

# Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program Newsletter

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## A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

*Another great semester of the Honors Program is coming to an end. And what a great semester this was!*

*We had once again a record semester in terms of our courses. For the first time, more than 400 students enrolled in our almost forty courses, ranging from Architecture of the Synagogue to Statistics.*

*We have welcomed sixty new students to our program, who are enrolled in the Freshman Honors Experience, learning about topics as disparate as the literature of east and west, the connections between philosophy of science fiction, the history of our court system, or the Spanish Civil War, while at the same time getting to know the cultural life of our city.*

*At the same time more than forty students in our program are rounding their education in their fourth year on campus, completing second majors, doing research in labs, taking that wonderful extra course outside their fields which they could not schedule before, doing research on their Honors thesis, and preparing themselves to enter the world of graduate or professional schools and the world at large.*

*We had a very active schedule of Honors luncheons in which students flocked to our lounge to listen to scholars from our own University and from far away, and we had great cultural events in the city in museums, the theater, and concerts.*

*But as I always tell my students: You haven't seen anything yet. Next semester will bring you much more of this!*

*-- Prof. Gabriel Cwilich*

## Students News Highlights

- Congratulations to Honors alumnus **Eitan Zimberg** on being selected for the very prestigious ASPIRE scholarship. He is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Cybersecurity at New York University.
- Congratulations to the four Honors students who have been nominated this year as Henry Kressel Research Scholars: **Yosef Frenkel, Daniel Shlian, Russell Spiewak, and Sheldon Lerman**. This prestigious research fellowship offers selected students the unique opportunity to craft a yearlong intensive research project under the direct supervision of University faculty. Frenkel, Spiewak, and Lerman are also currently working on their Senior Honors Thesis.

## Fall 2015 Orientation

The first couple of weeks of the semester were packed with activities to start off the new school year. New Honors students had their Honors orientation on Friday morning, August 21, where they learned from Prof. Cwilich about the various opportunities offered by the program and how to get involved.



Then, on August 23, First Time on Campus students attended an event in the Sky Cafe, where they met Honors faculty, including those teaching Freshman Honors Experience, in order to begin the year in conversation about a timely subject: counter-terrorism, surveillance programs, and their relationship to human rights, privacy rights, and democracy.

To round off orientation week, new students from the Yeshiva College, Stern College, and Syms Honors Programs, as well as Dean's Scholars, met for a Panoply Extravaganza on August 26th featuring trivia games and dessert.

The Honors Program hosted our yearly Welcome Luncheon on September 2nd, where both new and returning Honors students sat down with Honors Program staff and the Honors Student Council for a discussion about what's new in the program and to learn about upcoming events and opportunities.

## HONORS SUMMER PROGRAM 2015: ROME

This past summer's successful Honors Summer Program trip to Italy, focusing on Rome and Naples, left participants with some great memories. Between touring the sites of Rome, discovering the ruins of Pompeii, and eating copious amounts of pizza, pasta, and gelato, students had an amazing time learning about the history and art of Rome. Here is what some of our participants had to say about the trip:



**Jacky Sasson:** I learned a lot about Jewish history, sculptures, paintings, and many other things. What's priceless is how united the group was: even though we came from different backgrounds, we all learned from each other.

**Hillel Field:** The trip would not have been complete without an amazing, intellectual, curious and adventurous group of students. We found the time to bond as a group making lifelong friends within our incredible excursions. The experience of spending Shabbat together added a spiritually profound layer to the trip. There are not many experiences that epitomize the ideal of Torah U'Maddah as well as this trip, and I hope students will continue to take advantage of such opportunities.

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# Highlights of Past Events:

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

## October 14 – Alexis de Tocqueville on decentralization and 'local government,' revisited

Dr. Neil Rogachevsky, a postdoctoral research Associate at the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, came to the Honors Lounge for our weekly luncheon to give a talk on the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who was famous for celebrating 'local government' and 'associations' as a means of perpetuating liberty within democracies. While Dr. Rogachevsky pointed out that his talk accepts the view that Tocqueville celebrated and sought to encourage civic associations, he also stressed Tocqueville's view of the limitations of such associations in modern politics.

At the end of the talk, time was set aside for questions from the audience. During the discussion that followed, several modern day examples were brought up, including efforts in France to empower the local municipalities and the recent secession attempt in Scotland. Prof. Cwilich brought up the modern day example of Catalonia and Spain, where certain political parties in Catalonia support the idea of independence from the rest of Spain.

## October 28 – Honors Roundtable featuring Dr. Joanne Jacobson

The Honors Program hosted another installment of our Honors Roundtable series, an event in

which faculty members reflect on their career and trajectory, their interests and the path that brought them to become the scholars they are today. This time, Professor Joanne Jacobson of the English department joined us to talk about writing, change, and the element of surprise in her unfolding life in the academy.

Prof. Jacobson, who has taught in the English Department at YU since 1990, is serving her second term now as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. She has published two books and is currently completing a volume of literary nonfiction on chronic illness, *Every Last Breath*.

She began with her upbringing, and went on to discuss her doctoral thesis, which became her first book. After a brief talk, Prof. Jacobson read three of her essays on the topic of illness for the audience, about the illnesses of her mother, her father and herself. After the reading, Prof. Jacobson opened up the floor for questions. In response to one, Prof. Jacobson discussed the tension between creative writing and academia, pointing out that academia provides a safe place so that people can be creative while still having financial security.

## November 4 – Jews and Muslims in France: When Enemies Are Brothers Too

Dr. Ethan Katz, Assistant Professor of History and Affiliated Professor of Judaic

Studies at the University of Cincinnati, visited the Honors Program to speak about his new book, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France*. The book describes the history of the relations between France's Jews and Muslims from World War I until the present.

Dr. Katz spoke about his book, the history of Muslims and Jews in France, and the importance of that past for shedding light on the present. He discussed the large number of Jews living in France before World War II and the sense of crisis in Jewish-Muslim relations since the early 2000s, which were marked by aggression, inflammatory pamphlets, and the firebombing of a synagogue, which led Dr. Katz to doing research on the historical relations between Jews and Muslims and what led to the current circumstances. His discussion brought us back to moments in history when Jews and Muslims interacted as fellow immigrants and North Africans, instead of as members of opposing ethnic groups.

Muslims and Jews from North Africa had a sense of common culture and were able to bond over food, culture, and music. But then gradually things were becoming more politicized, which led to riots and strained relations. Dr. Katz pointed out that both groups are vulnerable now in regard to their standing in France.

## Freshman Honors Experience Special Events!

### A View from the Bridge on Broadway

On Sunday, November 15th & 22nd, the Honors Program took our first year students along with some upperclassmen to see Ivo Van Hove's new production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* at the Lyceum Theatre. This production, straight from a sold out run in London, won the 2015 Olivier Awards for Best Revival, Best Actor, and Best Director.



In Ivo Van Hove's brilliant new production, this 1950s drama set in an Italian American neighborhood near the Brooklyn Bridge plays out on an effectively minimalist set. The action unfolds with building intensity over the course of two hours, drawing the audience into one family's personal tragedy.

### Early Soviet Photography at the Jewish Museum

On Friday, October 23rd the students in the Freshman Honors Experience took a tour of the Jewish Museum, as part of their Freshman Honors Experience course.



The students went on a tour of the “The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film” exhibit, about the pivotal role Soviet photographers, many of them Jewish, played in the history of photography, covering the period from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution through the 1930s. The works they saw included photographs by Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and Arkady Shaikhet, along with poster art that had been used to disseminate Communist ideology. This exhibit shows how Soviet art was used both as a weapon of propaganda (such as the photographs depicting Soviet leisure life as a way of promoting the Soviet Union), as well as a tool for social change and political engagement.

### Visit to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives

Prof. Graciela Broitman's Freshman Honors Experience class went on a special visit to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) at Tamimen Library, New York University on October 30th. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was comprised of American volunteers to the International Brigades that fought in the Spanish Civil War, the subject of Prof. Broitman's course.

Kate Donovan, the Public Service and Instruction Librarian, met the group and introduced them to the archives. She also discussed with the group what it means to research archives and what it entails. The students were able to peruse some material that she had prepared: posters of the time of the civil war (which were analyzed and discussed), photographs taken by the members of the International Brigades, letters from members of ALBA, personal journals, and postcards that the volunteers sent to friends and family in the US.

## ***CULTURAL EVENTS FROM FALL 2015***

### **An Evening at the Metropolitan Opera**

As part of our extracurricular cultural activities, the Honors Program had the pleasure of going to the opera! On October 14th, the Honors Program accompanied the students in Dr. Will Lee's Honors INTC course "Shakespeare and the Arts," going to the Metropolitan Opera to see director Bartlett Sher's season-opening new production of Verdi's masterful *Otello*, an opera performed to an Italian libretto written by Arrigo Boito based on Shakespeare's play *Othello*.

This dramatic production of Italian opera's greatest tragedy follows *Otello*, a great hero who cannot control his jealousy and allows himself to be guided by others, and his downfall in what the company called a "miraculous union of music and drama." The Met Opera's modern production of this opera involved a cleverly designed moving set by British set designer Es Devlin, in which translucent walls slide between scenes to create different spaces and locations. Sonya Yoncheva is both visually striking and emotionally charged as the innocent, wronged Desdemona, *Otello*'s wife.



This powerful, poignant production made for a very enjoyable and thought-provoking evening. "The thrilling tragedy really drew me in," reflected Honors student Zachary Katz. Joshua Kaufman commented, "A scene I remember vividly is when *Othello* talks to *Desdemona* and *Iago* sort of stands atop the walls of the stage set. He is always off to the side somewhere even when he should not be, as his impact is on every scene, always toying with their minds, specifically *Otello*'s."

### **Rachmaninoff Philharmonic Festival at Lincoln Center**



As part of our calendar of cultural events for Honors students, on November 19th the Honors Program took a trip down to Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall, home of the NY Philharmonic, to hear a selection of works by Rachmaninoff as part of Lincoln Center's Rachmaninoff Philharmonic Festival. This performance was conducted by Neeme Järvi and featured solo pianist Daniil Trifonov. The program included Rachmaninoff's Russian Song Op. 11, No. 3, Piano Concerto No. 4, and Symphony No. 1, which made for a very enjoyable evening for the students, who were sitting in private boxes and had an unparalleled view of the concert hall.

# Christina Chiu Reading

On December 2nd, Honors students were treated to a special reading by Prof. Christina Chiu, who will be teaching a course on Creative Fiction in the Spring 2016 semester.

During this joint event with the English Department in the Honors Lounge, Prof. Chiu read a chapter from her new novel *The Ultimate Closet*, a coming of age story about a girl whose father leaves the family to start a life in China with another woman. The overall novel takes us to different points in the protagonist's life (ranging from age 4 to 86), and explores the impact of her parents' behavior—her father's narcissism in particular—as well as how it plays out behaviorally in her life.

Prof. Chiu spoke with the audience about the process of writing, and we all enjoyed welcoming her to YU.



## Spring 2016 Course Highlights

The coming semester offers an incredible variety of courses for Honors student to choose from as they move ahead in their studies. Including the cross-lists, which add a new element of flexibility to students' choices, 47 different courses will be offered. While it is impossible to list them all here, some of the highlights are:

- Six courses in Jewish Studies, which include some Honors “classics” like Classical Jewish History, or the Philosophy of Rav Kook, and two professors teaching Honors courses in Bible for the first time: Former Yeshiva College Dean Professor Eichler and Professor Hurvitz.
- New professors who will be teaching are Dr. Harry Ballan who will offer a course in Music and Cognition, building on the incredible success of the course with which he made his “debut” this semester in the Music and Psychology Departments; and Christina Chiu, a wonderful novelist, will return to YU to teach a course on Writing Short Fiction.
- In the Sciences we will offer courses from the introductory General Physics, to the advanced Immunology or Chemistry of Metals in Biology, to the graduate courses in Mathematical Statistics and Elliptic Partial Differential Equations.
- Our Yeshiva College core will be very well represented with the always popular courses of Books on Books, Films on Films by Dr. Geyh; the Psychology of Public opinion by Dr. Malka; the new History of the Law by Dr. Burgess; and Music and the World Wars by Dr. Beliaevsky.
- The Social Sciences will see courses ranging from Financial Economics, to Great Political Thinkers, Medical Sociology, Topics in Modern Political Foundations, and Psychology of Religion.

In other words, something for all tastes and interests!

## Addressing Current Events with the Honors Program

### *Constitution Day*

*On Wednesday, September 9th, the Honors Program co-sponsored our annual Constitution Day event with the Pre-Law Society, the Office of Pre-Law Advisement, and the Honors Entrepreneurial Leadership Program. The event, titled "How Reporters Protect Informants and Information," featured a conversation with reporter Ed Hammond of The Financial Times and Bloomberg LP. He narrated histories of several cases on which he had to report and walk narrow lines between informing fairly and avoiding lawsuits against himself and his employers. A very interesting, lively and spirited question and answer period followed.*

### *Nobel Prize Nanosecond Party 2015*

*Repeating a tradition that Yeshiva College has had for 10 years, the Honors Program co-sponsored the Nobel Prize Nanosecond Party on October 16th, along with several student clubs and organizations, including the Chemistry Club, Cancer Society, Physics Club, Entrepreneurship and Technology Club, Undergraduate Student Research Presentations, Yeshiva College Student Association, and the National Science Foundation.*

*In this annual event, held in the week that the Nobel Prizes were announced, six professors representing the six areas to which Nobel Prizes were awarded spoke for six minutes each about what this year's prize was all about. Prof. Neer Asherie moderated the event. Dr. Josefa Steinhauer, representing Medicine; Dr. Gabriel Cwilich, representing Physics; Dr. Jianfeng Jiang, representing Chemistry; Dr. David Lavinsky, representing Literature; Dr. Jamie Aroosi, representing Peace; and Dr. James Kahn, representing Economics, all gathered to explain the prizes that had been awarded in their fields, allowing students to keep up to date on the Nobel Prizes and be inspired by the great achievements of the winners.*

### *The Tragedy of Syria, the Immigration Crisis in Europe, and Their Global Implications*

*On December 15<sup>th</sup>, a very moving event took place on our campus. Our Program partnered with the Schneier Program for International Affairs, the Stern Social Justice Society, and the YC Tzedek Society to bring a superb panel of distinguished visitors to discuss this very current topic. Provost Botman opened the event, and the panel, moderated by Dr. Ruth Bevan, the Chair of the Political Science Department, was composed of Mario Sauder, the Consul for Political Affairs of the German Consulate in New York; the Award-winning Syrian journalist and documentary film maker Zaina Erhaim from Aleppo, Syria; and NYU Law Professor Muzaffar Chishti, Director of the Center for Migration Policy. They considered different aspects of the crisis in Syria, its impact on the daily life of its people, and the reactions in Germany and some of the other countries in the EU to the influx of refugees escaping from the war. They all expressed that, although there was a slow-down in the flux of refugees due to the winter, the continuous deterioration of the situation in the country makes it more urgent that the international community work together to face the crisis, and they gave several examples of possible ways students can help and get involved. The Honors Program is planning to screen in the Spring some of the documentaries that Ms. Erhaim and her organization made in Syria.*