

Date: Oct. 1

From: Dr. Ari Berman

My Dear Students,

We are excited that, in a few short weeks, our undergraduates will be able to return to campus. Some will be arriving for the first time. Others will be reuniting with friends, *rabbeim*, faculty and staff. This is the moment we have been waiting for and looking forward to for months.

In this letter, I wish to lay out for you the updated plans for our safe return to campus.

Due to the unpredictability of the spread of the virus, throughout our planning process we have used the analogy of a dimmer rather than an on/off light switch. As a dimmer, we have the flexibility to scale backwards and forwards to properly respond as the health situation evolves. This takes on extra significance in consideration of the fact that over the past few weeks, the COVID-19 infection rate in NYC has risen for the first time in months, with an increased rate in the orthodox community. Especially as our community is emerging from the holiday season with communal gatherings more likely to take place over the last days of Sukkot, we approach the timing and method of our return with an awareness of the need for extra caution.

Over these past number of weeks, we have better positioned ourselves for a safe return to campus for our undergraduate students by having already tested and improved our safety protocols based on our experiences in September with the in-person opening of the high schools and some select graduate schools. We have also added to our protocols recent technological innovations in the field. And very significantly, we have been closely monitoring and gathering the best practices from other universities, high schools and elementary schools that opened in the beginning of the Fall.

A key takeaway from our analysis is that the most effective schools have incorporated three core components to better their percentages for success: 1) regular testing protocols, 2) immediate response to positive COVID-19 cases, and 3) universal community compliance. Due to the above considerations and with the experienced guidance of our medical director, Dr. Robert van Amerongen, we are updating our protocols to include ongoing saliva PCR testing to anyone who comes to our campuses. This new non-invasive test will be in addition to the daily temperature checks and symptom-monitoring on campus. This additional measure will enable us to be better positioned to respond more immediately to any positive COVID-19 cases, triggering our contact tracing and quarantining protocols.

In addition, we are moving the start of the undergraduate in-person classes and on campus housing to the next week, opening on **Wednesday, October 21**. This will enable members of our

community who are coming to campus to be tested after the *Simchat Torah* holiday to ameliorate the effects of the spread [*chas ve-shalom*] that may potentially happen over the holidays. Any student who is coming to campus, whether they are commuting or living on or near our campuses, will be required to take a PCR Nasal Swab COVID-19 test after the Yom Tov holidays no earlier than Thursday, October 15, even if they have antibodies. No student will be allowed on campus without proof of a negative result from that test.

Students who are coming from NY's travel advisory restricted states or international locations who are mandated to quarantine and have opted to be at our quarantine hotel do NOT need to change any of their plans. They are required by New York State to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, and we have arranged hotel rooms and full accommodations for this period. Our Student Life and Housing teams, together with our faculty, medical director, *rabbeim* and staff, have planned a full program, including shiurim, mental health support, wellness and fitness programs, daily check-ins, pre-Shabbat programs and virtual events to support students throughout. These students are not required to take a coronavirus test after *Simchat Torah* before they arrive at the hotel, because they will be waiting out the 14-day period in quarantine and will be tested during their hotel stay. When they finish this quarantine, they will move straight into the dorms.

Upon arrival onto campus, you will find a campus that has been diligently prepared with the requisite safety guidelines and social distancing measures to enable you to have a rewarding, enjoyable and impactful college experience. This year will be like no other, and it therefore presents to us new opportunities for growth and personal development. For you, our students, this year will be the most important educational year in your formative years, as character is formed during times of adversity. The time with your *rabbeim*, teachers, faculty mentors and peers will prove to be instrumental in your life and in your future.

Some of the features of campus life will include:

Beit Midrash: Many of our *rabbeim* and Judaic Studies faculty will be back on both campuses and are excited to resume in-person learning with our students.

- **Athletics:** We are excited to have our Macs back on campus for the winter/spring season. The athletic center will also be open for students to use (socially distanced and following other NYC regulations).

- **Shabbat:** I personally am excited to join our students on campus for Shabbat. Students will have the opportunity to spend time with friends and have Shabbat with many YU personalities, including Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Jacob & Penina Bernstein, Rabbi Yisroel Meir and Elisheva Rosenzweig, Rabbi Menachem Penner, Dean Shoshana Schechter, and Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, as well as other Roshei Yeshiva and faculty. Each Shabbat throughout the semester will be planned with programming, including Thanksgiving Weekend and Shabbat Chanukkah.
- **Events:** There will be a mix of virtual and in-person events (socially distanced based on current guidelines), including social events, election viewing parties, shiurim, orientation for new students, mentoring and virtual career fairs.
- **Academic support, coordination with faculty re: midterms:** Our deans and academic advisers are working together with faculty to ensure that students are supported, and that policies take into consideration that students will be moving in during the middle of the semester and may be impacted by the uptick in COVID-19 cases as well.

Much has been done to set up the campus, the courses, the dorms and student life for an incredible semester ahead. But so much of this depends on you. The third component for success is universal community compliance. The way we behave individually and as a community will certainly be a key determining factor in our success this semester, both in the way we consider the potential effects of our actions on our own health, and perhaps even more so, in the way our actions could potentially impact the health and safety of those who are around us. In preparing for this year, I of course have read many stories about behavior on other college campuses that appears reckless during this era of COVID-19. Especially with our *rabbeim* and faculty members who are so committed to our students that they are choosing to come to campus for in-person teaching or enrichment experiences, together with all of the administrators and professionals in maintenance, security and food services who are needed to staff the buildings, I have had to consider the potential consequences of opening our campus. And it is my belief in not only the importance of our education and the extraordinary preparations of our professional and academic team but also the values and quality of our students that gives me confidence in our ability to succeed.

No one can predict the future in the era of COVID-19. In the end, we totally understand that it is all in the Hands of Heaven. It is only God in whom we place our complete trust. But our tradition teaches that we must do our best to be God's messengers. And in this case, there is no doubt that

this means to abide stringently to the full safety measures and guidelines. Masks and social distancing on the campus are, of course, a given. But even outside of our campuses, we need to be vigilant in maintaining these standards in considering the kinds of rooms, crowds or activities in which we engage. When coming to campus, I encourage our students to consider staying on campus throughout the entire semester, on Shabbat and during the week. This is one of the opportunities we have in front of us this semester to create a novel YU experience with a concentrated amount of time focused on our collective studies and internal social connections. The key is to internalize and actualize the deep sense of *arevut* – responsibility and compassion – that our Tradition teaches us is at the core of Jewish life.

As part of our reopening plan, we have formulated a COVID-19 Code of Behavior which sets in writing some of these thoughts, but the essential point is not simply one of policy but mission. We are here in Yeshiva University and in this world to live our values and sanctify God's name. This unique time in history presents us with an opportunity to do just that: to study our values, live by our values, and show what it means to be steeped in Torah values as a Yeshiva University student. Knowing you and our student body as a whole, I am inspired with great confidence in our future.

We understand that even after reading through this you might have many additional questions. We will be posting an updated FAQ section online at yu.edu/fall2020 and hosting a call for students.

Wishing you only blessing and joy in the upcoming holiday and eagerly looking forward to seeing your masked face from a safe social distance in the coming weeks ahead.

Warmly,

Ari Berman