

# Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program Newsletter

YCHonors is a department of:



## WHAT'S INSIDE:

### PAGE 1

A LETTER FROM THE  
DIRECTOR

### PAGE 2

STUDENT NEWS

HONORS SHABBATON

### PAGE 3

HIGHLIGHTS OF PAST  
EVENTS

### PAGE 4

HONORS YEAR-END  
DINNER

### PAGE 5

CULTURAL EVENTS

### PAGE 6

VISIT FROM NYC  
COUNCILMAN YDANIS  
RODRIGUEZ

FALL 2016 COURSE  
HIGHLIGHTS

## A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

*Dear Honors students:*

*Another academic year finished in our program, and we are getting ready to start a new one in just a few days. This has been a great year for our program, as you can glimpse from this and our previous newsletters.*

*It is still amazing to me the caliber of the thirty five students who graduated or are graduating from our program in the past academic year, the depth of their research thesis projects, and the interesting paths of further study or work that they will be pursuing after college, and nothing made me prouder than sharing their accomplishments in our year-end dinner together with their families and the highest authorities of our University. To think that seven years ago, when I started my Directorship, we were graduating less than a dozen students per year, and that now almost eighty five percent of our Honors students choose to stay in college for a fourth year to engage in research, complete a second major, pursue extra minors, and in most cases to engage in the wonderful process of producing an Honors thesis under the mentorship of our faculty. It is a testimony to the commitment to the values of education on the part of them, their families and my colleagues in the faculty. Read more about them in this newsletter and follow their exploits on our website.*

*As this newsletter shows, we had some exciting memorable extracurriculars this year, by bringing great speakers from inside or outside the University, or attending some of the amazing shows, concerts and museum exhibits that our city offers, and we are planning a similar array for this coming year that we will announce soon.*

*And as usual we offered a great array of Honors courses, the true heart of our program, which received a record enrollment of almost eight hundred students, and as you can see here, our offerings for the coming Fall are just as exciting as we get ready to receive a new cohort of Honors students, who, we are sure, will continue in the steps of their predecessors.*

*Altogether, great things happened last year and more great things are to come.*

*-- Prof. Gabriel Cwilich*

## Students News Highlights

- Congratulations to Honors student **Herschel Singer** on his acceptance to Brandeis's Hornstein Program - a 21 month, 2 degree program from which he will receive an MA in Jewish Professional Leadership and an MBA in non-profit management from Brandeis's Heller School for Social Policy and Management.
- Congratulations to Honors alumnus **Shlomo Zuckier**, whose paper on "A Halakhic-Philosophic Account of Justified Self-Defense" inspired a week-long symposium by the Association for the Philosophy of Judaism.
- Best wishes to **Adir Feifel** who is beginning work at the prestigious economic consulting firm Analysis Group in Boston, and to recent graduates **Josh Fitterman**, who is starting Law School at Georgetown University; **Shalom Wilner**, **Sheldon Lerman**, and **Nathan Denicoff**, who are starting Medical School at AECOM; and **Elie Flatow**, who is taking a research position at Mount Sinai Medical College.

## HONORS SHABBATON

Honors students took a trip down to the Beren Campus for the yearly Honors Shabbaton, which took place this year on April 15-16, which was Parshat Mitzorah. The Honors Society teamed up with the Medical Ethics Society for an enjoyable and interesting Shabbaton.

On Friday there was a beautiful Carlebach davening, followed by a joint dinner. Following dinner, Dr. Herb Leventer gave a talk on "The Ethical Issues Raised by the Zika Virus."

After Shabbat lunch, Dr. Cwilich gave a talk in which he related his his love for some gentiles who love the Jews. He read excerpts and translations of some of his favorite non-Jewish writers' perspectives on Judaism and Jewish thought, including Leonardo Padura's *Heretics* and several texts from Erri De Luca.

Our very own Honors student Chaim Metzger gave a dvar Torah at Seuda Shlishit emphasizing what community means and how central Korban Pesach was, and Seder still is, to Jewish tradition. And of course, there was great singing all around.

## HONORS PROGRAM STAFF

Gabriel Cwilich  
Director

[cwilich@yu.edu](mailto:cwilich@yu.edu)

Ben Katz

Publicist

[bkatz3@yu.edu](mailto:bkatz3@yu.edu)

Hannah Rozenblat

Program Coordinator

[hannahrozenblat@gmail.com](mailto:hannahrozenblat@gmail.com)

Check out our blog at [blogs.yu.edu/honors](http://blogs.yu.edu/honors)

Follow us on  
Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/YCHonorsProgram](http://www.facebook.com/YCHonorsProgram)

To unsubscribe, please send an email to [yhonors@yu.edu](mailto:yhonors@yu.edu) with a polite request to do so.

# Highlights of Past Events:

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

## February 17 – The Intriguing Case of Yosef Haim Brenner

Our first luncheon of the semester featured Professor of Hebrew Dr. Sam Schneider, who spoke about the intriguing case of Yosef Haim Brenner (1881-1921), the forerunner and father of modern Hebrew Literature. Yosef Haim Brenner, who immigrated to Palestine in 1909 and dramatically lost his life during the Yaffa riots, left a rich body of novels and stories, later translated to many languages, that were extremely influential literarily and philosophically on the generation of Israeli intellectuals that came after him.

Dr. Schneider began his talk by tracing Brenner's early life and biography. He described the simplicity of Brenner's early biography, explaining that most Hebrew writers went through the same rites of passage. Brenner was born in a shtetl in Ukraine and then went to yeshivas, moving from place to place when the shtetls began emptying at the end of the nineteenth century. He was conscripted into the Russian army, where he encountered anti-Semitism, before deserting and moving to London. Eventually he returned to Galicia, before moving to Israel around 1908. During this entire time, he continued writing prolifically and publishing his work. His autobiographical writing had a wide readership. Dr.

Schneider discussed Brenner's books and themes.

An important theme that evolved was the question of how to handle the past and tradition. Brenner wanted to start focusing on the present rather than on the past, and he became an anti-religious writer, asserting that religion was the cause that brought the Jews to the current situation of anti-Semitism. But in spite of this, the great religious figures of the time, like Rav Kook, had great respect for him. Since Brenner was a key figure in Hebrew literature, his thoughts had a great influence.

## March 16 – Figurative Inquisitions

Dr. Erin Graff Zivin visited the Honors Program to talk about her book, *Figurative Inquisitions: Conversion, Torture, and Truth in the Luso-Hispanic Atlantic*. Dr. Erin Graff Zivin is the Chairperson of the Spanish and Portuguese and Comparative Literature Department at the University of Southern California, and is an expert on Marrano culture.

In what was one of our most well attended luncheons to date, Dr. Graff Zivin discussed the political climate of the time and the reasons why Marranos and assimilated Jews made real Christians so anxious. She explained that during that time, it

was difficult for Christians to distinguish between themselves and these new Christians, and this lack of a clear cut boundary created a lot of tension.

She encouraged students to share what new things they learned through this talk that they had not known before, highlighting new ways of thinking about Marrano culture.

## April 13 – International Dimension of the Honors Program

The Honors Program invited current and former students who who spent time abroad to speak about their international experiences and work.

Aaron Portman, a senior at YU, spoke about his experiences studying abroad last semester at the University of St Andrews, located in Scotland. He mentioned the benefits of studying abroad, and what it means for a student of Yeshiva University to do so.

Yair Saperstein, a graduate of the program, spoke about his experience traveling and working globally in medicine over the last four years. He focused on the work he has done in Uganda and the way he perceived his personal, medical, and Jewish growth as a result of this experience.

## HONORS YEAR-END DINNER 2016

On Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the accomplishments of our seniors who graduated this month at the Honors Year-End Dinner. Seniors, their families, representatives of the Honors classes of 2017 to 2020, faculty members, and trustees from the university enjoyed dinner while hearing brief remarks from Dr. Elizabeth Stewart, the Honors Program Committee Chair; Dr. Selma Botman, the provost of Yeshiva University; and Dr. Joshua Joseph, the Senior Vice President of YU.

Dr. Gabriel Cwilich, Director of the Honors Program, then spoke about the past year's activities and accomplishments before presenting the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Award for Service to the Honors Program by a Graduating Senior to Chaim Metzger and Shai Berman. Awards for the best theses of 2015 were presented to Daniel Atwood (Social Sciences/Humanities) and Benjamin Statman (Natural Sciences).



After dinner, our guests split into four groups to hear the students' Honors theses presentations, introduced by Professor Liesl Schwab, the head of the writing program. Once the presentations concluded, everybody reconvened for dessert and for a faculty address by Dr. Sumanta Goswami, the chair of the Biology department. The wonderful evening came to an end with closing remarks by Dr. Gabriel Cwilich and graduating senior Aaron Portman, who encouraged his fellow graduates to hold on to what they have achieved and learned in the academic world and to celebrate their accomplishments as they go out into the bigger world.

We couldn't be prouder of our seniors and are thankful to all two hundred and fifty guests who attended the dinner and celebrated their accomplishments. This year's dinner celebrated more students than ever, a testimony to the growth of the Honors Program. We look forward to next year!



## ***CULTURAL EVENTS FROM SPRING 2016***

### **Trips to the Metropolitan Opera**

As part of our extracurricular cultural activities, the Honors Program had the pleasure of going to the opera not once but twice this semester!

In March, we took our students to see *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Metropolitan Opera. Set in 1930s Seville, this comedy of manners and morals is one of the most popular operas in the Met's repertoire with music composed by Mozart. *Le Nozze di Figaro* made for a fun evening full of laughs and we all thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to see this classic about the servants Figaro and Susanna who are trying to get married but must first thwart their married employer's attempts to seduce Susanna while teaching him a lesson in fidelity.

Then, in April, we went to see a completely different type of opera. *Elektra*, composed by Richard Strauss, was an intense performance where the drama unfolded in a single act that was less than two hours. This opera about the grieving Elektra who seeks to avenge her father's death combines Greek tragedy with the insights of early-20th-century Freudian psychology, making for a powerful performance, both vocally and emotionally.



### **Long Day's Journey into Night**

On Sunday, April 3rd, the Honors Program went to see *A Long Day's Journey into Night* on Broadway on its very first day at the American Airlines Theater. This emotionally intense production of the highly autobiographical play by Eugene O'Neill ran for a full three hours and 45 minutes long, making this one of the longest Broadway shows we have seen!

The action of the play unfolds over the course of one summer day, following the Tyrone family's personal drama. The dysfunctional Tyrone family, starring Jessica Lange, Gabriel Byrne, Michael Shannon, and John Gallagher, Jr., are in their summer cottage in Connecticut and while each of them is dealing with his/her own issues, their relationships with each other are unraveling as well. Through the dialogue, the audience learns about their history and the things that led to their present situation.

# A Visit from NYC Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez

On April 6th, the Honors Program had the honor of hosting a very special guest for our weekly luncheon. NYC Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez came to speak to our students about his experience representing Washington Heights to the city, as well as his recent trip to Israel.

He discussed the relationship between Jews and Dominicans, mentioning how the Dominican Republic took in Jews fleeing from persecution. He pointed out how we can help other people in our very own neighborhood, mentioning some of the initiatives Yeshiva University students are involved in.

Many students and faculty members came to hear Councilman Rodriguez speak, and even President Joel joined for this highly important event.



## Fall 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, 31 different courses will be offered. While it is impossible to list them all here, some of the highlights are:

- New professors who will be teaching honors courses are Dr. Maria Zaitseva with a course in American Foreign Policy, Professor Amy Stuart with a course in Sociology of Race and Racism, cross-listed as Sociology and the HBSI core category, and Dr. Jacob Wisse, who will be teaching together with Dr. Meir Soloveichik a course on Rembrandt and the Jews.
- Our Yeshiva College core will have a strong representation with seven different courses in the categories of Human Behavior and Social Institutions, Interpreting the Creative, Cultures over Time, and Contemporary World Cultures. And for the first time these will include the three sections specifically devoted to the Freshmen on Friday morning, our new Freshman Honors core, taught by Professors Hadassah Kosak, Will Lee, and Rachel Mesch.
- In the Sciences we will offer courses in Stem Cells, Chemical Analysis, and Statistical Mechanics, together with a vast array of graduate courses in Mathematics.
- Five courses in Jewish Studies, which include some Honors "classics" like Medieval and Classical Intellectual Jewish History, two professors teaching Honors courses in Bible: Former Yeshiva College Dean Professor Eichler and Professor Carmy, and after a long time an Honors course in Advanced Hebrew.
- The Social Sciences will see courses ranging from Money and Banking, to the timely course in Presidential Elections, co-taught by Dr. Ruth Bevan and Senator Lieberman, while the humanities will have courses ranging from The Evolution of the Skyscraper to Graphic Novels and Animation.