wise” educational seminar, a mandatory online course for all YU students which informs students about the consequences of alcohol consumption.

One student, referring back to the “culture” issue discussed at several points during the meeting, called for “disrupting” that culture by informing the student body that disciplinary action is taken against any student for an act of cheating. Earlier in the meeting, when Rabbi Penner questioned if any disciplinary action had been taken against cheaters in the past five years, Dean Pava confirmed that no students had been expelled from Yeshiva College for cheating, while Dean Pava cited an instance from last year where a YU undergraduate was expelled.

While the deans voiced approval for the notion of actively disrupting the culture of cheating, the conversation shifted to the proposition of placing cameras in classrooms. This would serve as a proactive measure to discourage students from cheating, while providing a recourse for review when students report instances of cheating after exams. Dean Pava predicted that this will become a reality on a number of universities in the near future.

As the clock approached 1:00, the deans thanked everyone for coming and Dean Sugarman concluded the session, emphasizing that it was only the beginning of the discussion and that clear that the issues brought up would be taken seriously.
The male undergraduate population is down 50 students between Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, to 1025. However, this change exhibits what appears to be a natural fluctuation for the Wilf campus between semester to semester numbers when compared to data sets for the past 5 years.

“As with all enrollment numbers at any college, we see trends, and the job of the Admissions professionals is to make sense of them by rethinking recruiting strategies to appeal to the widest spectrum of students whose goals, both social and academic are most closely matched to our mission,” noted Director of Undergraduate Admissions Geri Mansdorf. “Many small private colleges are struggling nationally, and YU is fortunate to be in the unique position of offering what no other university or undergraduate program can offer the Orthodox student who is committed to the best secular education in a Torah true environment.”

Similarly, Dr. Monique C. Katz, Dean of Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon observed, “People make individual decisions, but those decisions reflect group behavior.” She stressed that trends in decision making are often the result of a series of different factors and that just as they’ve changed over the past few years, they can shift again in the next few.

Dean Bacon continued: “People are perceiving more options [in education] than they ever have in the past” and that “there has been a sociological shift in what options [in education] than they ever have in the past” and that “there has been a sociological shift in what people see as appropriate preparation for a successful life.” Nonetheless, she believes the “strength of Jewish community is in quality education with a Torah component.”

Sy Syms was founded in 1987 after a $22 million dollar donation from philanthropists and businessman Sy Syms, along with other businesspeople. Since 2012, the Sy Syms Wilf population has risen from 300 full-time students to the 525 students enrolled today. During that same period, Yeshiva College’s population has declined from 799 to 500 full-time students.

Although it is unclear what specific factors have caused this swing in favor of the business undergraduate program, it is likely a combination of interest, job prospects and skill acquisition, and the addition of the Sy Syms honors program, it and the Business Intelligence and Marketing Analytics major.

In a meeting with The Commentator, Sy Syms Dean Moses Pava and Dean Michael Strauss detailed a variety of societal and institutional factors responsible for the increasing Sy Syms enrollment.

They noted two major goals they accomplished at the outset of their tenures six years ago: creating a Sy Syms honors program and obtaining accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (or AACSB International), often regarded as the standard for business school quality, although the association itself has since lost its accreditation from the United States Department of Education. According the the AACSB website, only 786 business schools have their accreditation out of thousands of business schools across the world.

“Students are looking at the bottom line. Going to a business school immediately gives students the tools for work, improving their job prospects,” said Pava. He proceeded to note the high rate of job placement or full-time enrollment in graduate programs (95%) that alumni report 6 months after graduating.

The deans directly credited the Advising Center and the Career Center for producing results that current undergraduates are noticing and responding to with their academic choices.

Both Pava and Strauss made sure to note the societal shift that yielded the trend towards business school. Applications to undergraduate business programs are in fact up across the country. According to Fortune Magazine, applications to undergraduate business programs rose 14% from the 2008-2009 academic year to 2012-2013, paralleling the shift in enrollment on the Wilf campus, indicating this isn’t simply a YU-specific phenomenon.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics notes that in 2013-2014, the number of undergraduate degrees conferred in business was 355,000, more than any other field, and far exceeding the runner-up, health professions and related programs, in which 199,000 degrees conferred that same year.

The increasing Sy Syms student population and changes made to the program seems to have borne fruit. Currently there are 100 students in the Sy Syms Honors program, and Sy Syms was recently ranked 16th for best bachelor’s programs in accounting by accounting.com.

Further, the larger student body has driven up the average composite SAT score for Sy Syms undergrads nearly 100 points, to 1206 from 1111 in 2011.

Both deans also noted developments in the way information is communicated in the technological age and the ways they’ve responded, creating the Business Intelligence and Marketing Analytics major, as well as revamping the finance faculty.

Dean Bacon noted both liberal arts colleges are making strides in this area as well, referencing the work of professor Judah Diamant, whom The Commentator interviewed last year, in developing new, comprehensive computer science programming for the computer science major itself, and for data analytics in the humanities and social sciences. In these areas, Bacon said students pursuing degrees in liberal arts could serve as communication “bridges” in the workplace, between those with the technical skills to collect data and those to whom the information is most relevant.

Crafting information “narratives” will also be an important skill for students in the workplace, and she said the undergraduate colleges are adapting to make sure students are equipped to do so.

She concluded that such interpretive and deliberative skills are necessary for individual growth: “I think a requirement for a full life is to value education, education that includes reading, writing, researching and debating ideas in all their richness.”

The drop in enrollment at the Beren campus is entirely reflected in enrollment at Stern College for women, which has declined to 728, from 936 since 2013. Sy Syms enrollment at the Beren campus has ticked upwards over that time, although at a far slower rate than on the men’s campus, increasing 20 students between 2013 and 2017, to 157 business undergraduates.

Commenting on the recent downward trend in Beren enrollment, Ms. Mansdorf pointed towards developments in the decisions made by women post-high school: “we are seeing an uptick in women who either choose to spend additional time learning in Israel as well as an increase in those choosing to attend college and do Sherut Le’umi there” she said. Often, women who elect to stay in Israel for Sherut Le’umi (national service) rescede their enrollment and admissions has been contacted by students explaining their decisions to do so.

She also pointed out that admissions could be looking at a new upward trend in enrollment: “Our application numbers are up significantly this year, but of course, given that 80% of our students will spend at least one or two years of study in Israel, we will only see the positive outcome of all this effort when they return to the States to study at YU.”

Undergraduate Admissions is hoping to make that turnaround a reality in the coming years.

This year’s Jewish Job Fair attracted crowds of employers and potential employees. Professional placement after graduation may be one factor behind Syms’s growth.
Here's Who's Running for Student Council President

Traditionally, student council presidential candidates introduce themselves to the electorate in The Commentator at the beginning of the campaigning period. Below, each contender writes about his background and the goals he has for his desired position.

The introductions are arranged by council first (YSU, SOY, YCSA, SYMSSC) and alphabetically second.

Yeshiva Student Union (YSU)

ARYEH MINSKY

Hey, readers!

My name is Arye Minsky, and I am hoping to be your Yeshiva Student Union President this coming year. A little about myself: I grew up New Hempstead, NY and attended TABC in Teaneck, NJ for high school. After that, I spent two years studying at Reishit, and am now in my sixth semester on campus. I'm a finance major by day (marketing minor!), and an IBC Talmid by morning.

Also good to know about me: I am intimately involved in my campus- and why shouldn't I be? I love YU! When I'm not giving tours to prospective students, working games for athletics, helping with new hires in human resources, or waiting in the caf on Shabbat, I'm probably playing on the YU Baseball team, or scoring goals in hockey intramurals (three-time champion!), or, I might be in class...

I think my love for YU is evident in how heavily I involve myself here. I've already spent two years on Yeshiva Student Union (as Junior Class President and VP of Classes), as well as two years on the Student Life Committee. I spent this past year running the SLC, as well as a few months as YSU President (I know, interim president, but it’s the same experience). I want to be YSU President because I really take pride in my campus. I'm a finance major by day, and my minor is in Sysms. I have been a part of both YP and IBC. This past year I participated in student leadership as an RA, and was highly involved in a bunch of clubs on campus, such as Tanid, YUPAC and The Commentator. As a co-founder of The Scope I’ve also had the chance to write satire and produce YU’s Purim shpiel.

RAFFI WIESEN

After High School at MTA I spent three years in Israel, half in Yeshiva and half in the IDF. When I came back to New York I knew I wanted to get involved in campus any way I could. This year I served as the Vice President of Clubs and saw firsthand the inner workings of the student council structure and procedures.

Since I am the head of clubs, maybe the most important part of campus life, I manage the budget, approve clubs and events, and plan for major events. I was one of the student liaisons for the IAmYU campaign, and was stunned by the unbelievable outpouring of support everyone showed. I also currently serve on the planning committee for the commemoration and celebration of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut.

Through my experience as a student leader, I’ve learned that if there’s anything we YU students are not, it’s dispassionate. Student-run events are some of the most successful events that we have. Everyone here has great ideas for activities, events, and areas for improvement. Because of this, I want to create a new outlet that will allow everyone the chance to get involved. Every student should have the opportunity to take an active role in improving their college experience, even if they’re not on student council or a president of a club. As president of YSU, my job will be to hear your voices, take your suggestions, and turn them into the best college experience we can have.

Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY)

DOVID SIMPSER

Hi! I’m Dovid Simpsser. Many of you may know me from my involvement this past year as Vice President of the S.O.Y. Student Council, where I worked to create religious programming that better served our religiously diverse community. Now, I’m running for S.O.Y. President to continue my vision of a warm and inviting community for all students here at YU.

Every student has their own unique religious needs and values, and we, as the center of Modern Orthodoxy, need to create an environment where all students can feel comfortable and engaged. Therefore, whether through religious outlets such as Klein @ 9, or broader ranging Shabbos programming, my goal as President is to help establish better opportunities for students to feel religiously engaged on campus. There are so many great programs and opportunities here at YU, but there is still much needed change and improvement for the Yeshiva to better serve its religiously diverse student body.

I’m always available to speak through any thoughts and suggestions, and by working together we can take the dreams of today and turn them into the reality of tomorrow.

Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA)

JOEY JUBAS

“Work hard until you no longer need to introduce yourself” is a quote I have been living by since I started at Yeshiva University three years ago after my year in Israel. I have been involved with campus activities and student life since I set foot on campus. From my high school experience on student council in Detroit, Michigan, I knew I wanted to be a change-maker in college as well. Upon my arrival at YU, I immediately joined the Student Life Committee, started working as a lifeguard at the aquatic facilities, and was selected to serve on the board of numerous clubs. I also held a number of leadership positions including the co-presidency of YAS! (Yeshiva Activities Society), striking a balance between extracurricular involvement and academics as I pursue a degree in math/computer Science with a minor in Physics.

I currently serve as Vice-President of YCSA and I hope to further my role on campus by representing you, my peers, and by presenting a strong voice to the administration. I plan to expand class offerings, coordinate more on-campus events, construct a clearer schedule highlighting the courses offered only once per year, and streamline the course registration process.
YCSA Continued

EITAN LIPSKY

My name is Eitan Lipsky and I hail from the town of West Hempstead, NY. After attending DRS Yeshiva High School and spending two years learning in Israel in KBY and Gush, respectively, I am currently in my second year at YU where I am studying biology, with the long-term plan to study and practice medicine.

Since arriving at YU, I have felt privileged to be a part of all that the college has to offer; academics, extracurricular clubs, and even chesed missions. I have also been able to take leadership positions, serving as an editor for The Commentator; and a key board member for Project TEACH, a local tutoring club, and several university journals. As YCSA President, I would humbly serve as the necessary link between the YC deans and students, and ensure that students’ complaints (of which I have heard too many without proper follow-up in my time here), are appropriately addressed.

If elected, I would look forward to working with the deans on improving the Hebrew requirement. I would like to rethink the placement process as well as what type of Hebrew curriculum would be most valuable to students. I would also like to take steps to make sure that academic integrity is maintained in YC so that students aren’t disadvantaged by others’ dishonesty. These are some of the many ideas that I have, but ultimately change comes from the input of all students. If elected, I hope to make sure that all voices are heard.

Syms Student Council (SYMSSC)

AVI LENT

My name is Avi Lent, and before starting Syms I attended MTA and Yeshivat Hakotel. While I’m currently an accounting major, I intend on pursuing a career in law. In past years, I have served in numerous leadership positions, including the Assistant Youth Director of the Young Israel of New Rochelle and the Assistant Head Lifeguard in Camp Morasha. Additionally, I’ve worked at the Supreme Court of Westchester, which sounds exceedingly prestigious if you don’t think about it too much.

I’m running for Syms President for a few reasons. Firstly: Yehoshua, my fierce opponent, was running unopposed, and I could not allow him to simply seize the presidency without a fight. Secondly, I hear this looks good on a resume, and I really want to go to Harvard Law. Most importantly though, I want to make a difference. While Syms has blessed me with an incredible education, I think I have some cool ideas that can really make attending Syms an even more incredible experience. And to pacify any reservations you may still have regarding my candidacy, know that I’ve received endorsements from both Rav Schachter and Rabbi Klapper. So please, come out and vote, and help me win this glorified popularity contest.

JOSHUA ZIRMAN

My name is Joshua Zirman, and I am a finance major. I grew up in Teaneck, NJ and attended TABC for high school. I then went to Orayta for my gap year before attending Yeshiva University.

In my four semesters on campus, I have had the opportunity to interact with students across the YU spectrum: international, local, YP, BMP, and IBC. I have gotten involved in many diverse clubs on campus such as the Business Leadership Club, Shield News, TAMID, Macs Live, YUNMUN, Yeshiva University’s TEDx event, and even a brief stint on the basketball team.

I have decided to run for president because I see all of the potential that YU holds, yet watch some of it go to waste every year. I want to improve Syms events to make them more desirable, and work with students who have passions to start new initiatives on campus. I believe one of my strongest qualities is listening to those around me, and I intend to bring that with into my presidency. The best way to improve the YU of tomorrow is to interact with the YU of today.
**YU Honors’ Programs Changes SAT Requirement for Admission, Lowers Mandatory Number of Honors Classes**

By Shoshy Ciment

As of this year, admittance to the three undergraduate honors programs at Yeshiva University no longer requires an SAT score of at least 1400 or its equivalent ACT score of 32.

Whereas admittance to the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program at Stern College and the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program at Yeshiva College previously required a 1400 minimum on the SAT (the Sy Syns honors program requires a 1350), the standardized test score is no longer a determining factor in admittance.

Geri Mansdorf, the Director of Undergraduate Admissions, explained that the change came as a result of ongoing conversations with college guidance counselors and heads of school regarding the unfortunate circumstances in which exceptional students were barred from consideration for the honors programs because they narrowly missed the cut on their standardized test scores.

Mansdorf wrote, “in response to [these conversations] and to allow truly outstanding students a chance to be considered for our undergraduate honors programs, we decided to try a new approach.” “Our goal was to open the program to a wider array of students while maintaining the integrity of the program as well as its high academic standards”, she explained. She asserted that by considering students “whose test scores were excellent, if perhaps a bit short of our previous cutoffs”, they were able to meet with “stellar candidates” that might not have originally been given a chance.

Marcy Roberts, the Director of College Guidance at the Katz Yeshiva High School of South Florida, said that she was pleased to hear about the relaxed requirement for the honors programs, as it opened the doors for more students to be considered. However, she noted that it was interesting that “despite these more flexible scores, the average scores for those students eventually admitted was actually even higher than the original cutoff.”

Indeed, the YU admissions page that outlines the requirements for the honors programs states that the average SAT score of acceptees is a 1450 on the SAT, or a 33 on the ACT, remarkably higher than the original requirement.

Despite what could be viewed as a drop in standards, Mansdorf asserts that those in admissions are “confident that this new cohort of honors students will continue to be high achievers at YU and challenge not only themselves, but their peers and professors, as well.”

In addition to these new changes for admittance to the honors programs, the YC faculty recently announced that students who are in the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors program will now be required to take just 6 (rather than the previously required 8) honors courses in order to graduate. A reason for this change, as delineated in an email sent to all honors students on April 19th, is to increase the number of students writing honors theses by giving students more opportunities to fulfill their requirements and still be able to enroll in the classes necessary for them to write their thesis in their last two semesters on campus.

“I remind you that the terms of your financial awards include completion of all aspects of this requirement (courses and thesis) and that compliance is closely monitored” wrote Shalom E. Holtz, the Director of the Honors Program.

Students in the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program at Stern College are still required to take 5 honors courses in order to graduate in addition to completing a thesis.

**CRITICISM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

When pressed if he takes issue with a specific article or statement issued by Rabbi Klapper, Rabbi Schachter responded to the author, “You were born yesterday. I’m a little older than you. We have known the man for many years. He doesn’t represent our community. We have known the man for many years. He doesn’t represent our community.”

I think there are more important things to write in The Commentator. I said a fantastic shiur today and yesterday — why don’t they write that up? Why do they write stupid things?

Joshua Skootsky, after describing the attendance, added that “Rabbi Klapper had a chiddush about the Mahzor that was not speculative, but rather emerged forcefully from reading the sources carefully. It seemed certainly correct. There is a recording of the shiur, people should go to the Center for Modern Torah Leadership’s website where it should be uploaded soon.”

“Rabbi Klapper went through the vetting process,” continued Simper, “and was approved by the Office of Student Life as they believe him to be an appropriate speaker for students to hear from. He is also a rabbanim within the YU community. Furthermore, he has spoken on campus multiple times in the recent past without any incident.”

Speaking about the specific Rabbi Schachter incident, Simper reflected that it “shows that there needs to be greater dialogue between the Roshei Yeshiva of RIETS, the University Deans, and the Student Leaders.”
By Zev Behar

Nintendo recently unveiled their newest system: the Nintendo Switch. Following the abysmal sales of the Wii U, Nintendo knew that they needed something big, new, and engaging if they wanted to regain the trust of their fans after millions were lost on the Wii U’s pretentious experiment that wasn’t driveable. I was not too excited about the Switch when it was first announced. The idea of the Switch was to take two consoles and combine them into one compact device that could be used both at home and on the go. When the Switch was released, I thought it would be a failure. However, with a few months of use, I have come to love the Switch and I believe it has the potential to be one of the best consoles ever made.

The Switch features a 6.2-inch screen that is capable of outputting 1080p video at 60 frames per second. The console itself is powered by a Tegra X1 system on a chip, which is capable of handling powerful games. The Switch also has a touch screen that is capable of displaying vibrant colors and sharp images. There is also a built-in NFC reader, which allows the user to scan items and access additional content.

Nintendo recently announced that the Switch would be compatible with all Wii U games, which is a huge plus for fans of the console. The Switch also has a wide variety of accessories, including a Joy-Con controller, a Pro controller, and a wireless adapter for PS4 and Xbox One controllers.

One of the most exciting features of the Switch is the ability to play games on the go. The Joy-Con controllers can be detached from the console and used as handheld controllers, allowing players to play games on the go. This feature is especially useful for fans of Mario Kart, where players can race against each other on the go.

Overall, the Nintendo Switch is a great console that offers a lot of value for its price. It has a lot to offer for fans of all ages, and I believe it has the potential to become one of the best consoles ever made.
Biloxi Blues: Where Comedy and Character Depth Meet

By Hillel Field

After a brief hiatus last semester, YCDS has returned in full form with a production of Neil Simon’s semi-autobiographical play, *Biloxi Blues*. The play is essentially a comedy, but at the same time a *bildungsroman*, or a coming-of-age story. Eugene Jerome (Ezra Felder) is a young and naïve Brooklynite who is whisked off to Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training during WWII. The play revolves around his mission statement for his time in Biloxi: to stay alive, become a writer and lose his virginity. By the end of the play, he accomplishes his goals, in albeit unexpected ways. The connections created between the young soldiers from their shared experience under the wrath of a tyrannical sergeant stand at the heart of the play, and the actors of YCDS manage to convey a sense of strong brotherhood.

“THE CONNECTIONS CREATED BETWEEN THE YOUNG SOLDIERS FROM THEIR SHARED EXPERIENCE UNDER THE WRATH OF A TYRANNICAL SERGEANT STAND AT THE HEART OF THE PLAY, AND THE ACTORS OF YCDS MANAGE TO CONVEY A SENSE OF STRONG BROTHERHOOD.”

While each actor brings out the unique and complex personalities of each soldier-in-training, Yaacov Siev steals the show with his explosive portrayal of the authoritarian Sergeant Merwin J. Toomey. Siev’s southern drawl sounds authentic, and he makes excellent use of his booming and commanding voice to humiliate and intimidate the new arrivals. The way he carries himself makes his sheer physicality a force of authority. The sergeant spends large amounts of time shouting in the soldiers’ faces with unrelenting persistence, and I would not be surprised if some of his wild antics are improvised at times. You can feel the palpable intensity of Toomey’s presence when he pushes his recruits to their emotional and physical limits, especially when he makes his recruits perform one hundred push-ups on the spot. The actors throw themselves into the moment, allowing the audience to relate to their struggle.

The play sets up the character of Arnold Epstein (David Cutler) as the polar opposite of Toomey: reserved and a non-conformist, yet, at the same time, he is someone who is unafraid to speak his mind. From the first time they encounter each other, you get the sense that, in the words of Heath Ledger’s Joker, “this is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object.” The tension between Toomey’s dominance and Epstein’s defiance escalates throughout the length of the play, and climaxes in a scene where the sergeant almost puts Epstein’s life on the line. The relationship that develops between the two is enjoyably unpredictable, and has a strong resemblance to the relationship at the heart of the movie *Whiplash*. In this film, an unforgiving music teacher pushes his student to unreasonable extremes, and while the student despises him for his methods, he eventually comes to an appreciation of this extremist approach. Without giving too much away, Epstein seems to go through a similar acceptance of Toomey’s ideology of someone whose entire being is dedicated to creating perfect soldiers. The fact that we really get in touch with both of these characters makes the final scene of the play all the more satisfying and memorable.

An interesting theme that runs through the play was absent from the last several YCDS productions is the explicit portrayal of the authoritarian and intimidating perspective of the film version starring Matthew Broderick devotes a lot of attention to a budding relationship between Eugene and Daisy, a girl who is only described by Eugene in this production. While we do see Eugene indulging in his love for her in a well-executed “dancing” scene, it does feel like Daisy is a character who is conspicuously missing. This issue is also relevant when Eugene accomplishes his goal of losing his virginity, which all takes place behind the scenes. It seems somewhat inconsistent to keep something that is such a major element of Eugene’s development as something that is only implied. On the other hand, I can also see why leaving out these elements of the play seems puzzling. A given for any YCDS play is the absence of female actors, and this limits the options of plays to choose from where this would not cause major issues. Interestingly, *Biloxi Blues* has a major female role in its original conceptions, and the film version starring Matthew Broderick devotes a lot of attention to a budding relationship between Eugene and Daisy, which all takes place behind the scenes. It seems somewhat inconsistent to keep something that is such a major element of Eugene’s development as something that is only implied. On the other hand, I can also see why leaving out these elements of the play is not a huge sacrifice. This play immerses the audience into the dynamics of these ragtag soldiers, so much so that their exploits outside of the army base become secondary to their interactions among each other. The focus is not so much on how they achieve their aspirations, but on how these soldiers perceive their fellow’s achievements.
In Defense of Obesity

By Jonah Stavsky

We’ve all been there — sitting around the dinner table with family and friends — and, when the dessert plates finally arrive, theconversation begins. Uncle Peter is convinced the carbs are to blame. Cousin Sarah begs to differ, as she understood fats to be the culprit — if you eat fat, you get fat. Brother Andrew asserts the importance of protein for proper nutrition. Mom, after having recently read an article about the probiotics in fermented foods such as kombucha, claims it’s all about the bacteria. Dad, skeptical as always, proposes the supremacy of exercise in losing weight.

Calories in, calories out — that’s what we’ve all been taught. As a personal fitness trainer, I, too, emphasize this idea to my clients. However, according to current research, this view is proving far more complicated than initially thought — more on this later. Then there’s the willpower argument. If we could just put the fork down, the pounds would melt away. Again, it’s not that simple.

The etiology, or cause of obesity is complicated — considerably beyond what people realize. The obesity population are often stigmatized as lazy or simply lacking willpower. However, our genes cannot take all the credit — a deficiency of which has been highly associated with overeating. Nevertheless, this cannot account for the obesity epidemic — some of which may surprise you. In doing so, I’d like to review the famous “diseased gene” theory, regarding obesity. It is accepted that the condition requires a general deficiency of which we will become. Ideally, a “diseased” gene would be located and repaired. Unfortunately, more often than not, a multitude of genes are implicated in a condition. This makes the matter of solving the genetic puzzle to obtain the cure — a task which is easier said than done. Regardless, progress has been made in this area of research.

The most commonly implicated gene in obesity is the MC4R gene, which codes for the melanocortin 4 receptor — a deficiency of which has been highly associated with overeating. Nevertheless, this cannot account for the steep statistics on obesity. More likely, several genes acting in synchrony contribute to the phenotype, or visible effects of individual who willpower. In this article, I’d like to describe just a few of the many etiologies surrounding the obesity epidemic — some of which may surprise you. In doing so, I’d like to review the famous “diseased gene” theory, regarding obesity. It is accepted that the condition requires a general deficiency of which we will become. Ideally, a “diseased” gene would be located and repaired. Unfortunately, more often than not, a multitude of genes are implicated in a condition. This makes the matter of solving the genetic puzzle to obtain the cure — a task which is easier said than done. Regardless, progress has been made in this area of research.

An example I like to give to my clients: in front of you lies a single donut or a table lined to the brim with broccoli — each contains the exact same amount of calories. Which is going to make you more full? The correct answer, of course, is the broccoli. However, if you thought to yourself, “but I want the donut!” you were looking for the immediate dopaminergic response that accompanies a densely packed diet. Dopamine, along with other brain chemicals, is a hormone that is released when we eat, the stomach expands, and stretch receptors tell our brain that we’re full. Note that the effectiveness of this system is dependent on food volume. Fruits and vegetables are high volume, low calorie foods; that is to say, you get more satiation and nutrition for your calorie buck. Sociologically, however, many societies, especially those of Americans, have decided to compress foods, increasing their density — effectively decreasing the feeling of satiety. An example I like to give to my clients: in front of you lies a single donut or a table lined to the brim with broccoli — each contains the exact same amount of calories. Which is going to make you more full? The correct answer, of course, is the broccoli. However, if you thought to yourself, “but I want the donut!” you were looking for the immediate dopaminergic response that accompanies a densely packed diet. Dopamine, along with other brain chemicals, is a hormone that is released when we eat.

In the hunter-gatherer era, food was scarce. Our bodies, therefore, developed adaptations that allowed us to get the most out of a potential encounter with food. Let us say, for example, that one of our ancestors came into contact with a delicious looking blueberry bush, which would inevitably lead to overindulgence. In order to take full advantage of the field, the calorie in which work through a hormone called ghrelin, are extremely powerful. If we don’t eat, ghrelin runs rampant, and has us soon scavenging for food, whether it be miles away on a berry bush, or next-door in the fridge. On the other hand, the hormone leptin, along with others, signals to our brains that we are full. When we eat a big meal, leptin skyrockets, and we feel satiated. The signals to stop eating work from us eating are much weaker than those forcing us to eat. Who knows when the next food encounter would be? Through this mechanism, our ancestor at the blueberry bush is able to stock up on plenty of energy, overindulging for a kind of hibernation, so to speak — toward a considerably bear consuming salmon before winter.

Furthermore, our brains have developed in a way that reinforces the act of eating. When we eat, the brain releases dopamine — the famous “feel good” neurotransmitter — similar to a heroin injection, albeit to a significantly smaller extent. And people wonder why food is addictive! Closely related with our ancestor at the blueberry bush, this dopaminergic response allowed our ancestors to continue eating and not die out — survival of the fittest at its best. In modern times, however, when food is so readily available (i.e. fast food), these mechanisms have backfired. In essence, what was once a live-saving adaptation, is now killing us.

But even with modern food availability, wouldn’t we still be able to regulate our appetites? Sure — so long as we are eating the right foods. The human stomach was designed to signal satiety to our brains in specific, although complicated, ways. One of the simplest manners in which this is done is through stretch receptors. When we eat, the stomach expands, and stretch receptors tell our brain that we’re full. Note that the effectiveness of this system is dependent on food volume. Fruits and vegetables are high volume, low calorie foods; that is to say, you get more satiation and nutrition for your calorie buck. Sociologically, however, many societies, especially those of Americans, have decided to compress foods, increasing their density — effectively decreasing the feeling of satiety. An example I like to give to my clients: in front of you lies a single donut or a table lined to the brim with broccoli — each contains the exact same amount of calories. Which is going to make you more full? The correct answer, of course, is the broccoli. However, if you thought to yourself, “but I want the donut!” you were looking for the immediate dopaminergic response that accompanies a densely packed diet. Dopamine, along with other brain chemicals, is a hormone that is released when we eat.

In several studies, scientists have given the same diet to regular mice and germ free mice (mice born without any bacteria inside of them), and watched as the germ free mice became exponentially fatter than the regular mice — their calorie intake remaining constant. Moreover, when the microbes of a fat mouse were transferred to the colon of a skinny mouse, the skinny mouse began to gain weight; again, this was done with a consistent diet. How does this work? Science simply isn’t sure yet, although progress is being made everyday. The fact of the matter is, that fields such as epigenetics and the human microbiome (and several others not mentioned) highlight the vast complexity of obesity. The cause of the issue clearly extends far beyond what we currently know; calories in, calories out may not be the whole story.

The obesity statistics, as previously highlighted, are startling. Simply being even 20% overweight exponentially increases a person’s odds of receiving a diagnosis of heart disease, stroke, cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes, to name a few. Yet, as we have seen, the cause of obesity is complex. Accordingly, it is vital to account for these variables when deciding how one should perceive obese or overweight individuals. Moreover, how exactly do we place, or even define fault? Are we to blame an obese child for the way she was raised by her parents? What about her genetics? Epigenetics? What if she is still obese into adulthood? Can we blame her then? Her brain is now wired to crave fat, sugar, and salt, from a point in her life in which free will was limited. These philosophical questions regarding the place of fault, or blame, if you will, demonstrate further nuances into the stigmatization of obese individuals.

It is possible to perceive that the only difference between medical conditions such as obesity and heart disease is the external expression of the former, in that obesity is plain to see. You might never know about the hidden medical conditions of your friends, family, and colleagues. Obesity, however, is out for everyone to see — perhaps a duly unjust circumstance. Therefore, the selective stigma attached to obese individuals can be irrational and may even perpetuate comorbidities such as anxiety and depression. Instead, we should seek to evaluate obesity in a more understanding, yet scientific manner — to question our assumptions when assigning blame to any medical condition. Ultimately, by acting in this way, we can create an atmosphere conducive to prevention and healing.

A Note on the Author: Jonah Stavsky is a pre-medical student at YU completing a major in biology and a double minor in psychology and public health. Jonah is an American Council on Exercise (ACE) Certified Personal Trainer with dual specialty certifications in behavior change psychology and fitness nutrition.
By Benjamin Koslowe

This author recently had the opportunity to sit down and talk with Samuel Kalnitz (aka Sammy K) and his manager Dennis Gindi. Here is the inside scoop on this rising star.

Benjamin Koslowe: Let’s get right into it. Who are you, where are you from, and what’s your background?

Samuel Kalnitz: I go by Sammy K. I’m from Atlanta, Georgia. I’ve been rapping for almost nine years at this point. I’ve been recorded for about two or three years. I put out a couple of mixtapes in the past, and now I’m trying to get my name out there, just trying to do some real music. There’s a lack of realness to hip hop nowadays, so what I’m trying to do is try to help the cause and get that realness back to hip hop. That’s what I’m about.

BK: What do you rap about?

SK: A lot of different stuff. Hip hop is definitely a reflection of who you are and what your background is. I don’t make a “Jewish rap,” per se, but my mainstream music that I make definitely has inspiration from aspects of Judaism. I’ll do a rap about Israel or a rap about the Holocaust as a reflection of who I am. There are other aspects of who I am, such as word plays and puns, past experiences, struggles I’ve had, or other things that pertain to me. Whatever’s going on in my life or whatever I’m thinking about, that’s what my song will be about. Whatever emotions I feel from the instrumental is how it will translate into the song.

BK: You have a big following now, correct?

SK: Yeah, thank God. It’s doubled in three days since the “Jewish Guy Rapping in NYC” video. My fan base has literally doubled since then.

Dennis Gindi: It’s pretty cool how it all started. I work with Sammy K, going back with him to when we started working on our first project. A lot of things came together, when we were both on the program, we both liked rapping. Even though I’m not pursuing rapping at all, I really enjoy the whole art of it, being part of the experience. Sam and I used to bond over “freestyle rapping,” which is basically going into things off your mind and trying to rhyme them. Back then we were pretty immature (I’m still immature and Sam has evolved). When he came back to YU I got involved with him. We’re thinking of ways to get his name out there.

We like having lunch meetings in the YU Caf. At one meeting, we came up with the idea of something unique that hasn’t been done before. There are all these YouTube videos of “nerd raps in the hood” or “this guy with this specialty raps here,” a lot of things like that. We tried to figure out what could be our niche that would promote Sammy in the right way. We were mulling around a few ideas and we finally got to one that would include Sammy wearing a black hat. Cool enough, he actually wears a black hat. Funny enough, I had the idea a while ago. We were all sitting around the meeting thinking about how to go viral, and I just threw this old idea out there. We were like, yo, that’s actually a good idea. Let’s actually do that and put it to fruition. Crazy how it turned out.

BK: How does your business work? How do you manage your income, your expenses, and so on?

DG: The business as it stands now is a four-person group. There’s Sammy K who’s the talent, and then there are two managers – we both work on different aspects of the music group. I work more with PR, communications, and logistics, and the other manager works more on technical stuff, video editing, things of that nature. And then we also have a social media campaign manager who manages social media.

SK: Mark and Dennis are our managers. I always explain to people that Dennis is the optimist and Mark is the realist. Dennis is gonna be the one who goes out to everyone and is like, look, this is the product you want, you gotta get this stuff. And then Mark will come to me and be like, is this really what you want, do you actually mean this, is this really what you want to portray? It’s a great balance.

DG: Then we have another Jewish rapper (he goes by Ursu) who goes to Binghamton who’s very passionate about this field as well. He knows Sammy as well and we’re all acquainted and friendly. He’s visited a few times. We have good open communication for collaborative team effort.

As far as your question about revenue, at this point we’ve actually all invested a bit. Here and there we all put in a couple of bucks for things like mic rental, website domain, social media related promotions, stuff like that. As I like to say, we are in our “pre-revenue” stage, but we’re hoping to exit that soon.

On one level, we’re all friends. We all talk about funny things that happened in our day and things like that. But the conversation can easily switch to business and we’re all very passionate about getting this moving.

There’s a rap group that was very popular starting around 2008 called Travis Porter. Somebody got a hold of our video and showed it to Travis Porter. They responded to this person, “that’s tight,” a colloquial term saying that they liked it.

Separately, in another arena, we’ve been working with a fraternity at the University of Indiana to have us open for Travis Porter, which we did this past week (Thursday, April 20). Little did they know that this is the guy they saw on the video.

BK: When do you expect to exit the “pre-revenue” stage?

SK: We’re definitely on the verge. We can’t predict it for sure, since you never know what label will reach out, and whether or not they’re willing to work with our circumstances.

DG: I would say that at the early stages we’d put all of the revenue back into growing Sam’s following and covering the costs we’ve had. We’re lucky enough to be working with people who are extending their resources to help Sam. These include video editors, producers, and things like that. We’re definitely looking into merchandising as an option. There’s not too much we can give away as far as the actual numbers, but we’re looking forward to starting those kinds of projects.

BK: Do you view what you’re doing as a long-term career?

SK: That’s definitely the goal. I’m not trying to rap to make money – I’m trying to make money to rap, I want to be able to make this my career. I want to do what I love, get paid for it, and be able to do it again. Instead of having some other job and rapping in my off time, I want to have this as my main gig. Shows, radio station interviews, all those sorts of things play into it. Do what you love, love what you do. That’s what I stand by.

DG: A lot of times people hear of the phrase “Jewish Rapper” and they immediately think of Matisyahu or a handful of other Jewish rappers. But I genuinely think that there aren’t many talented and devoted Jewish rappers that are religious and devoted to the Torah, Mitzvot, and learning in their everyday lives. For Sam and the rest of us, we view this as getting a voice out there from the Jewish community as an influencer through hip hop, a channel that Orthodox influencers don’t generally take. To be able to have that voice is very important for Sam, and it’s a very humbling experience to have people listen and react positively to the message that Sam, and we as a group, is trying to portray. So far, thank God, it’s working out.

We want to stay away from the stigma of “just a Jewish rapper” or just rapping about Israel.” So we try to stay away from politics, race issues, and stuff like that. We try to show that Sam is a Jewish white male who can actually get his voice heard and have a nice message to share with the world.

BK: How would you categorize your fan base?

SK: I’ve definitely gotten feedback from people all across the spectrum. My little brother who’s twelve years old loves my stuff. Whenever I write songs, I keep in mind that I want him to love it. At the same time, my grandmother is one of my biggest fans. She religiously listens to my music. And I also get broader feedback from people her age, people my brother’s age, and all across the board. I feel like I can reach literally the entire world, because of this huge diversity of ages that all listen. There are different aspects that they like. Some like the beat, some the words, some the flow, some the lyrics, some the message, and these factors as well vary for different age groups. Obviously older fans appreciate the lyrics...
As you studied in Vassar College as an undergrad. How did you decide to attend a small liberal-arts college?

BB: My mother attended Vassar; I was attracted to her legacy. When I visited the campus, I fell in love with the massive stone gate entranceway, and tall, thick trees that were apparently decisive in keeping Vassar in Poughkeepsie, away from moving to New Haven to merge with Yale. I chose Vassar because the music department was strong, and Latin, which I loved in high school, was taught there. Grounding in that ancient language gave me a sense of words as infinitely plastic energies.

AS: Your bachelor's degree was in music composition. How did you get interested in studying music? What sorts of different things have you done with music? Do you still compose?

BB: A lot of being "creative" is what you believe about yourself. If you are sure you're not creative, you'll fear a creative writing class. If you're open to the possibility of gorgeous things flowing from your pen or keyboard, you won't be produced anywhere, any time, perhaps surprising the writer. Look at the ingenious paintings of unscientific kindergarteners. But people are pulled by different magnets; those of us who choose to walk the austere path of writing are motivated perhaps by a desire to investigate how syllables might evoke what we call "meaning," "story," and by mysterious unconscious motivations. It takes practiced discipline to write, build a table, dig ditches, not get at the glorious range of skills humans possess (and our non-human friends, too, apparently!).

If as a writing teacher, if I can help a student feel the thrill of solving words on a page, help shed limiting ideas about who he might be as a writer, nurse freedom in his expression and simultaneous respect for rigorous editing into his writing life, I have succeeded.

AS: What might a student look to get out of studying creative writing even if they aren't an English major or even if they might not think of themselves as particularly "creative"?

BB: I have no formula; I might know the plot before I write, I might discover the plot after years of burrowing blindly forward like a mole. Not knowing can be vital to my process, the state-John Keats called "negative capability," a fertile receptivity to what comes. I often flash on an idea for a play overhearing a conversation on a NYC street, reading something in the paper. In terms of finishing work, "How do you know when a poem is done?" I once asked an Irish poet elder. Looking at me quizically, he replied: "When it's done." Sounds like a Zen koan, but I got it: there is no formula, and that's why the process, as long as it takes, and I can take years on a play or poem, is exciting.

My process: quickly writing by hand a first draft, then revising and revising, adding, subtracting, brainstorming, cutting, standing back and seeking again the "beating heart" of the piece. Also, my husband's feedback is a must; he knows where I struggle in my writing, can say: you're doing that again – try this instead...he really is my collaborator and often I can't proceed without his input. I do the same for the novel he is working on.

AS: Can you tell us about some interesting projects that you are currently working on?

BB: I am now finishing a play I have worked on a long time, about an Afghanistan vet undergoing a hallucination/flashback to a traumatic combat event. I am proud that I have almost finished what was formerly a high energy, character-rich but chaotic play, in terms of dialogue. And as I said, I am working with Dr. Snider, co-writing book and writing lyrics and music for a kids' musical called Heartsong. I plan to write a folk musical based on the picturesque American folk song, "Betsy from Pike.

AS: Could you tell us briefly about the different classes you offer in YU?

BB: I teach First Year Writing and creative writing courses (Playwriting, Introduction to Creative Writing, Poetry Workshop). The creative writing courses are joyful, full of discoveries I make alongside and because of my students. First Year Writing is more difficult to teach, but I am very process-oriented and seek to empower young writers to develop and grow their own most effective writing practices.

AS: What led you to come to YU? Has your experience teaching at YU differed from what you expected coming in?

BB: I very much wanted to move to New York to pursue playwriting, so when I saw the position at YU advertised in the Times, I put all my intention toward getting the job. YU has been a gratifying place to teach since classes are small, and students, for the most part, are vibrant, engaged. I am Jewish but practice no formal religion. At YU, I learn a great deal about Judaism from students and faculty about the meaning of terms and holidays. I am moved by how my students are sustained by their Jewish communities;
The Soul of A Cappella: A Review Of A Kumzitz in the Rain 3

By Ariel Reiner

Just in time for Sefirat Haomer, producer and arranger Doni Gross has released his third album in the a cappella CD trilogy A Kumzitz in the Rain, and this time around, like with the first and second albums, listeners will not be disappointed. Now you may be thinking, “three? I never even heard one and two!” That would be a fair statement since the A.K.I.T.R. albums have flown somewhat under the radar. I’d like to briefly discuss why that may be, before elaborating in more detail on this specific album release. I do not wish to go into the Halachos of listening to music, live or recorded, during sefira right now, but let it be noted that many Orthodox Jews refrain from listening to music during the days of sefira, even when the music that they might play in the privacy of their homes and cars is recorded. However, many poskim allow for a cappella music to be played during these weeks, as the lack of instruments detracts from the simcha with which music infuses us. It is something which is definitely worthy of contacting your Local Orthodox Rabbi to discuss.

Because of the limitation on music during sefira, a myriad of albums has been released over the years which consist solely of human voices in order to avoid the issue of listening to instrumental music. Well-known artists like A.K.A. Pella and Six17 revolutionized the Jewish a cappella world with tracks that make you wonder how they can produce such sounds merely with their voices and beat boxing. The popularity of this genre has led as well to a cappella songs being produced for non-sefira times, such as A.K.A. Pella’s Purim song “What Does Haman Say,” a spinoff of the secular song “What Does the Fox Say?” Other groups like The Maccabeats and YStuds as well have used the a cappella genre to produce creative tracks which can liven up one’s day, in addition to producing more traditional ones.

Undoubtedly some Jewish Music listeners wish to listen to upbeat and lively music all year round, and these a cappella innovations help one do so even during the Three Weeks. But sometimes these tunes cause us to lose focus of what the limitation on music during these times is meant to be about. Sometimes Jewish a cappella releases are more of a technical circumvention of a prohibition, than a channeling of that prohibition to provide inspiration. What eliminating music can do for a person in terms of framing the days of sefira as more somber, soulful a cappella can do to turn those days into ones of inspirational introspection. This is what A Kumzitz in the Rain does so uniquely for its listeners. In fact, in the featured description of the third album on mostymusic.com, it states, “Once again, the group is focused on delivering pure and catchy sing-along kumzitz songs with no electronic or synthesized sounds.”

Due to its more soulful and less creative a cappella style, as well as its general lack of well-known Jewish music names, A Kumzitz in the Rain may not be a familiar brand to many. But it should be. The tracks on these three albums help bring listeners back to those inspirational Three Weeks summer camp kumzitzes. Each song is a soulful and stirring classic. They are the tunes you often hear during kedusha on Shabbos, meant to bring you down memory lane. A listener may glance at the track list and wonder why it’s necessary to record “Hamalach” or “Habein Yakir” yet again, but these a cappella vocals give the pieces a whole new meaning.

A Kumzitz in the Rain 3 – which is available in stores, on iTunes, and with a free sampler on Youtube – has two new features setting it apart from the previous albums. First, A.K.I.T.R. has been successful in its first two albums in using children soloists to bring the songs to another level. These kids are not screechy, but rather hit their notes well and have impressive vocal abilities.

AS: Have you noticed anything in particular that distinguishes the YU student (for better or for worse...) from students you have encountered in other settings?
AS: You have held a wide range of teaching positions in a diverse array of contexts, You have taught ESL, creative writing, and literature. You have done graduate teaching, adult education, and writer’s residencies. You have taught in traditional colleges, community colleges, and high schools. In all this teaching experience, have you found that there is some quality to the teaching that is really the same every time, or is each teaching position just a whole new adventure?
BB: Your wonderful question travels far and wide. Building relationships in the classroom is what I value most; I’m not a fan of virtual learning, though I’m aware of its benefits. Another thread through my teaching is that I aim to encourage creativity and creative problem solving in every student, so that perhaps a writer can write something he believed impossible.

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Beauty and the Beast: Something There?

By Tzvi Levitin

There is one moment in Bill Condon's new live-action adaptation of 1991's Beauty and the Beast that hasn't garnered enough attention. A moment that shocks the audience, jarring the senses, and leaves many a viewer squirming in their seat. It's a one-second shot that calls into question the modernization of Disney, the challenges that come along with injecting "reality" into animated film, and whether tales as old as time are best left untouched by the 21st century. Yes, you know exactly which moment I'm speaking about.

Or maybe you don't. For it is not the revelation of the preening antagonist Gaston's (Luke Evans) right-hand-man LeFou's (Josh Gad) homosexuality that I speak of (I'm sorry, but shouldn't the Stockholm-syndrome-induced-bestiality trouble you more?), but rather a moment midway through the movie during Belle's (Emma Watson) performance of "Something There," when the princess-to-be starts to realize that the Beast (Dan Stevens) has a tender side. She engages him in a flirtatious snowball fight, and after she pelts his massive frame with a well-aimed shot, he gathers mounds of snow and ice into his massive paws and launches a ball the size of a watermelon at Belle's head with brute strength. The snow boulder slams into Belle's face at full force, dealing her a blow that in the real world would surely kill her even before her skull slams into the stone floor beneath her. In the movie, of course, Belle is unharmed and continues her song, and the entire theater bursts into uproarious laughter of the sort you'd hear watching a blooper reel or America's Funniest Home Videos.

At first, the cheap comedy of the scene troubled me, seemingly so out of place in the otherwise laugh-out-loud-free movie, but upon further reflection I realized that the film needs this moment — awkward, contradictory, slapstick — to maintain its charm over the audience. We need to buy into the storyline of this imprisoned girl falling in love with her beastly captor, but we cannot do so without an appropriate amount of distance between our reality and that of the movie. The film lost some of that distance when it transformed the animation into a combination of convincing CGI and live-action; whereas the 1991 version of the Beast was an amorphous tapestry of brown with the gentle voice of a nobleman, the 2017 Beast confronts us in high definition with the yellow-stained tusks of a boar, the matted fur of a bison, and the bone-chilling growl of Bane from The Dark Knight Rises. To compensate for what would otherwise become an uncomfortable experience of watching a young girl fall in love with an animal, the film maintains as many innocent qualities of the animated world — the world of birds sewing dresses, of enchanted forests, of the Road Runner dropping anvils onto Wile E. Coyote — as the live-action medium will allow without becoming too ludicrous.

Given this premise, many of the other elements of the movie that initially seem to miss the mark begin to make more sense. The film makes a half-hearted attempt at complicating and strengthening Belle by portraying her as an aspiring inventor instead of a ditsy and absentminded daydreamer. But they dare not make Belle too independent or fierce, lest her eventual swoon into the arms of the Beast lose its credibility, so any spark or ingenuity Belle exhibits at the start of the film dissolves as soon as she is taken captive. The duo's bizarre magical trip to Belle's childhood home in Paris, the site of her mother's death at the hands of the Black Plague, ultimately serves as nothing more than a throwaway attempt to make the Beast seem more human.

The singing and dancing furniture are the saving grace of the film; while at times they seem more anatromantic than animated (Ian McKellen's Cogsworth loses too much humanity to the metallic workings of his clock), the furniture, more than anything, maintains the magical innocence of the original film and charms the viewer into the world of fantasy. Without Lumière's (Ewan McGregor) performance of "Days in the Sun," the viewer would likely fall out of the film's spell and question the problematic love story at its core. The film employs these strategies to circumvent the dilemma lying at the heart of this remake: bringing the animated feature into live action requires injecting the story with realness without giving it too much credibility. Because we are not meant to think about this film. We are meant to be swept away into two hours of beautiful cinematography, flawless special effects, and heartwarming nostalgia. And in this, from the rose petals to the golden thread of Belle's iconic ball gown, the film flourishes without question.

SAMMY K, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

a lot more, but the younger crowd definitely likes how it sounds a lot more. When the music is aesthetically pleasing in all of those regards, that's how you reach the whole spectrum. (3)

BK: What are you guys studying in YU?

DG: Currently I am in the JSS program. I'm a junior studying Accounting. I went to Israel for one year and now I'm finishing my fourth semester on campus. It's been a great experience so far. I really enjoy the school aspect of it. I was here for three semesters before Sam came along, and it was pretty good, and now it's just that much better.

SK: This is actually my first semester on campus. I was in Israel for a year and a half. I'm in Rav Belizon's shiur in BMP. I'm majoring in Management right now, but I plan on switching over to Marketing. But so far so good. I'll be here as long as it takes to either get signed or graduate first.

BK: Would you in theory drop the degree for a promising enough career?

SK: For sure, if it's a high-paying job. If someone's in medical school and, before they graduate, some hospital comes to them and offers them an opportunity to start making millions of dollars a year, they'd probably take it. I'd say that example more or less carries over for me. Obviously I'd like to have a degree in my back pocket, but if next month someone wants to sign a million dollar deal, it would be hard to turn down.

And I really do like YU. I love my shiur. YU is a good community to be a part of. There are lots of students with similar mindsets, which is nice. It's a very nice community.

DG: YU is different from most other schools. At any school you can have a close network of friends, and even maybe a Chabad or Hillel to reach out to, but in YU there's such a massive community. You can strike up a conversation with so many people who are similar to you. Everyone at YU who has heard about Sammy has been really supportive. People feel connected. It's different from just any rapper at any college campus. Sammy is a specifically Jewish rapper who relates to the students here in a specific way.

SK: I'll have people in classes that I'm in who I've never spoken to, but then they recognize me in class and will tell me that they loved the video, or something like that. People recognize who I am and it's all love, it's all great. I haven't gotten a single negative word from anybody here about the music.

You can follow Sammy K on Twitter (@SammyKTheRapper), Instagram, Facebook, Spotify, and at www.sammyktherapper.com.
How to be a Winner: Comparing Trump to your Favorite Television Characters

By Elliot Fuchs

I would note that in his most recent book “Great Again,” the very first chapter is titled “Winning Again” and he goes on to discuss the topic of winning at length for the next chapter and a half. It is the same strategy used by Specter and Gold. And it works for Trump as well.

While reading Steve Jobs’ by Walter Isaacson, I was often amazed by Jobs’ unwillingness to ever concede to his colleagues. This was especially astounding in instances when it seemed as though his colleagues were right, such as, Apple’s long lasting tradition to have different hardware than other companies so Apple users must purchase collaborative Apple products. Continuously, people would support Jobs’ ideas while he was presenting them, and once he left the room condemn him for those very same ideas.

But despite his stubbornness and headstrong attitude, you still have an iPhone in your pocket. And the reason you do is because Steve Jobs, perhaps better than anyone else was a master of reality manipulation. He manipulated people into thinking that his “bad” ideas were good ones and manipulated consumers into buying those same ideas. Steve Jobs told himself he was a winner in even the most difficult times, and as a result, Steve Jobs died a winner.

This phenomenon was called, by people close to Jobs, Steve’s “reality distortion field,” wherein lied a mechanism to deflect his naysayers despite their valuable points. He created his own reality and pushed it so far down their throats that they themselves began to believe what he was saying. The truth is that with a strong presentation and the ambitious look in his eyes, he could have had them believing anything. The interesting connection between

the expectation of a quality product will turn into to

see winner, continued on page 21

done well enough, when one bends his own reality, he will bend that of those around him. That is to say, that if your entire industry knows that you do not lose when you are wearing a certain pair of socks, then they will cower when they see you wearing them.

Of course, this only works to a certain extent, and eventually if one’s expectations are unrealistic then the reality they are trying to form will come tumbling down upon them. Berdik describes as much in the interview, when he notes that the wine can only taste so bad before the expectation of a quality product will turn into to the realization that is isn’t as high quality as the price indicated.

In an effort to stick to the theme of celebrities, I’d like to include the example of Charlie Sheen. Two and a Half Men fans can remember when Charlie Sheen was a legend. He played a savage on the screen and took that savagery into his daily life. At this writing, Sheen’s twitter bio self proclaims him as a “#Winner” but I assume that even the most diehard of Sheen’s fans would admit that he is not an “all circumstance winner” like he used to be. Because when Charlie got in a fight with his cable television series, had

the audience strictly for ratings. It’s a good point. But how do the viewers never question the realistic nature of these shows? Why are these shows so popular if the realistic nature of these shows? Why are these shows so popular if you already “know” the outcome—namely, that Harvey and Ari are the inevitable winners?

The reason is because even though Ari and Harvey are fake, there are people in the world that are just like them. In fact, there are those that say that Ari Gold is meant to depict famous talent representative Ari Emmanuel, in which case many of these stories are not fictional at all. These people—who self-identify as winners, and continuously win, assured by their own self-confidence. Donald Trump is one of those people.

You see, Specter, Gold, and Trump succeed by bending reality. The most famous scenario in which one’s psychology bends reality is the “Placebo Effect.” This is a famous phenomenon which occurs when an individual takes a fake medication and feels better due to a fallacy where he believes he is taking a real drug, and begins to feel better as a result even though he has not taken any actual medication. But it seems to me, that the Placebo Effect is the baseline of this concept, and we see people bend reality around us every day. These people possess a very special set of skills.

When you declare yourself a winner, and truly believe it to be the case, your confidence becomes top notch and you win more often. Confidence puts you at the doorstep of success even prior to any engagement in the endeavor you are about to embark upon. When the wins begin to tally up, you develop a reputation for being a winner. When you become famous to others as being a winner, your opposition will become less confident when they face off against you, increasing your success rate geometrically.

This phenomenon plays on the old adage about telling a lie enough times that people start believing it. That is what is happening here. Just as the lie spreads through recognition of the masses, so too, does one’s esteem as a winner.

This is why, the American voters felt that it was vote Trump and win or vote Hillary and lose. Because Trump was already known nationwide as the winner. And like many of his other endeavors, he won the election too.

Jobs and Trump in this regard, is that when they bent reality, they bent it into one where rules didn’t apply to them. They were successful, despite some of their egregious actions or comments, because the reality they created allowed them to be.

Perhaps this is what Jobs meant when he stated that “people don’t know what they want until I give it to them.” I venture to say that he was suggesting a situation where he knew what the people would want because he was going to force them to want what he was providing.

Pulitzer prize winning journalist Gareth Cook interviewed Chris Berdik, author of Mind over Mind, and he wrote about their discussion in a 2012 article in the Scientific American. In it, Berdik gives the example of Schein’s wine was high priced until it was finally opened and tasted sour. This really makes one wonder how Trump, unlike Sheen, has not lost his ability to bend reality. His statements throughout the campaign trail certainly seemed to have been inflammatory enough to do so. But I would suggest the following conjecture, as I suggested in a previous article for The Commentator, titled Breaking Rules and a Successful Brand: How Trump Won the Presidency, Trump won because of his “Halo Effect” and even though he made himself a despised individual on the campaign trail he didn’t do anything to damage his brand. And as a result, people still flocked to his persona and presentation. The winner, a politician can create his own halo here in this regard is Frank Underwood from House Of Cards. This is, of course, because they are both politicians that used this persona to help them win the presidency. The difference is that as opposed to the characters and entrepreneurs we analyzed previously, Frank uses his reality distortion ability to manipulate others to progress his will as oppose women coming out against his every action, and became very addicted to drugs, the winning persona disappeared. Sheen’s wine was high priced until it was finally opened and tasted sour.

This really makes one wonder how Trump, unlike Sheen, has not lost his ability to bend reality. His statements throughout the campaign trail certainly seemed to have been inflammatory enough to do so. But I would suggest the following conjecture, as I suggested in a previous article for The Commentator, titled Breaking Rules and a Successful Brand: How Trump Won the Presidency, Trump won because of his “Halo Effect” and even though he made himself a despised individual on the campaign trail he didn’t do anything to damage his brand. And as a result, people still flocked to his persona and presentation. The winner, a politician can create his own halo here in this regard is Frank Underwood from House Of Cards. This is, of course, because they are both politicians that used this persona to help them win the presidency. The difference is that as opposed to the characters and entrepreneurs we analyzed previously, Frank uses his reality distortion ability to manipulate others to progress his will as oppose
Stoicism: A Philosophy for Ambitious College Students

By Rebecca Kerzner

College students are constantly busy. Running from activity to meeting to next activity, there is always something going on and off campus. That’s part of the fun: the buzz of things constantly happening. This student body is filled with ambitious students. Presidents of clubs making endless meetings with the Office of Student Life. Athletes running from class to basketball or softball practice. Peer tutors hopping around to teach calculus to struggling newbies. Everyone has their own reasons for why they do what they do. For some it’s the perfect GPA. Others just want to look good on paper. But at the end of the day, everyone’s really in it for one overarching goal: Success.

But what’s most annoying about failure is that the struggle to overcome is setback for the meta goal: success. Each failure moment feels like a personal defeat to the person feeling the pain. It’s like being treated with the same drug which increases time lost. So, how should one deal with such obstacles? How should one respond in the face of failure?

I love those cheesy quotes like “Choose to be happy” and “Enjoy the little things”. They give me the inspiration and positivity to keep moving forward. I recognize that such “isms” happen on life’s issues and share an idealistic view that is often dubbed as cliche, irrational, and overused. But still, they adorn of lock screens, post it notes, and posters in our rooms. They’re so widespread, and printed on so many consumer goods, so there must be a logical reason for why all of these “isms” have come to be part of today’s consumer culture.

In my search for success, I came across a game changer called Stoicism. Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in the early 3rd century BCE. Famously practiced by Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, the tenets of Stoicism asserted that attaining inner peace comes from within, rather than from external events. The goal is to battle destructive emotions head on by practicing self-control and conscious intention, with a recognition of the short time we are given on this Earth. Stoicism places great importance on facing and understanding our circumstances to overcome them instead of running away from them.

There is so much knowledge to gain from the Stoics. But for the purpose of success, I’ve chosen to focus on three simple understandings to refer to the four questions psychologist Chuck Chakrapani, a Stoic minimalist, often asks himself when dealing with conflict:

First: Practice misfortune. Seneca believed that “It is in times of security that the spirit should be preparing itself for difficult times; while fortune is bestowing favors on it is then the time for it to be strengthened against her rebuffs.” Practicing misfortune is about making a point to practice what we fear. Seneca practiced living in quasi-poverty once a month. A week. He would eat less food and wear worse clothes to put himself in the situation of poverty to experience it and would ask himself “Is this what I used to dread?” The idea behind his actions was that in putting himself in the situation where something bad like poverty actually occurred, he would be prepared. So if we were to prepare ourselves and anticipate that things would not always go our way by pushing ourselves more physically and mentally, we’d be prepared for whatever life throws at us.

Second: Train your perception to avoid good and bad. The stoics exercised “Turning the Obstacle Upside Down.” With this logic, every “bad” moment became a new source for good. Every “bad” was supposed to be seen as an opportunity to develop strengths and break down limitations. For example, usually if someone was getting on your nerves, the response would be anger and frustration. But the stoics exercised the obstacle upside down and mentally, we’d be prepared for whatever life throws at us.

Third: Remember-it’s all ephemeral. It’s important to remember just how small we are in the world. What we experience it and would ask himself “Is this what I used to dread?” The idea behind his actions was that in putting himself in the situation where something bad like poverty actually occurred, he would be prepared. So if we were to prepare ourselves and anticipate that things would not always go our way by pushing ourselves more physically and mentally, we’d be prepared for whatever life throws at us.

The Stoics believed that “It is not the thing itself that afflicts us, but our judgments on them.” The theories aren’t meant to be a discussion for intellectual pursuit, but as tenets for practical application.

For as applying these principles to everyday life, I’d like to refer to the four questions psychologist Chuck Chakrapani, a Stoic minimalist, often asks himself when dealing with conflict:

1. Is this under my control?
2. Am I reacting to someone without exercising my choice to act the way I want?
3. Am I getting irritated by the little things?
4. Am I enjoying the life that I am blessed with?

These are definitely big questions. It’s impossible to address them in their full scope. But if there’s anything we know it is that asking the tough questions and delving into the possible answers for those questions is beneficial too.

Being that the YU college experience can be so intense and all encompassing, tough times are unavoidable. But Stoicism says that we are more in control than we think when it comes to handling those emotions. Changing one’s perceptions on the good and bad is a great tool to use when dealing with the everyday college struggles, especially because it’s impossible to guarantee that everything around you will always run smoothly. But dealing with the hard times efficiently begins with understanding yourself. There will always be times where it seems the deans just aren’t listening, the Office of Student Life is taking forever to pass on your event, and you have two projects and three tests on one day but the next time it happens, remember to channel your inner Stoic. Of course, we are by no means all philosophers here. But everyone can take a moment to take advantage of the insight Stoicism has to offer.

Think about it. It might be worthwhile.

WINNER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

to making them bend to his personal desires, as Trump does. But the theme remains the same, namely, that they got the presidency as they wanted because they are winners. Interestingly, in an interview, actor Kevin Spacey made the comparison between his character and Trump.

By labeling himself a winner, Trump enters every situation that he does with a certain standard of excellence. And when he begins exciting that speech or starts negotiating that deal, both his and his opponents’ brains already know the outcome and now they just have to play it out as the puppeteer.

Perhaps with that mindset, we can now understand why Aaron Korsch has Specker refer to himself as a winner in all of the first 5 episodes and why he continues to label himself as one through all six seasons of Suits to date. Furthermore, we can also understand why Mark Wahlberg and the creators of Entourage do the same.

While on the topics of these entertainment personalities, I would also add that I think since people overestimate how realistic these shows are in comparison to real life. When they see someone who reminds them of one of these characters, they actually believe they are as perfect as the TV show character. This is obviously absurd, given that humans don’t follow scripts or get re-takes when they mess up.

But the absurdity will fade if the individual has already used your perception of reality and your perception of his abilities to take an immediate advantage over you. Season after season they talk about winning. Speech after speech he talks about how well both the character and the real person always seem to.

The last factor I want to discuss is the fact that in addition to their constant deliverance of confidence and their imperiousness, there’s the fact that in some point or another in their respective shows, the characters have let their guards down and revealed that they are all soft, caring people. When the facade drops, they go from winners, egotists, and narcissists to genuine people who care about their friends and loved ones.

Can we assume that the same applies to Trump? For sure we have seen that like all of these characters, Trump has shown tremendous loyalty which is another trait they all seem to have in common. Ari went to great lengths to get Vinny movies even after being fired, Harvey’s yearbook quote was about loyalty and he was willing to go to jail for Mike,) and Trump has been criticized for giving cabinet positions to his “baronial “buddies” instead of people who he left considers “qualified.”

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By Doniel Weinreich

This article was published online prior to the church’s protest. A counter protest formed opposite the church’s protest and was reported on by The Commentator.

Imagine the Wilf Campus at 9:45 on a Monday morning. People file out of Rubin with backpacks on and teetihlin in hand after the 9 o’clock minyan. At the intersection of 18th and Amsterdam, students—perhaps some queer ones among them—pass each other as they navigate the ongoing construction and constant stream of traffic—some on the way to their 10 o’clock classes, while others tardily make their way to morning seder. Local Washington Heights residents—Jews and non-Jews alike—travel through our campus as well during their morning routine. A thousand students are already immersed in Torah study in the classrooms of Freist and our several batei midrash.

But today, something is different. Standing in the middle of this daily scene on our little strip of Amsterdam Avenue are half a dozen protestors, each with as many signs as he or she can display at once. The signs contain a variety of hateful and abominable slogans: “GOD HATES JEWS,” “THE JEWS KILLED CHRIST,” “YOUR RABBI IS A WHORE,” “THANK GOD FOR DEAD SOLDIERS,” and, of course, “GOD HATES FAGS.”

And nobody recoils. Nobody even looks for more than a couple seconds. Besides for the presence of this small group, everything goes along exactly the same way as any other day. Forty-five minutes later, this deplorable group packs up and moves on to its next victim.

This is what many people wish to see this Monday morning, when the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) will be protesting here. In an email to the student body after the protest was first announced, Vice President Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph and Vice President for University and Community Life Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander encouraged us not to engage the group. During a meeting with students, Dr. Paul Ostreich, Executive Director of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs, and Dr. Chaim Nissel, University Dean of Students, warned students that counter-protest is what WBC desires, that it gives them further exposure and that they make their money from frivolous lawsuits afterwards. Doron Levine, Editor-in-Chief of The Commentator, wrote in his latest editorial that no one should protest, warning it would give the WBC unnecessary attention and divide the YU community; he even paints a similar picture to above as an ideal.

But what is contained in this picture? What message does it send? Is it one of resolute defiance, or of apathy and cowardice? We’re not the first university the WBC has done it to. When they protested Shanghai High School a month ago, they were barely aware of the institution beyond the fact that it is Jewish, and they told the media that they didn’t care about the size of their audience or whether they accomplish anything. Regarding their protest at YU, they told The Commentator that the only response they seek from YU is the administration confessing that our ancestors killed Jesus and that we repent and accept him as our Messiah. These clearly aren’t sane, rational, or grounded people. They view protesting with their abhorrent signs and songs as their sacred religious duty and will continue to do so tomorrow and the next day, without any regard for reaction or lack thereof. They aren’t going to be fazed or defeated by some YU students snubbing them.

Furthermore, the effort to silence all counter-protest is futile, and the idea that the media won’t cover the WBC’s protest is fantasy. Protesting won’t bring them undue attention; they already get that attention and will continue to do so anyway. Does anyone seriously think it’s at all realistic that no one is going to protest or engage with people so offensive? Does anyone think that Jewish media organizations aren’t going to jump at the chance to cover something so exciting and controversial, happening in our little world? The only question is what we want that media coverage to look like.

Do we want to report that students callously carried on with their day? Or would we rather it report that YU as a community, in an organized effort, rejected the WBC’s spite?

This isn’t about the Westboro Baptist Church. This is about us. Who are we? The purpose of protest isn’t always to make concrete change; sometimes it’s just to affirm what kind of people we are. When people are on our doorstep spewing slurs at queer people and saying that God hates them and they’re doomed to an eternity of hellfire, are we silent? Or do we stand with the LGBTQ people in our community?

Levine claimed in his article that the WBC’s message is alien to us and that it has no relevance to, or purchase about us. Who are we? The purpose of protest isn’t always to make concrete change; sometimes it’s just to affirm what kind of people we are. When people are on our doorstep spewing slurs at queer people and saying that God hates them and they’re doomed to an eternity of hellfire, are we silent? Or do we stand with the LGBTQ people in our community?

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When people are on our doorstep spewing slurs at queer people and saying that God hates them and they’re doomed to an eternity of hellfire, are we silent? Or do we stand with the LGBTQ people in our community?

Levine claimed in his article that the WBC’s message is alien to us and that it has no relevance to, or purchase about us. Who are we? The purpose of protest isn’t always to make concrete change; sometimes it’s just to affirm what kind of people we are.
"I DO FEEL THAT YU AND ITS ADMINISTRATION HAVE A DUTY TO BRIDGE SOME LEVEL OF COMPENSATION OR CREDIT FOR THOSE STUDENTS WHO TOOK AND RESPECTED THE ESSENCE OF THE CORE DESPITE WHOLEHEARTEDLY KNOWING IT WAS A WASTE OF TIME."

the one hand, I am pleased that the school was finally able to sit down and piece together a final conclusive decision on the matter. On the other hand, however, I do feel a little ripped off. As a pre-med student and biology major, I was pressured by my advisors and the deans of the school to take NAWO in the Fall of 2016, as were many other science students. I was told at the time that the likelihood of NAWO becoming abolished as were many other science students. I was told at the time that the likelihood of NAWO becoming abolished was slim and I should simply get it out of the way early as a favor to myself. While the class may have interested some of my peers, as someone who has taken a fair share of advanced biology and chemistry courses, and various labs, I found it to be a waste of time. I took NAWO to cross it off my list of requirements holding me back from graduation. For YU to come out now and permanently rid its existence for everyone pursuing a health career is severely unfair for those who were misinformed by the school faculty and forced to sit around for three hours a week listening to a lecture that was centered and designed for someone who didn’t know what a cell was. So, am I annoyed? Yes, of course. It’s a little inconvenient, and I know countless pre-health students who have stayed an extra semester for the pure purpose of taking NAWO. For some, this decision has significantly quickened their path to graduate school and enabled them to take entrance level exams such as the PCAT, MCAT or DAT a little earlier than anticipated. For others, it potentially delayed this process and possibly pushed graduate school off by a semester or two. I’m not one to judge the fairness of this decision, as I’m sure it will not change anyone’s ultimate career aspirations or goals to a degree worth stressing over. Regardless of such, I do feel that YU and its administration have a duty to bridge some level of compensation or credit for those students who took and respected the essence of the core despite wholeheartedly knowing it was a waste of time. There is a saying that goes “time is money.” The NAWO course is without a doubt guilty of wasting the time of many science students, and now that it is no longer needed to graduate the school administration should be burdened with finding a non-monetary form of compensation for students such as myself. A worthy suggestion could be using the NAWO core as a substitution for a different core of equal credit value. Ultimately, it is announcements such as these which force me to lean back in my chair on the fourth floor, take a sip of coffee, and humorously whisper under my breath “nowhere but here.”

Consider our Daughters

By Adin Rayman

My wife has attended three educational institutions in her adult life. All three institutions taught both Torah Sheb’al Peh and Torah Sheb’al Peh in single-gender settings. The first two offered women nearly equal access to Gemara learning with respect to time and resources allotted. The third institution offered her less than 20% of the time allotted to her male peers. Sadly, the institution that shortchanged my wife was not a school near the fringe of Orthodoxy, but the flagship institution of Modern Orthodox female education: Stern College for Women.

I wish to preface my arguments by insisting that—as an Orthodox Jew, my commitment to Halacha remains unquestionable. I am not a proponent of total religious egalitarianism or any other—ism which considers its own values a more powerful normative force than the words of the Shulchan Aruch and Rama.

A master of any discipline, be it art, athletics, or academics, will tell you that time and practice are the keys to proficiency and mastery. No matter how innately talented an individual may be, a master must be trained in a craft, true mastery can never be achieved. Mastery of Torah is no different. Spiritual mentors both inside and outside YU consistently stress the importance of dedicating time every day to studying Torah. Our daily birkut haTorah reminds us that we are commanded not only to learn, but to be, to seek, to busy ourselves, with Torah. And when it comes to the difference between Torah learning on the Wilf campus and on the Beren campus, time again proves its importance.

The Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP) on the Wilf campus ensures its participants more than 21 hours (seder and shiur time combined) of intensive study of Torah Sheb’al Peh each week. Stern College’s Advanced Gemara shiur is in session for a total of under six hours per week (including seder time, of which SCW students are afforded only 1.5 hours a week compared to three hours a day in MYP). A Stern woman who wishes to devote additional time to preparing or reviewing for shiur must seek a course outside of our evening schedule. This time must be found among hours taken up by classes, labs, and coursework for the coming days. There is only one way to change the unequal reality our community finds itself in: Stern College must offer an MYP, or MYP-style program, afford ing similar amounts of time for accelerated Torah study during which no secular studies classes can be offered.

Those who would oppose such a program on ideological grounds presumably disapprove of the existing Gemara shiurim offered in Stern, and I harbor little hope of convincing them that the hours women spend learning Gemara should increase. But I remind them that YU, an institution which looks to personalities such as Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Rav Aharon Lichtenstein as heroes, has already firmly accepted the importance of women’s Gemara study. The change I advocate for is simply one of degree, an adjustment that will fully realize the institution’s commitment to the highest level of Torah study for all. This change should not offend any member of the YU community on an ideological level. I am not suggesting, explicitly or implicitly, any shift in normative practice or ideology. I am pushing for more of something that our institution and community has already decided is a value worth pursuing.

Many may respond that such a drastic change is not warranted, as the number of women who would be interested in such a program could be very small—20 women would be a very optimistic estimate. I would respond that these 20 women are worth the change. Looking towards the future, I dream of a Stern College in which 200 women would participate in such a program, but that dream can never be realized if we do not take the first step. If we do not send the message that we value the Talmud Torah of women as much as we do that of men, a generation in which as many women are learning Torah as men will remain a fever dream. I shudder to think that my future daughters may find themselves in an institution that caps their potential, a potential that would be more easily realized had they been born sons.

The only true obstacle to such a change is a logistical one, and although it may present a large hurdle, it is one with which the institution must grapple. The installation of such a program would likely mean that classes would run until later in the evening, a change that many women at Stern may find unwelcome. Why should the educational aspirations of 20 women force a pre-med student to be in lab until 8:45 PM?

I do not come to table carrying a torch and pitchfork; I realize that there are intense practical and ideological issues that must be addressed in ensuring educational equality at Yeshiva University. But the failure of Yeshiva University to offer programing that even resembles equality is magnified by its centrality in the Modern Orthodox world. We often quip “nowhere but here,” but I would ask “if not here, then where?” The current educational model at Stern College’s flagship institution has failed that they will not receive equal opportunity and access to the texts and traditions that define our practice of Judaism. Even if a fully equal option cannot exist for practical reasons, I hope that a new Yeshiva University administration will strongly consider implementing a change long overdue, one that will cross it off my list of requirements holding me back from graduation. For YU to come out now and permanently rid its existence for everyone pursuing a health career is severely unfair for those who were misinformed by the school faculty and forced to sit around for three hours a week listening to a lecture that was centered and designed for someone who didn’t know what a cell was.

Opinions 23

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Monday, April 24, 2017 - 28 Nissan 5777

By Avi Kohanzadeh

As a science major, I can express a two-fold opinion on YU’s recent decision to abolish the Natural World (NAWO) core requirement for all science majors and students pursuing a pre-health education track. On the one hand, I am pleased that the school was finally able to sit down and piece together a final conclusive decision on the matter. On the other hand, however, I do feel a little ripped off. As a pre-med student and biology major, I was pressured by my advisors and the deans of the school to take NAWO in the Fall of 2016, as were many other science students. I was told at the time that the likelihood of NAWO becoming abolished was slim and I should simply get it out of the way early as a favor to myself. While the class may have interested some of my peers, as someone who has taken a fair share of advanced biology and chemistry courses, and various labs, I found it to be a waste of time. I took NAWO to cross it off my list of requirements holding me back from graduation. For YU to come out now and permanently rid its existence for everyone pursuing a health career is severely unfair for those who were misinformed by the school faculty and forced to sit around for three hours a week listening to a lecture that was centered and designed for someone who didn’t know what a cell was.

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There is a saying that goes “time is money.” The NAWO course is without a doubt guilty of wasting the time of many science students, and now that it is no longer needed to graduate the school administration should be burdened with finding a non-monetary form of compensation for students such as myself. A worthy suggestion could be using the NAWO core as a substitution for a different core of equal credit value. Ultimately, it is announcements such as these which force me to lean back in my chair on the fourth floor, take a sip of coffee, and humorously whisper under my breath “nowhere but here.”
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Yeshiva University
By Yehuda Greenfield

"It's funny how they called the rosh yeshiva ztz’l, the Rosh Yeshiva, while they called Reb Yoche Ber, the Rav," Ray Reuven Feinstein said in his much-imitated, wispy voice. "Really, it was the rosh yeshiva ztz’l who was the Rav, a poseik, and Reb Yoche Ber was the Rosh Yeshiva."

I was in eleventh grade, sitting in a chumash shiur given by my own rosh yeshiva, Ray Reuven Feinstein. He was saying a story about his father, Ray Moshe Feinstein, and a man unknown to me, Reb Yoche Ber. "Who’s Reb Yoche Ber?" I asked my chavura later, during seder.

"Reb Yoche Ber? Oh, that’s JB."

"JB?" I asked. "Who’s JB?"

"JB Soloveitchik. He was the head of YU."

"Oh," I replied.

I didn’t know much about YU, but I’d heard about it before, in whispers. It was a place of kafra, a place where a kafrirah, Someone once told me that they had a gay club there. It wasn’t a place a proper ben Torah would talk about.

It was later that I realized I’d heard of JB before. My grandfather, rabbi of a small shul in Long Island, would mention him in a kavod hatorah! I refrained from calling him JB! Have a little kavod hatorah!"

"Who’s Rav Soloveitchik?" I asked my grandfather later that month.

He looked at me with interest.

"Rav Soloveitchik? Why are you asking about Rav Soloveitchik?"

I was a good bochur, in a chashuva yeshiva. He didn’t want me getting involved in such things. "My rosh yeshiva mentioned him in a shiur of my yeshiva," I replied. "Ah. Well, Rav Soloveitchik was a big talmud chachom, but his hashkafos were messed up. A real genius, but real krum hashkafos,"

From then on, my grandfather would remind me this, every time he quoted words of Torah from Rav Soloveitchik. "A genius, but krum hashkafos," he would say. "He made the first coed Jewish school! Such a thing was never heard of before!"

My grandfather owned his seforin though, and would listen to his shiurim. In my yeshiva, Rav Soloveitchik’s seforim were nowhere to be found. No one would talk about him except in hushed whispers behind closed doors, and even then they would refer to him as “JB.”

I was shocked to hear how they called the Rav, a great talmid chochom and a moser of YU, is someone whom I greatly admire. This wasn’t the way I expected a torah dialogue to be carried out, here of all places.

I didn’t spend years struggling to leave yeshiva, so that I could hear the same type of close-minded dialogue in YU that I heard my whole life. I didn’t give up my old life, lose friends, and basically become an outcast of my community for attending this venerable institution, in order to hear the leaders of my Yeshiva humiliate others because they disagree with their views.

I’m shocked to my core. Someone needs to speak up. I don’t want Yeshiva University to become the same type of place my old yeshivas were. I came here searching for Torah Umudah. I came for thinkers like the Rav and Rabbi Lamm. I found those thinkers here, but I’ve also found other types of thinkers that I didn’t expect to find. Thinkers who denigrate others and call them names because they disagree with them. I saw too much of that in my old yeshivas. I don’t want to see it here.

I agree with what Rabbi Penner said in the Glueck beis medrash this morning. He said that we need open dialogue. We need to speak to each other. If Rav Schachter doesn’t like Rabbi Klapper’s views, let him speak to him. Let him give a shiur to his students about how he disagrees with Rabbi Klapper. To call Rabbi Klapper an apikorus and rip down the signs advertising his shiur shuts down any semblance of the open dialogue Rabbi Penner spoke of.

I’ve worked hard to get to YU. I came here knowing no one and terrified of this shiur. After three semesters, I finally feel comfortable here, but I’m scared. I didn’t spend years struggling to leave yeshiva, so that I could attend this venerable institution, in order to hear the leaders of my Yeshiva humiliate others because they disagree with their views.

I’m shocked to my core. Someone needs to speak up.
The Problem of the Past in Religious Experience

By Yisroel Ben-Porat

History is problematic for religions. Although it contains a repository of useful traditions, customs, and ideas, history has a pernicious effect on the perception of sacred religious texts. As time passes, such texts fade into the distant realm of history, becoming “ancient” and “primitive.” Practitioners of a particular religion then begin to feel a dissonance with the original culture that produced their religion’s sacred texts. As a result, some reach the conclusion that the text is inappplicable to their “modern” society. This perception creates difficulties for these people, who consequently attempt to navigate the historical gap between the text and their own lives.

The above scenario, presented in abstract, is one aspect of the clash between religion and modernity—a story that is, unfortunately, quite familiar. The passage of time affects all religions, in all places. In the West, the Bible’s authority has increasingly eroded. Today, many people view the Bible as an outdated, barbaric text. To these people, the notion of following the Bible today—at least on the literal level—is laughable. In 2007, A. J. Jacobs, an editor at Esquire magazine, published The Year of Living Biblically, a bestselling satire describing the author’s year-long “quest” to follow the Bible as literally as possible. Jacobs humorously relates his “attempt” to follow the biblical law against adultery, which the Bible treats as a capital offense; obviously unable to truly fulfill this mandate, Jacobs instead “stoned” an adulterer with pebbles.

Similarly, religions in the East have faced the difficulties of a historical gap from their sacred texts. Confucianism derives its philosophy from an ancient collection of teachings entitled The Analects, which was compiled over two thousand years ago. In several East Asian cultures, especially in China, the Analects are as relevant to the West’s Bible, in terms of its authority and elevated status. Yet, much like their Western counterparts, Chinese people now view the Analects as an ancient historical document that is irrelevant to contemporary China. In 2010, Chinese media personality Yu Dan published Confucius from the Heart: Ancient Wisdom for Today’s World, a modernized retelling of the Analects containing Yu Dan’s meditations on Confucius’ “simple truths that every person knows in his or her heart.” The necessity and popularity of Yu Dan’s book stems from her ability to make the Analects relatable to modern Chinese society, despite (as the title implies) its perceived inapplicability to today’s Judaism, is, unfortunately, no exception to this phenomenon. Although the Torah is eternal, it is clear that Rav Schachter’s first thoughts rather than his subsequent full thoughts took the cake. The Commentator’s first piece covering this incident garnered almost 1,500 Facebook likes, while the follow-up piece garnered a little more than 400. Would it be safe to assume that few paid much attention to the follow-up article? Approaching Rav Schachter the first time around and asking him to confirm, clarify or justify his remarks would have been the “journalistic” thing to do.

While The Commentator’s follow-up article did well in clarifying matters—it confirmed some bunches and debunked others—it is clear that Rav Schachter’s first thoughts rather than his subsequent full thoughts took the cake. The Commentator’s first piece covering this incident garnered almost 1,500 Facebook likes, while the follow-up piece garnered a little more than 400. Would it be safe to assume that few paid much attention to the follow-up article? Approaching Rav Schachter the first time around and asking him to confirm, clarify or justify his remarks would have been the “journalistic” thing to do. It would have been the “journalistic” thing to do.

The final, albeit minor, issue that I have with Doron’s article is its sensationalist title. “Rabbi Hershel Schachter: Inviting Rabbi Aryeh Klapper to Speak at YU is ‘like inviting a Reform rabbi’” deserves a sensitive and balanced critique. Allow me to preface my remarks by briefly paraphrasing the mission statement of Rabbi Klapper’s credentials, I believe he could have done well by Senior Rosh Yeshiva.” The final, albeit minor, issue that I have with Doron’s article is its sensationalist title. “Rabbi Hershel Schachter: Inviting Rabbi Aryeh Klapper to Speak at YU is ‘like inviting a Reform rabbi’” deserves a sensitive and balanced critique. Allow me to preface my remarks by briefly paraphrasing the mission statement of Rabbi Klapper’s credentials, I believe he could have done well by Senior Rosh Yeshiva.”

A Response to The Commentator’s News Coverage of Rav Schachter’s Remarks

By Michael Shavolian

Doron Levine’s recent article entitled “Rabbi Hershel Schachter: Inviting Rabbi Aryeh Klapper to Speak at YU is ‘like inviting a Reform rabbi’” deserves a sensitive and balanced critique. Allow me to begin. The comments herein are only my personal opinions, arrived at after careful but by no means comprehensive consideration. Any critique that follows takes for granted that Doron did not harbor any malicious intent and that his report was truthful to the information in his possession. His record as an editor and writer for The Commentator serves only to highlight his sterling reputation and service to the student community. For that, I thank him.

Allow me to begin. The Commentator has no fealty to investors or shareholders. Its value as a student-run newspaper lies in its mission to not only break news, but to facilitate productive conversation surrounding important issues. Hence, the decision to frame a piece of news with commentary is an important one. Doron’s article was a piece of news that, if it indeed warranted publication, equally warranted commentary. By failing to take the time to make an additional inquiry or supply background information, it seems that The Commentator sacrificed comprehensiveness for the sake of a quick press release.

Following the publication of Doron’s article one Facebook user (a rare breed, indeed) commented, “[The article is] very unfair to [Rabbi Klapper] individually and professionally...it is also obvious to me that many people are going to read this and think less of Rav Schachter, so literally everyone loses.” Indeed, while I do commend Doron for including a paragraph about Rabbi Klapper’s credentials, I believe he could have done well by briefly paraphrasing the mission statement of Rabbi Klapper’s Center for Modern Torah Leadership (CMTL). Such information may have provided readers totally unfamiliar with Rabbi Klapper with the opportunity to form their own opinions about him (if they so wished).

Furthermore, while Doron included a comment from a supporter of Rav Schachter—though inclusion of the comment was warranted in its own right, since the student removing the flyers was arguably a part of the story’s development—he failed to include a rejoinder in support of Rabbi Klapper from an alumni of the CMTL’s summer beit midrash. Such an editorial decision would have provided due counterbalance to the actions of the “junior in Raiders’ shiur” and to the false perception that only one side has supporters among the student body.

Likewise, Doron failed to frame Rav Schachter’s purported actions and remarks in the context of his principled insistence on a tradition of psuk. There is no doubt that the naysayers may have denounced such an inclusion as apologetic, but it would have informed readers that Rav Schachter sees himself as standing up for something quite important, even if they may not agree with that something.

While The Commentator’s follow-up article did well in clarifying matters—it confirmed some bunches and debunked others—it is clear that Rav Schachter’s first thoughts rather than his subsequent full thoughts took the cake. The Commentator’s first piece covering this incident garnered almost 1,500 Facebook likes, while the follow-up piece garnered a little more than 400. Would it be safe to assume that few paid much attention to the follow-up article? Approaching Rav Schachter the first time around and asking him to confirm, clarify or justify his remarks would have been the “journalistic” thing to do. It would have been the “journalistic” thing to do. The final, albeit minor, issue that I have with Doron’s article is its sensationalist title. “Rabbi Hershel Schachter: Inviting Rabbi Aryeh Klapper to Speak at YU is ‘like inviting a Reform rabbi’,” seems like a ploy to grab attention (even if not intentional). Perhaps a more appropriate title would have been “Perceived Rift at YU Highlighted with Opposition to Campus Speaker by Senior Rosh Yeshiva.”

One last thought. Unfortunately, much of The Commentator’s online readership glazes their uninformed opinions about the state of modern orthodoxy at Yeshiva University from anecdotes and Facebook posts, not from speaking with Yu Dan’s dedicated faculty or passionate students, not from observations of a booming beit midrash and life from an alternative universe called YU. And no matter how thorough Doron would have been, YU’s detractors, the pessimists, the I’m glad I didn’t go to YU commenters, the most vocal, the loudest, the angriest at YU moaners, would have found something to shout about and nothing to reflect on. The fact of the matter is that delivery of even the best reporting won’t ensure receipt of the accurate information therein. This is partly because oftentimes what is left out is just as important as what is put in and partly because when some readers don’t detect bias, they invent their own.

All in all, I commend The Commentator for doing a much better job in maintaining journalistic impartiality than other Jewish publications that report every sneeze and cough heard at YU. I hope that the YU student body continues to discuss pressing issues with a sense of respect and humility, with a reluctance to draw conclusions when unnecessary, and with tremendous hope for YU’s continued success as the living, breathing, alive and kicking flagship of modern orthodoxy.
By Kira Paley

Yeshiva University’s purpose, according to its mission statement, is to “promote a Jewish community that champions Torah Umadda.” The statement, though, does not clarify what it means by “Torah Umadda,” and this openness to interpretation leaves students qualifying the statement for themselves. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardizing their Halachic requirements. For some, it may mean having to fulfill Judaic Studies requirements in addition to General Studies requirements in order to be allowed to participate in team sports. For others, perhaps it means being able to participate in team sports without jeopardy.
as they made the quick but always suspicious walk from that musty lounge to the beat midrash for a late maariv.

We don’t know any different and have little reason to assume any better.

We could ask the framers, right? Well, we could, and probably would, if we knew who the framers were, but alas, the constitution is anonymous. It is not signed by anyone. There’s no “in witness thereof,” and needless to say, there is no secretary’s signature affirming ratification.

Imagine you walk into the new apartment you just leased. The smell of freshly plastered drywall fills your nostrils. You notice a piece of paper on a window sill, titled, “Constitution of Apartment 2B.” Even if your new home was indeed Apartment 2B (which would be particularly convenient in a walkup), you would not be bound by the provisions of that constitution. If Article One said you were president of the kitchen, you still would not be president of the kitchen. (Looks like you’ll have to rock-papers-scissors it for the top shelf of the fridge after all.)

We, the student electorate, have practically walked into an empty apartment and found a constitution – one that curtails our political agency (for example, we aren’t all presidents of the student council) and that of our elected officials (for example, the president cannot ban presidents of the student council from just ban clubs unilaterally). And we have no reason to believe that we are bound by this document.

The scenario would be completely different if we knew that the constitution was indeed ratified. To refer again to our residential analogy: if you take a spot in an apartment that already has three other roommates who’ve been living there for a while, and they tell you that they all agreed that the papers on the windowsill are the apartment’s foundational document, then so it is. If Article Two says the newest roommate is the vice president of waste management, you’ll be taking out the trash for a while. This is more or less why we are still bound by the United States Constitution hundreds of years after its ratification, and this is how we would be bound to a student constitution whose ratification was on record.

But let’s suppose for a moment that we did in fact have official record of ratification. The constitution would still be invalid – if not in whole, then definitely in part. This is because of the second set of constitutional problems: jurisdiction.

The constitution grants powers it has no right to grant and imposes obligations it has no business imposing. Below are a few examples. They quote from the words of the constitution and may get a little technical, but they make the point that the document reaches far beyond where it can legitimately go.

An example is a constitutional power that the constitution claims to offer but cannot be subpoenaed. According to the constitution, there is a student court in which students can bring claims against other students. For any court to hear a claim against a party – think a defendant – the court has to be able to compel that party to appear before the judges. Government courts do this by subpoena, whereby they force an accused person to show up in court under the penalty of law. The Wilf Campus undergraduate constitution gives the student court the power of subpoena but does not define it. Article IV, Section 1, (3), mandates “The Student Court shall have the power to enforce its subpoenas by means of disciplinary action against those who fail to appear.”

The problem with this provision is that disciplinary action (think academic probation) can be taken against a student only by the administration of the university. Earlier this year, Dr. Chaim Nissel, University Dean of Students and a member of the disciplinary committee, confirmed this explicitly to Chief Justice Yossi Hoffman and myself, the Justice Pro Tempore, both of the student court.

This means that if you thought that an elected student leader was abusing his power or neglecting his duties, and you wanted to pursue student-legal means to get him to correct his ways, he could just decline to appear in court and there would be nothing you or the judges could do. Your claim would amount to nothing and the official would continue with his corruption.

An example of obligations the constitution has no business imposing can be found in Article VIII, Section 1, (6): “The YSU President may sit in on all meetings of the Governing Board of The Commentator.” It is a somewhat trivial truth that he may, but this fact is up to the discretion of the editors of The Commentator. If they choose to exclude the YSU president, that is their prerogative, and no student constitution can compel them otherwise. Although many of its readers, most of its writers, and all of its editors study at YU, the paper is independent – it does not take a penny from the student council and is not bound by the student council constitution.

To put things in terms of off-campus housing, imagine that 2B’s constitution said that you could charge your upstairs neighbors a noise fee for their late-night raves. Such a law would be pretty much meaningless; don’t count on paying your wifi bill with that extra income. Your sleepless Saturday nights will remain uncompensated.

A related problem that is not as severe from a constitutional perspective but may point to more serious attitudinal problems is the sloppy writing. Perhaps one example will suffice: the title page purports to introduce the constitution of the Yeshiva University Undergraduate Student Government, and the body of the document does at least try to construct a government for the male undergraduates. Nowhere, however, does it discuss the Yeshiva University undergraduate student government for females. Presumably, the framers forgot to put the word male on the title page, but such a glaring omission makes us wonder what else the framers forgot.

(Or did they forget to constitute a student senate?)
By Joshua Zirman

One of the most watched TV show in America in 2016 was Shark Tank. Shark tank is not an action-packed drama or a tear jerking romance, rather it is a reality show where entrepreneurs pitch their products and companies to five investors or “sharks” who listen to the pitch, analyze the team, and make an investment decision. Shark Tank has gained such rapid popularity because of how relatable it is to viewers watching. Contestants on the show are just like the viewers watching: moms and dads, and hardworking small business owners who are sometimes living paycheck to paycheck trying to meet ends meet.

The second annual TAMID Tank event occurred recently in Barnard. TAMID Tank starts with finding student-run startups on campuses across the country. 103 companies applied to be part of the “Shark Tank” style competition this year, and after several rounds of vetting, there were only three companies left. TAMID members and non-TAMID members from universities around New York came to listen to the presenters while the TAMID community hand-picked three investors to listen to the presentations and give feedback to each company. Two of the presenters were venture capital partners, while one investor was a private investor who owns a large company and does angel investing on the side.

The first company to present at the program was called Averia. Their goal is to develop a unique app that has a concussion test attached. The company did not end up getting an investment because the investors were concerned with the revenue model of the company. They were attempting to partner with massive solar farms as opposed to going to private residents who have solar panels and selling to them. One investor said “you guys are going for the giants before touching the ants. Yes, it takes many ants to become a giant, but you need to start somewhere.”

The second company to present was called Vescence, which was a spray on for solar panels to make sure that they do not accumulate dust and dirt which can reduce efficiency by as much as 40%. The technology was developed by a professor at the student’s university (the University of Houston) but these students were given exclusive rights to sell the product. The company did not end up getting an investment because the investors were concerned with the revenue model of the company. They were attempting to partner with massive solar farms as opposed to going to private residents who have solar panels and selling to them. One investor said “you guys are going for the giants before touching the ants. Yes, it takes many ants to become a giant, but you need to start somewhere.”

The last company to present was called Pyle. Pyle is a software that helps students pay off their loans by creating a schedule for payments and investing some extra cash in the stock market to help repay loans quickly. The student loan industry has now over taken all other kinds of debt as the leading defaulting loan and the idea came from there. There must be a way to help students who are not financially literate pay off their loans in a timely manner! The idea was phenomenal but the execution was not there yet. The company was in its earliest stages and still had not perfected its stock picking algorithm and payment methods. One investor said, “I would love to see you guys back here in six months with all of the developments you have made but you are just too early in the process for an investment.” Unfortunately for those in attendance at the event, an inside source told this writer that a company with $1.3 million in revenue last year was scheduled to present as well but had to drop out at the last second. It would have been fascinating for the audience to see how the investors would have interacted with a more mature company doing over a million dollars of revenue.

Although none of the students received investments from the investors, students, parents and alumni loved the event. YU student Joshua Morrow said, “It was very exciting to see peers’ passions and accomplishments at such a young age was inspiring and a joy to be a part of.” Baruch Sophomore Daniel Jonas said that his TAMID chapter made the event mandatory but it was “the best decision they made all semester.” There is something inspiring listening to ambitious friends and peers pursue their passions and visions. The appeal to TAMID Tank is similar to that of Shark Tank; the audience fall of entrepreneurs felt empathy and a direct connection with the presenters and could see themselves one day being on the big stage pitching their company to a group of investors. It’s the moms, dads, and students that are pursuing their dreams that inspire their peers to take risks and strive for nothing less than greatness. TAMID Tank 2017 was educational, inspiring, and a huge success even though no investments were made.

The Spirit of Entrepreneurship

By Ariel Axelrod and Doni Yellin

On March 23rd, the new X-Nihilo Entrepreneurship Society held its first event. The kickoff introduced members to the new society and its founders, and to establish an agenda for the coming semesters. At first glance, most people would not associate the term X-Nihilo with entrepreneurship; however, there is more to the society than just the unique name. The founders chose X-Nihilo as it’s a derivation of the latin phrase, “Ex-Nihilo,” meaning “something from nothing” or in Hebrew, “yesh me’ayin.” Just like God created the world from nothing, so too entrepreneurs utilize their God-given creativity to turn fleeting dreams into permanent realities. This is how the founder, Yonah Hiller, expressed the meaning of the society’s name.

As founder of the companies MiztvahWorld.com and Chilazon.org, Hiller is no stranger to the life of an entrepreneur and neither are the rest of the society’s board members. Mark Weiss, Dena Skydell, and Yakira Klein all boast impressive entrepreneurial resumes. Mark, having started his own app called LIT™, plans to “unlock the entrepreneurial spirit in the student body.” Dena Skydell, one of the creators of Instagram account Hungry Twins, is ready to share her experiences with other students who have the desire to launch a business. Hungry Twins boasts a following on Instagram of over 500 thousand followers. When asked why she joined the society’s board, Dena pointed out, “I saw that there was no forum here at Yeshiva University that helps students develop ideas into businesses. We [at X-Nihilo] want to turn passion into action and help motivate fellow students to push themselves.” Yakira Klein has had her running at three extremely successful fundraising campaigns for Chai Lifeline. Having the ability to sell an idea whether that’s an organization or a business is an essential skill for an entrepreneur.

The first ever event was filled with bright young minds, gathering to hear from the board members who have gone through the steps of becoming entrepreneurs, having launched their own businesses. Members shared personal business experiences, struggles they faced, and ultimately the path to their successes. The underlying theme of the night was that passion breeds success. Passion is the driver for when problems arise and solutions need to be found.

Yonah Hiller affirmed that the main goal of the society is “to foster a community of entrepreneurs and give students the tools and resources they need to start their own businesses.” As a community, members discuss opportunities, share personal business experiences, and create a milieu of innovation and creativity. One of the attendees of the event reflected on what he expects from the society: “The society will help my ideas become a reality and I can’t wait to continue to network with the members and hopefully accomplish great things.”

One way to think of the purpose of business is that it exists to further develop God’s world. When speaking with Yonah about enjoying the work one does, he reflected on the Mishna in Pirkei Avot, which reiterates the importance of loving work - “choyov et ha’milacha.” This is what X-Nihilo hopes to accomplish with its members. Not only will it offer members the structure of a startup think tank, but it will offer them a fun and interactive experience, regardless of their respective field of study. Having heard the feedback from the first event and the society’s future plans, the board members of X-Nihilo are well on their way to fostering a spirit of entrepreneurship at Yeshiva University.

The Spirit of Entrepreneurship
What is Driving the Future of Uber?

By Ezra Berman

Every day thousands of a people use Uber for the convenience it provides for private transportation. All it takes is one click on a cellular device to have a driver pick you up. Although Uber has found a way to break-in and dominate the transportation industry through a reinvented taxi business, it is evident that this will not be the future of their business looks. In reality, Uber is not a transportation company, but rather it is a technology company. Travis Kalanick, the CEO of Uber, has noted, “It’s a technology platform that connects riders and drivers.” Despite Kalanick’s indication that the company’s functionality, the company has demonstrated many attempts to shift the focus of their business to autonomous vehicles.

Before focusing on Uber’s future it is important to understand the company and the business model as it is now. According to recent statistics, there are 1 million Uber rides taken every day all around the world. Uber’s business model is no different than a traditional cab company in that its only source of revenue is from rides; however, Uber allows essentially anyone with a car to become a driver and takes a twenty percent cut from the driver’s revenues. Uber is the “middle man” between an individual and a cab and for that service it charges a slight fee to the driver. Uber has been successful not only because they have revolutionized the taxi industry, but also because they have been able to segment their services in order to appeal to various demographics. For example, commuters on a tighter budget might elect to use Uber Pool, which is basically a carpool version of the service. Although an Uber Pool ride may take slightly longer, it allows riders to pay a cheaper fare by splitting the ride. Alternatively, Uber also offers Black Car services which appeal to users seeking a more luxurious mode of transportation, for a higher price of course.

Uber’s revenue growth over the past few years is truly remarkable. In the first half of 2015, the company’s gross revenue was $3.63 billion, which is around $1 billion higher than 2014. Despite revenue was $3.63 billion, which is around $1 billion more in gross revenue than the entire 2014. Despite revenue growth over the past few years is truly remarkable. In the first half of 2015, the company’s gross revenue was $3.63 billion, which is around $1 billion more in gross revenue than the entire 2014.

“IN REALITY, Uber IS NOT A TRANSPORTATION COMPANY, but RATHER IT IS A TECHNOLOGY COMPANY.”

that Uber will be successful in, there are a number of risks associated with this business endeavor. Firstly, there is the risk of competition. Companies such as Google, Tesla, and automakers such as Ford have been extremely active in this space and it seems that it will be a race to implement the technology successfully. Furthermore, Uber will have to take much more responsibility for any accidents involving their fleets. Just a couple of weeks ago an Uber autonomous vehicle was involved in a collision in Arizona which may result in a lawsuit filed against Uber. Lastly, what's stopping them from doing it again. Despite the tremendous opportunity in autonomous vehicles, I think Uber still has a lot of ground to cover, and until Uber can assure society of the unquestionable safety of self-driving transportation they will continue to be a high revenue, negative profit business. It takes a lot of accountability for companies such as Uber to change the way we live and it remains to be seen how innovation will impact our methods of transportation.

Syms to Launch New Master’s in Taxation this Fall

By Adam Kramer

Syms’ new Master’s of Science in Taxation program, led by longtime Syms accounting professor Leonard Fuld, will welcome its first cohort of students in Fall of 2017. In an interview with The Commentator, Professor Fuld touched on many aspects of the new program, including some of the program’s basic details, YU’s clear need for the program, and his involvement in it.

While Syms has traditionally offered a Master’s in Accounting, over the last few years Professor Fuld has been hearing from students that they would be interested in a Master’s in Taxation program as well. He noted that it makes more sense for students who are interested in a career in tax who already majored in accounting for their undergraduate degree to spend the additional time getting a Master’s in Taxation rather than Accounting, since their knowledge in taxation will make them that much more skilled and valued in their specific area of expertise. Professor Fuld also mentioned that major accounting firms are said to give employees a bonus for getting a master’s degree, and will give a bigger bonus for people who get that master’s in taxation. Lastly, not enough people who studied accounting also know tax as a subject. Professor Fuld taught a course on contemporary tax issues at Baruch’s graduate business school and it went from 29 students to 98 in 3 years, and he optimistically envisions Syms’ program gaining popularity with YU students in a similar way.

In terms of the some of the basic details of the program, it will be a year-long program with classes taking place on the Beren campus at night. This will allow students to be employed full-time or to study for the CPA test while enrolled in the program. Professor Fuld has been working diligently for the past year, primarily on his own time, organizing the various aspects of the program. He has spent that time getting together syllabi for all of the classes, a budget and business plan, and, most importantly, gaining approval from senior YU administrators as well as from the New York State Education Department to run the program with the proper accreditation. Professor Fuld is hoping to have 15 students in the Fall 2017 cohort, but will be happy with a class of only 10 students. He hopes that around half of the students in the program will come from YU, with the other half having matriculated at other colleges for their undergraduate degree.

When asked how he’s going to approach hiring new professors for the program, Professor Fuld responded that initially there will be a few 3-4 day hires of whom will need to be experienced in their fields. Rather than hire university scholars, Syms is looking for professionals with 25-30 years of experience in tax practice. McCall hopes to line them up, including an IRS agent with 30 years, a VP of taxes with 40 years of experience, and a compensation tax expert. In the longer-term, as director of the program, Professor Fuld hopes to start a tax clinic where students in the Master’s program will consult and advise local Washington Heights businesses, helping them out and gaining practical experience in the process. Additionally, he mentioned that he’s exploring ways to partner with big accounting firms to leverage their employees to come speak to students in the program, and hopefully work with them to hire students for internships and full time jobs.

Professor Fuld expects that the low tuition of $23,000, which is significantly less than most similar one year Masters of Science programs, will encourage students to choose Syms’ tax program instead of similar ones at Baruch and other schools where those graduating Syms with a BA in Accounting might otherwise have gone. In terms of recruiting students for the program, Professor Fuld realizes that it’s already late in the year and that ‘it’ll be a challenge to market and advertise the program as fully as it could have been if the approval process had taken less time. That being said, Syms has provided a marketing budget, which he’s excited to use to recruit for this Fall, and expects the program to benefit the students and YU for many years to come.
Corporate Law: The Synergy of Law and Finance

By Noam Zolty

For many students in college, picking a profession can be a long and difficult decision. Many students want to be involved in the business world in some way, but at the same time have a desire to be engaged in other activities, rather than just dealing with numbers and dollar figures. For those that have an interest in going into a field that has a nice balance between the business world and the law world, corporate law is the perfect synergy of the two. Whether negotiating the acquisition of a multi-billion dollar company or assisting a small Internet start-up company, corporate lawyers are involved in advising businesses on their numerous legal rights, responsibilities, and obligations. A good corporate lawyer is one of the most valuable employees that a major financial institution such as an investment bank or a private equity firm can have. Therefore, one of the most exciting and stimulating professions in the business world is corporate law.

Corporate lawyers work for both public and private companies, helping them formulate contracts, and avoid falling into legal pitfalls. They advise publicly held companies with regards to issues such as the public disclosure of disappointing financial results, an adverse judgment in a litigation matter, or the initiation of a government investigation regarding the company. The company may, for example, need to advise the public about an impending product recall, litigation that has been initiated due to an environmental problem, or an unfunded pension liability. A private company, however, may need a corporate lawyer for an entirely different set of needs. They may need help establishing a line of credit with a bank, creating the proper loan documents and helping guide the company in its quest to raise more funds. Privately held companies also seek advice on the formulation and enforcement of contracts, on tax matters, and even on succession issues, in which attorneys help plan for the orderly transfer of ownership or management to the next generation of owners. Most significantly, when a company decides to go public, the corporate lawyer is very involved in the process. Corporate lawyers work very closely with the investment banks in helping them prepare their clients for the Initial Public Offering (IPO). They help draw up the paperwork and negotiate and help decide exactly how many shares their client is going to offer to the public to invest in.

In addition to going to law school, corporate lawyers often spend an extra year in school in order to receive a J.D./M.B.A., which is a law degree combined with a Master of Business Administration. Since the activities of corporate law are so heavily intertwined with the businesses of their companies, it is expected that they possess an intimate knowledge of how finance operates and the mechanisms of the business world. According to Forbes, corporate law is the highest paid field within law. Average salaries for first-year associates range from $160,000 to $180,000. Since the salaries are so attractive, corporate law often attracts the top students from the most prestigious law schools. Many law students who decide to go into corporate law are the ones who have been interested in business for a long time. While the percentage of law school students who majored in finance or economics is about 7%, the percentage of corporate lawyers who majored in one of these two fields is around 40%. Many corporate lawyers love being able to be a part of Wall Street, while still remaining on the law side.

A recent study done by Harvard University revealed that corporate lawyers tend to be much more content and fulfilled by their jobs than attorneys who specialize in other fields. One of the reasons cited by the study is the lack of confrontation that is found within the job. The practice of corporate law is less adversarial than that of trial law. Lawyers for both sides of a commercial transaction aren’t deemed to be opponents, but rather facilitators. Transactions take place amongst peers. There are rarely wronged parties, underdogs, or inequities in the financial means of the participants. Many trial, litigation and family attorneys describe how the constant fighting leads to many of them to become despondent. They describe how much of the passion for law that they had when they first began their jobs has significantly waned. On the contrary, many corporate lawyers note that there is a much more positive feeling within their workplaces than many other law offices. As noted, a career in corporate law can be an extremely rewarding job, in both monetary compensation and job satisfaction. Those that have an interest in making a nice salary while still having a career that is intellectually stimulating should seriously consider a career in corporate law.
Yeshiva University undergraduates can take courses at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies.

Classes are open to students either within the BA/MA Program or as upper-class undergraduates taking graduate courses with permission.

### CLASS SCHEDULE FOR FALL 2017

#### BIBLE
- **BIBLICAL HEBREW I**
  - Koller | M | 7 – 8:40 p.m.
- **THE MEDIEVAL PESHAT TRADITION,** c. 900–1300
  - Cohen | T | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **BOOK OF AMOS**
  - Holtz | Th | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **BOOK OF PROVERBS**
  - Leiman | W | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **AKKADIAN I**
  - Eichler | TBD

#### JEWISH HISTORY
- **THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND RABBINIC LITERATURE**
  - This course counts toward the concentrations in Ancient Jewish history and Talmud.
  - Angel | T | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY:**
  - Christian Europe
  - Berger | W | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **JEWS IN MUSLIM LANDS II**
  - Tsadik | W | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **JEWS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE:**
  - 1492–1760
  - Carlebach | M | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **JEWISH MODERNITY IN LITHUANIA:**
  - FROM TALMUD AND MUSAR TO REVOLUTION AND ZIONISM
  - Karlip | W | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY:**
  - 1854–1881
  - Gurock | Th | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **THE “PARTING OF WAYS”: EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS JEWISH AND GRECO-ROMAN CONTEXTS**
  - Fine | W | 6:50 – 8:30 p.m.
- **JEWISH CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN**
  - Perelis | Th | 6:50 – 8:30 p.m.
- **JEWS OF IRAN: HISTORY AND CULTURE**
  - This course counts toward the concentrations in Medieval and Modern Jewish History.
  - Tsadik | M | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **JEWISH NATIONAL MOVEMENTS**
  - Zimmerman | M | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.
- **THE INTERFACE BETWEEN SEFARAD AND ASHKENAZ IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES**
  - Kanarfolg | Th | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.

#### JEWISH PHILOSOPHY
- **SURVEY OF MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY**
  - Rynhold | M | 6:50 – 8:30 p.m.
- **INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH MYSTICISM**
  - Dauber | T | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONCEPT OF MITZVAH**
  - Rynhold | W | 6:50 – 8:30 p.m.

#### TALMUD
- **INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDRASHIC LITERATURE OF THE TANNAIM**
  - Hurvitz | T | 2:50 – 4:30 p.m.
- **MAIMONIDES’ HALAKHIC WRITINGS**
  - Hurvitz | T | 6:50 – 8:30 p.m.
- **THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND RABBINIC LITERATURE**
  - See under Jewish history
  - Angel | T | 4:50 – 6:30 p.m.

#### LANGUAGES
- **ARABIC I**
  - Open to undergraduates without special permission.
  - This course does not count toward the ten required MA courses, but scholarship grants apply to this course.
  - Tsadik | M & W | 4:40 – 5:55 p.m.

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For information on taking a Revel course outside the framework of the BA/MA Program, please contact Rona Steinerman, Revel Director of Admissions, at steinerm@yu.edu