



## From the Dean's Desk

### *Challenges Become Opportunities: New Summer Initiatives at YU*

March 3, 2020, marked the first major local development in the COVID-19 epidemic: two prominent Jewish day schools, SAR Academic and SAR High School, closed their doors.

That day, Daf Yomi was learning Berachos 60, which ends with the role modeling of the famed Rabbi Akiva (50-135 C.E.), along with his donkey and candle, of how to get stronger from setbacks.

This highlights a valuable lesson: We need to take setbacks and partner with Hashem to find ways to get stronger from them.

Please see below for the latest example of how we are doing that for the coming summer, and let us know if you'd be interested in joining this major new effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noam", with a stylized flourish underneath.

Dr. Noam Wasserman  
Dean

### *The Upcoming Summer Crisis*

For two weeks after Rabbi Akiva made his appearance on the Daf, we focused intensely on transitioning YU to being fully online. Once we had accomplished that goal, we realized that **this summer could potentially be another major challenge for our students**. Students who wanted internships would have major problems finding them, and those who would have gone to summer programs would likely have them cancelled.

To combat this problem, we embarked on a major effort to develop new summer initiatives for YU undergrads, in addition to increasing our summer course offerings.

Our goal was to provide talented and dedicated YU students with strong summer experiences, while strengthening non-profits, startups, and other organizations who could benefit from their hard work.

**This was echoed by a student comment: “Currently I don’t have an internship and would love if I had an experience I can grow from, but give back to at the same time.”**

## *Aggressively Developing New Initiatives*

We brainstormed within Sy Syms, discussed options with YU alumni and friends, broadened the dialogue to the other YU undergrad colleges, and then started involving partners with whom we could collaborate. This week, we surveyed students to gauge their interest in the initiatives and got a **tremendous response**, as described at the bottom of this newsletter.

What emerged are **four major categories of new initiatives**.

For most of the initiatives, students would enroll in a YU summer course that would enable us to provide them with the academic experiences and faculty oversight. Our students would thereby earn academic credits rather than having to be paid by the financially strapped non-profits and startups for whom they would be working.

## *The New Initiatives*



For the first option, students would work with **an expanded group of YU Innovation Lab (I-Lab) startups**. During the last two academic years, YU's Innovation Lab has hosted Israeli startups that want to break into the United States. Students, mentored by faculty, work on projects that help the founders of those startups develop new plans and begin executing them.

For the coming summer, we decided to expand the I-Lab in **four significant ways**.

- First, we would recruit the first-ever **summer cohort** of Israeli companies.
- Second, we would explore expanding the I-Lab to include **alumni startups**.
- Third, we would see if there were **student startups** that could benefit from the I-Lab.
- Finally, we would expand the effort to include the non-profit startups that are part of the [Orthodox Union's Impact Accelerator](#).

**If you have a startup** that might benefit from the hard work of a talented team of YU students, please let me know at [noam@yu.edu](mailto:noam@yu.edu)

We'd love to explore whether you could join the I-Lab for the summer (and maybe beyond).



For the second option, we would convert the new YU Israel Summer Intern Program, which was supposed to debut this summer, into an **Israel virtual-internship program**, and try to find additional Israeli companies to participate.

We had partnered with [MassChallenge-Israel](#), the largest startup incubator in Israel, to have students intern at their companies, and would double-down our efforts with them and other potential Israel collaborators to find virtual-internship positions for our students.

**If you might have an internship in any country** for a talented YU student (who would earn academic credit for it), contact Todd Lotcpeich, the director of employer and alumni relations at YU's Career Center, at [todd.lotcpeich@yu.edu](mailto:todd.lotcpeich@yu.edu)



Third, the most unusual idea is to **create a YU Consulting Force** that would be comprised of multi-functional teams of students.

YU alumni who work for top consulting firms, including [Accenture](#) and [Deloitte Consulting](#), would teach the students how to be consultants. Classes would cover such topics as project management, design thinking, agile methodologies, teamwork, client management, and professionalism. Accenture is also developing a consulting simulation to give our students a hands-on experience to further prepare them before they take on actual projects.

After teaching the students these consulting processes and best practices, we would unleash the teams to do **projects for non-profits across the nation**, potentially including the Orthodox Union, Jewish day schools, tzedakah organizations, and YU itself. YU faculty would collaborate with project leads at the outside organizations to provide guidance and oversight.

**If you would like to mentor** YU students who are doing consulting projects or internships, please let me know at [noam@yu.edu](mailto:noam@yu.edu)



Finally, we would match professors with students interested in doing **research assistantships**, and also provide the chance for students to propose independent research projects on which they would like to work with a professor.

### *Immediate and Intense Student Interest*

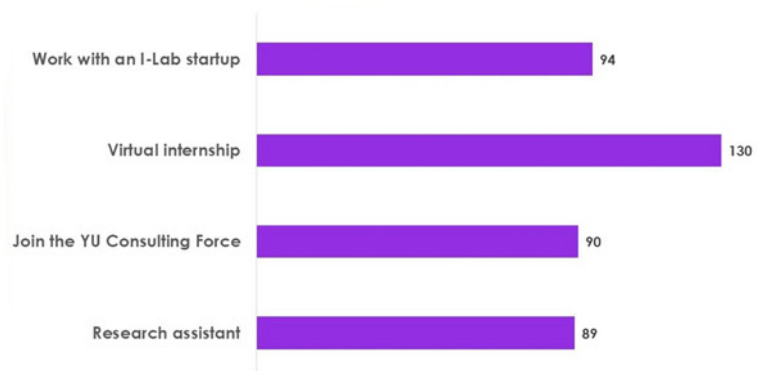
Last week, I sent a survey to the students to gauge their interest in these initiatives, hoping to find 50 students we could impact with these initiatives. We surpassed 50 submissions within the first hour!

In total, 235 students have expressed interest, spanning all four YU colleges: Syms-Women, Syms-Men, Yeshiva College, and Stern College for Women.

The students' majors range from computer science and business analytics, to finance and accounting, to marketing and management, to strategy and entrepreneurship, to psychology and philosophy.

The chart below shows the number of students who expressed "A lot of interest" or are "Extremely interested" in each of the initiatives.

(Students could do so for more than one initiative, so the total is more than the number of students.)



In addition, 39 students indicated strong interest in working on their own startups in the I-Lab.

**Once again, if you have interest in helping with any of these initiatives in order to make this summer into a Gam Zu L'tova moment for Jewish organizations and YU students, please be in touch!**

*And Finally: A Sign of the Times*



*YU Innovation Lab director Dr. Maria Blekher conducts her I-Lab course online*