



From the Dean's Desk

Powering the Sy Syms Honors and Entrepreneurial Leadership Program to Greater Heights

King Solomon tells us in Proverbs 22:6 that we need to customize our education for each student's path and level ("Chanoch l'naar al pi darko"). At Yeshiva University, this takes the form of having multiple undergraduate colleges, a wealth of majors in each college, multiple Torah Studies and Jewish Studies levels from which to choose, 150 student clubs ([see here for one major success](#)), the [YU Innovation Lab](#) and [YU Consulting Force](#) in which students can participate, and a variety of other high-impact campus activities.

Another prominent example of our acting on King Solomon's advice is **our Honors Program**.

When I joined Sy Syms almost three years ago, I convened a group of students and the director of the Honors Program, [University Professor Dr. Moses Pava](#), to brainstorm about how to enhance the Honors Program for our students.

The students were particularly interested in our focusing on three areas: developing advanced and **unique courses**, adding **enrichment events**, and conducting **experiential** exercises or trips. We used the students' input to create a distinctive strategy for the Sy Syms Honors Program that I detail below. Two donors, including Sy Syms Board of Overseers chairman Avram Blumenthal, were excited by our plans and made five-year commitments to the program.

As a result of the targeted investments we have made in the Honors Program over the last couple of years, it has truly become another gem of which Sy Syms can be proud. Please read below for more. Thank you also to the **Honors Student Committee**, led by Jonah Loskove, that we created two years ago and which has been an invaluable partner at planning and carrying out everything described below.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Noam'.

Dr. Noam Wasserman
Dean



Honors students attend a performance of the award-winning production *The Lehman Trilogy* (see the story below)

Unique Courses

In the Spring of 2020, we were able to **grow the Honors course offerings by 50%**, adding equal numbers of Honors sections on both the Beren (women) and Wilf (men) campuses. We focused on creating two types of courses: unique Honors elective courses and Honors sections of our Principles courses.

Unique Honors Electives

We have developed unique Honors offerings that can't be found anywhere else.

- For the first of those courses, we tapped the power of “One YU,” exploring faculty from across the university who excel at what they do and can bring it to students in other schools. I approached Dean Danielle Wozniak of YU’s Wurzweiler School of Social Work to brainstorm about creating a course in a domain at which Wurzweiler excels. Her suggestion: dealing with difficult people and developing your emotional intelligence. Two months later, a senior professor from Wurzweiler, Dr. Nancy Beckerman, debuted “**Dealing With Difficult People ... and Yourself**” to a packed classroom of Honors students. These skills are invaluable for anyone dealing with challenging people on the job and in the community at large.
- The following year, star YU alum Matt Williams, at the time the head of research for the Orthodox Union, debuted a course in **communal leadership**, “**Non-profits v2.0**,” in which students learn the best practices when creating or running high-impact non-profits, see how to translate their business skills into contributions to communal organizations, and get experience developing specific concepts for the next great non-profit. This semester's course is slated to have as guest speakers some of the biggest names in Jewish non-profits.

After debuting in the Honors Program, both of these courses have now **moved into the regular curriculum** so everyone can benefit from them as we look for the next great Honors-specific course to add.

Honors Sections of Principles Courses

Our curriculum is designed to build a strong foundation across the major areas of business while also enabling students to explore potential majors. During their early semesters, all Sy Syms students are required to

take introductory “Principles” courses in each of our five departments. We created **an Honors section within each Principles course**, enabling Honors students to be taught at an Honors level and students in the non-Honors sections to be taught at the appropriate level. For Honors students, working together with their Honors-mates in these Principles courses also creates a cohort, jumpstarting the relationship building that is a bedrock of the YU experience, and for many in the Honors Program a highlight of being in the program.

This semester, we also began expanding beyond the Principles courses by introducing Honors sections in non-Principles required courses: in Business Communications (taught by our head of **Business Communications**, Prof. Marc Spear) and in our new **Jewish Values** curriculum (taught by R’ Itamar Rosensweig, our new head of the Jewish Values curriculum).

A wonderful element of a YU education is **the very small class sizes**, which enable much deeper relationships between students and professors, and among students themselves. This is particularly true within the Honors courses, which typically are even smaller and more tight knit.

Enrichment Activities: Fireside Chats and Author Chats

We also added a series of Fireside Chats. These Chats focus on role models who are stars in their industries, helping the students learn firsthand from their journeys and their life examples.

Each Fireside Chat is comprised of three elements:

- **Relationship building** – The students connect with other students and with Honors Program alumni who are invited to most Chats.
- **Chat content** – The students learn from the dialogue between the moderator and the Fireside Chat guest, covering such topics as the key career decisions they made, how they integrate their personal and professional lives, surprising facts about their industries, and their best career advice.
- **Student Q&A** – The students then get a chance to ask questions about any new topics or to delve into issues that surfaced during the Chat.

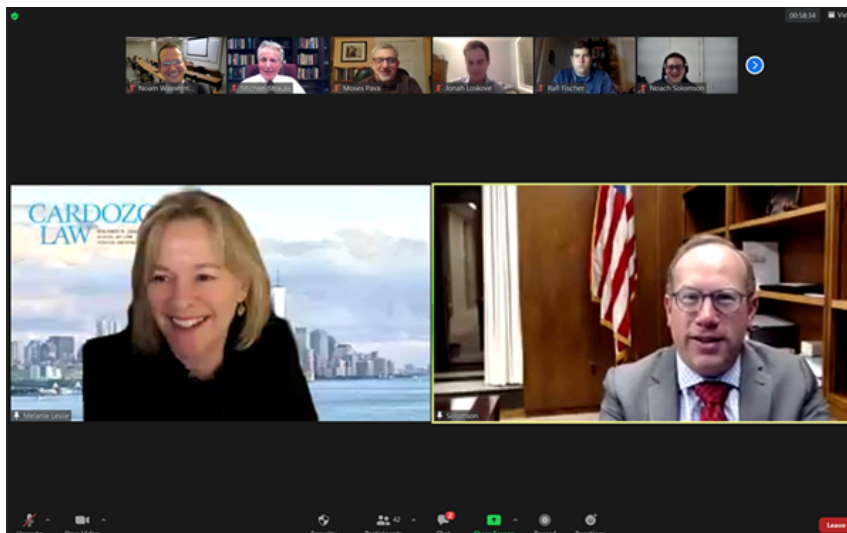
A little more than a year ago, **Sen. Joseph Lieberman** was our Fireside Chat guest, being interviewed by YU’s president emeritus, **Richard Joel**. (“The President Interviews the Senator.”)



After that, [Ilana Wernick Berenson](#), an Emmy Award-winning writer and producer, was featured. Others over the last year included [Greg Zuckerman](#) (senior writer at the *Wall Street Journal*), [Dr. Regina Herzlinger](#) (an expert on healthcare who was the first tenured woman at Harvard Business School), and [Andy Neff](#) (an all-star investment analyst who wrote [one of the most prominent first-person Baal Teshuva reflections ever](#)). Last semester ended with [Prof. Laizer Kornwasser interviewing business and sports mogul Mark Cuban](#) and then opening it up to questions from the students.

However, the one that sticks out the most for me was our Fireside Chat with **Judge Matthew Solomson**. Judge Solomson is an Orthodox federal judge who was interviewed for us by **Dean Melanie Leslie** of Cardozo Law School. Judge Solomson provided wonderful insights and reflections during the Fireside Chat, but the most unique part came at the end of the Chat. Judge Solomson invited our students to **watch an actual federal hearing** without having to come down to Washington, D.C., because they were being conducted on Zoom. When he asked who would want to attend, several students stepped forward.

Judge Solomson did a pre-hearing prep meeting with them, they watched the hearing, and then he debriefed with them afterward on what they had (and should have) seen. In the process, he developed a relationship with some of the students. Judge Solomson ended up **writing a law-school recommendation** for one of the students, and that student is now headed to an **Ivy League law school** this August.



The Fireside Chats are complemented by Author Chats in which the students meet in a smaller group with an author of a book in which they are interested – often a pioneering work in a domain of interest to them. Our first was with [Seth Siegel](#), whose book [Let There be Water](#) profiles the pioneers in the Israeli water-technology industry. Our second was with [Scott Shay](#), the founder and chairman of Signature Bank, about his book [In Good Faith](#). The students get the book ahead of time so they can read it and formulate questions, and then have a deep conversation with the author.

Up next: **Indra Nooyi, the former CEO and Chair of PepsiCo** and author of [My Life in Full](#).

Experiential Exercises and Trips

A final piece in the puzzle focuses on the experiential. One type of experiential exercise is Honors-specific **workshops**. For instance, last Spring we tapped YU graduate [Kuty Shalev](#), who teaches his employees about **time management**, to teach our students a workshop on that topic. That was followed in the fall semester by Syms graduate Elie Borger's workshop on **personal finance**, which is a current area we are strengthening within our offerings.

Also in the fall, [our students went on a field trip](#) to see the **award-winning production *The Lehman Trilogy***, about the founding and demise of the Lehman Brothers firm. A star Sy Syms alum who is a partner at Goldman Sachs, Dan Blank, accompanied them on the trip, along with a couple of our faculty who had played roles at Lehman. The next day, Mr. Blank debriefed with the students about what they had seen and provided his own astute insights.

This semester will end with a field trip to the **Wall Street Tour**, whereby our students will see the origins of the finance industry, key landmarks in its development, and the role that New York has played in becoming the financial hub of the industry.

May the Honors Program continue to strengthen Sy Syms and help us fulfill King Solomon's brilliant educational advice!