

Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program Newsletter

YCHonors is a department of:



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A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

And so it goes!

We are coming to the end of another successful year in the Honors Program. And what a year it has been! From the 725 students who enrolled in the more than 60 courses that the program offered (the highest enrollment so far in the history of the program) to the near 50 cultural or extracurricular activities that our students enjoyed during the year, around the University and around the city, the program offered something exciting and of interest to every student.

And the end of the academic year does not find us relaxing.

We are putting the finishing touches on our summer program in Rome and Naples, we just opened enrollment in 36 wonderful courses for our continuing and new students (see page 8), and we are busy planning the new and exciting Freshman Honors Experience that we will be piloting for the incoming Freshmen in the Fall, and getting ready for the Year-End Dinner where 22 of our graduating honors students will share their research with faculty, families and the authorities of our University. The perfect way to crown a fantastic year!

Students News Highlights

- Congratulations to **Michael Silverstein**, whose research for his Honors Thesis has been accepted for presentation at two conferences. He will present a poster of it at the Association for Psychological Science Annual Convention and Dr. Anna-Lisa Cohen will present the research as a paper at the SARMAC XI Convention in Victoria, B.C., Canada.
- Congratulations to **Mark Weingarten** on the publication of a paper that was commenced during Dr. Peter's Honors Stem Cells seminar in Fall 2013, and for his recent election as Yeshiva College valedictorian.
- Congratulations to **Yosef Frenkel**, who presented his research with Dr. Steinhauer at the 56th Annual Drosophila Research Conference, which was sponsored by the Genetics Society of America in Chicago, IL and had 1500 attendees.
- Congratulations to **Gabi Weinberg**, who was accepted to the Wexner Graduate/ Davidson Scholars Fellowship as part of his semikha program at RIETS.
- Congratulations to **Yosef Kornbluth** for presenting his research at the 6th International Workshop of Complex Networks in NYC last March.
- Congratulations to **Jonathan Green** and **Yakir Forman** on their acceptance to the Tikvah Fund's six-week college fellowship this summer.

STUDENTS IN THE THEATER: YCDS'S THE BOYS NEXT DOOR

On March 23rd, the Honors Program attended a performance of the Yeshiva College Dramatic Society's spring production, *The Boys Next Door*, featuring some of our very own Honors students.

Michael Fridman, an Honors senior and president of the drama society, introduced the play. The actors put on a touching performance of this play about a group of men with mental disabilities living in a group home, portraying the characters with empathy and sensitivity.



ANNUAL HONORS SHABBATON

The Honors Program, along with the Medical Ethics Society, planned an interesting and thoroughly enjoyable Shabbaton at the Beren Campus on February 13-14. Before dinner, Dr. Esti Rollhaus spoke about the different formulations of legal and ethical medical principles in Israel, New York State, and Halakha. After dinner, members of the Medical Ethics Society led a series of seminars relating to issues of law, ethics, Halakha and Medicine.

Students have said that one of the most memorable parts of the Shabbaton was Professor Cwilich's pre-lunch talk. After last year's talk about his life, family influences and journey to YU, everyone was excited to hear this year's talk about his involvement with the arts. He spoke about his role in advising playwrights on scientific matters, and how the arts utilize and rely on numbers as well.

After lunch, many people participated in a Murder Mystery. Everyone was invited back after Shabbat for Panopoly led by the President of the Honors Council, Dani Schwab, and the Founding President of the Honors Council, Jonathan Schwab.

Overall, in the words of Josh Nagel, "The shabbaton was one of the best I've ever attended, a perfect balance of intellectual stimulation and plain ol' good fun."

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Highlights of Past Events:

Here are some of the events the Honors Program hosted this semester!

February 18 – Ultra-Orthodox Yiddishism? The Case of Solomon A. Birnbaum

The Honors Program had the distinct pleasure of hosting alumnus Shaul Seidler-Feller as he presented his Honors thesis work on Yiddishist paleographer and author, Prof. Solomon A. Birnbaum.

Dr. Sam Gellens introduced Shaul Seidler-Feller and the work he did on his thesis during his time in the Honors Program. Dr. Gellens spoke briefly about Solomon Birnbaum's family, noting that one of his grandchildren was in the audience.

In his presentation, Seidler-Feller started off by providing some historical background information on the Jews leading to the time of Solomon A. Birnbaum, including the evolution of languages between German and Yiddish, and the attempt to create a sense of Jewish nationalism. He mentioned the question of whether Yiddish was a national language or the national language and the conclusion that it was only a national language because of the many Jews that did not speak Yiddish.

He then explained how this background shaped the Birnbaum family, and particularly Solomon, and discussed Solomon's lecturing positions.

At the end, Seidler-Feller opened the floor to the audience for questions.

If you missed the talk, you can download a recording of it on the Honors Program's blog.

February 25 – Honors Roundtable featuring Dr. Ariel Malka

The Honors Program hosted another installment of the Honors Roundtable series, wherein professors reflect candidly on their career path and how they came to be professional academicians. This semester's roundtable featured Prof. Ariel Malka, a member of YU's Psychology Department. In a presentation entitled "My Pathway into Social Science," Prof. Malka shared the journey that brought him to be a researcher of the psychology of political preferences.

Professor Cwilich introduced Prof. Malka and his background on the West Coast. Prof. Malka then discussed his research and experimental methods and goals, tracing them back to when he first entered graduate school and had been interested in how students' goals and values in studying affected their academic performance. This interest soon led him to ask broader questions about goals and values in general, and how they shape our political opinions and choices.

More recently, he has been doing research on the relationship between personality and political attitudes.

April 29 – Music and the Brain

At our last luncheon of the semester, Dr. Harry Ballan gave a presentation on "Music and the Brain," which is also the title of an Honors course he will be teaching at Yeshiva College in the fall 2015 semester.

He spoke about his work at the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function on traumatic brain injuries and the therapeutic effects of music, which is often used to help patients. He described very poignant cases of deeply catatonic Parkinson's patients who could not be reached in any other way, being awakened through music.

Dr. Ballan stressed that in understanding the relationship between music and the brain, one must also understand that the auditory system is only one part of it, and that the motor system is also involved both when playing music and listening to music. He then discussed the way our mood is affected by all these things. "Musicality involves everything we do as humans," Dr. Ballan stated.

YC HONORS ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Matthew Williams

Matthew Williams, who graduated in 2010 with a major in Art History and Literature and a thesis titled “The Faces of Marat: Violence and Representation in Year 2,” is now pursuing a doctorate in History and Education at Stanford.



I was fascinated by Art History and took a number of courses, some of them independent studies, with John Hogan,” Matthew said when asked about what led him to decide to write his senior thesis in the field of Art History. “He was a marvelous visiting professor at YU when I was here. I also studied with Steven Fine, who, in addition to being in Jewish studies, might be one of the top art historians studying religion generally today. I ended up getting accepted to a summer fellowship

at Yale in art history the same year Marnin Young arrived. He was incredibly gracious with his time and not only did he advise my thesis, he also worked with me on a graduate level independent reading seminar. I really feel like I owe all three of them so much.”

Matthew’s thesis contributed to his future career in a number of ways. After graduating, he was a curatorial consultant for a museum and wrote a couple of art history related academic papers. On a more direct level, his interest in art history evolved into a specific focus on how iconographic programs can take populations and make them citizens. “I grew interested in nationalistic, educational art,” he said. He is now a PhD candidate in History and Education, writing his dissertation on the history of kiruv.

Matthew Williams says the following about his experience in the Honors Program: “The Honors Program helped me in a number of ways, but I’ll focus on two in particular. The first is that it provided an opportunity for me to throw myself into a project that garnered real feedback and valuable criticism from professors. The thesis was an opportunity to have a conversation about my work in a richer more complex way than any course paper. The second was that the collegiality of the Honors Program, modeled for me what it would mean to be a good colleague, to root for others, and encourage their growth. Too often we fail to see that confrontation and competition are impediments to learning. The Honors Program helped me learn that we can grow together.”

CULTURAL EVENTS FROM WINTER 2015

An Outing to the Museum of Modern Art

The Honors Program started off the new semester by taking advantage of the rare opportunity to see an exhibit at the **Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)** of Henri Matisse's (1869-1954) later works. On **Friday morning, January 30th**, **Prof. Joanne Jacobson** led students from both her Honors section of **First Year Seminar** and other Honors students to see the exhibit, "**Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs.**"

The exhibit put together a significant number of Matisse's later works from the 1940s and 1950s, when, almost incapacitated by illness, he turned to cut paper as his primary medium. This technique allowed the artist to exploit positive and negative forms, and pinning these cut-outs to walls or a canvas allowed for constant revision. Highlighting the way Matisse experimented with this technique, MoMA assembled and put on display the cut-outs that Matisse hung on his own walls, as well as more formal works such as "The Thousand and One Nights," a series of blue nudes, and his trial for the stained glass window "The Tree of Life," which was designed for the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, France, where he lived his final years.

Students were able to learn about Matisse's innovative use of this medium while admiring the twentieth-century artist's boldly colored works. The exhibit also provided a unique look at the conservation work that had been done on one of Matisse's works ("The Swimming Pool") through a video playing before visitors entered the room where that work was displayed.



Ibsen Returns to BAM: "Ghosts"

On Sunday, May 3rd, Honors students and professors took a trip to the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) to see a special production from the Almeida Theater in London of Henrik Ibsen's 1881 play, "Ghosts." We were fortunate enough to catch it on its last day at BAM.

This play about a widow (Helene) reliving the past and remembering her dead husband through her conversations with her pastor and her son was originally intended as a commentary on 19th-century morality, remains highly relevant today. Lesley Manville gave a powerful performance in her role as Helene Alving, portraying the character with dignity and emotion. An intense and truly heart wrenching play, this production of Ghosts turned out to be unforgettable, or as the New York Times said, "possibly the best 'Ghosts' you'll ever see."

Humanities in Dialogue with the History Dept.

On Tuesday, April 21st, the Honors Program hosted another installment of the Humanities Book Series as part of Humanities in Dialogue in the Honors Lounge.



In front of an intimate audience of faculty and students, Professor Jeffrey Freedman (History) interviewed Professor Douglas Burgess (History) about his recent book, *The Politics of Piracy: Crime and Civil Disobedience in Colonial America* (University Press of New England, 2014).

Professor Burgess spoke about his research on the topic of piracy in the context of England's legal relationship with the American colonies in the seventeenth century, mentioning the way in which the word 'piracy' changes depending on its historical context. He contrasted the popular stereotypes of pirates today with the historical reality of them as men engaging in illicit trade on behalf of the colonies, who were simultaneously a part of American colonial society. He also discussed the way this activity led to increased tension between America and the colonies.

Creative Nonfiction Reading by Honors Students

As our final event of the fall 2014 semester, the Honors Program hosted Professor Joanne Jacobson's Honors course, *Creative Nonfiction Writing (ENG 1724H)* in the Honors Lounge on December 18th. Prof. Jacobson's course explored the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, in the hybrid form sometimes referred to as "literary nonfiction." The particular focus of the course is the personal essay.

In addition to Prof. Jacobson, various members of the class read excerpts from their writings, all of which concerned issues of illness and family. The readers were Samuel Apple, Natan Bienstock, Shaul Elson, Daniel Klein, Akiva Schick and Joshua Tranen and all, each in their own way, were thoughtful and moving.

The experience of reading a creative writing piece to an audience allowed the students to see their writing in a different light. "I had written personal narrative-type pieces before, but I had never read one aloud, certainly not in such a staged manner - as a performer of sorts before an audience," remarked Shaul Elson. "It can be easy, in the thick of the writing process, to forget that prose - in both fiction and non-fiction - is discursive; that writing is more than just speaking into the void, but about engaging with thinking, reasoning readers." The experience of reading for an actual audience made Elson more aware of a reader's presence and gave him and other students a deeper appreciation of the writer-reader relationship.

Addressing Current Events with the Honors Program

Am I Charlie? Dr. Rachel Mesch Speaks Out

On February 4th, the Honors Program hosted a relevant and timely event as part of an ongoing series on Violence and Social Justice, in conjunction with the Schneier Program for International Affairs, entitled "Am I Charlie? French Universalism and the Jewish Question."

Dr. Rachel Mesch, a Yeshiva University professor who is an expert in French literature and culture, discussed the recent attacks in France, attempting to place them in their social and historical context. Both students and faculty came to hear Dr. Mesch speak and to gain more perspective on the current situation in France.

Dr. Mesch raised a number of important questions during the course of the discussion, working on trying to make sense of this tragic situation while explaining the issues that might have led to it. While French anti-Semitism is by no means a new topic, Dr. Mesch provided an interesting historical perspective on it.

Criminal Justice System and Minorities: A Reflection on the Eric Garner and Michael Brown Cases

In response to recent events, the Honors Program hosted a joint event with the YC Tzedek Society and the Stern Social Justice Society on February 11th. This highly relevant panel discussion was moderated by Elliot Friedman (a YC alumnus who is currently a third year law student at Yale) and included Ms. Sarah Lustbader, a public defender; Professor Ekow N. Yankan, a professor at Cardozo Law School who specializes in race relations; Professor Michael Lyles, a professor at Cardozo Law School and ex-Assistant District Attorney in the office of the Manhattan District Attorney; and Rabbi Yosef Blau, senior spiritual adviser at Yeshiva University.

Prof. Cwilich opened the program, acknowledging the important role students played in organizing the event. As the discussion began, questions were addressed both to the panel as a whole and to the individual speakers, who reflected on the way law enforcement and the criminal justice system are often unfavorable towards minorities, which can be seen in incidents like the shootings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

Yeshiva College and the Honors Program: Looking Above the Fray

The Honors Program hosted an event on March 18th to provide an opportunity for faculty and students to discuss the Honors Program's status and its perspectives for the future, along with the University's. Professors Ruth Bevan, Shalom Carmy, Gabriel Cwilich and Will Lee, who represent several different academic departments in YC and have all spent a large part of their professional lives at YC, led a conversation which tried to go beyond our daily and sometimes dramatic 'pressing concerns' in order to think more broadly and reflect together on YC's past, present and future, and its mission in the years to come.

After hearing from the professors on how the university changed and adapted to new situations, we heard the students' perspective from several student leaders from the Yeshiva College Student Association and the Honors Program Student Council, who had agreed to be part of this important conversation. The event was meant to allow students to voice their thoughts and hopes for the future and provide a safe and quiet space for everyone to think together.

This was one of our most successful luncheons, with the number of students attending over 60, and it was a clear demonstration of the interest of the faculty and students in being active participants in the life of the college and their willingness to be invested in its future.

Fall 2015 Course Highlights

The Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program is offering an amazing array of Honors courses for all the students in Yeshiva College and the SSSB to choose from, covering all departments from Arts (Architecture of the Synagogue, by Professor Glassman) to Introduction to Statistics (by Professor Aisenbray). This also includes all the categories of our general education both in the core curriculum (like Shakespeare and the Arts by Professor Lee, or an Honors section of Frontiers of Science by Professors Steinhauer and Peter) and in Jewish Studies (Dead Sea Scrolls by Professor Bernstein or Genesis and Literature by Professor Carmy).

We have courses to help students start their path in a discipline (Calculus I by Professor Lebow, General Physics by Professor Cwilich, Introductory Latin by Professor Jaffe, or Logic by Professor Johnson), and also courses that are more advanced in a field of study like Stem Cells by Professor Peter, Chemical Analysis by Professor Jiang, International Crimes by Professor Burgess, Mathematical Physics by Professor Zypman, or Ancient and Medieval Philosophy by Professor Segal.

We have new exciting interdisciplinary courses that are appearing for the first time in our curriculum like Music and the Brain, by Professor Ballan, and some others in this category which students loved in the past like Religion and Politics by Professor Aroosi.

In whatever direction you want to move your studies forward, you will find something stimulating and challenging. Find more about these courses on our website under 'Courses.'

YEAR-END DINNER

The Honors Program is gearing up to celebrate its fourteenth graduating class, with a dinner for the graduating students, their families and guests, the mentors of their theses, and many members of the faculty and administration of the University including President Joel and Provost Botman.

The highlight of the dinner will be a brief presentation by each student of the highlights of their research. So our guests will be hearing talks on an incredible mixture of topics illustrating the richness of our curriculum.

Just a short sample of the topics that these twenty two graduates will address:

- **Nathan Akhavan** will speak on "Creating a Mouse Model to Study Chronic Pancreatitis"
- **Joshua Fitterman** will present on "Poverty and Social Institutions in Medieval Fustat's (Old Cairo) Jewish Community"
- **Nat Tracer's** topic is "The Affordable Care Act: An Analysis of Intervention in a Market With Imperfect Information"
- **Zach Mostel** is researching "The Dimension of Time Within Classical Judaism and Rabbinic Literature"
- And **Ben Statman's** talk will be on "Investigating the Role of the Planar Cell Polarity Pathway in Drosophila Spermatogenesis"

It will certainly be an evening to remember!