



## From the Dean's Desk

### *History, Life Choices, and Economic Theory Come to the Jewish Values Curriculum*

Throughout the first book of the Torah, our forefathers grapple with many life challenges, such as how to maintain service to God while earning a livelihood, how to strengthen the broader community rather than just focusing on themselves, and even where to live (e.g., Egypt during a famine? separate from Lavan or together?).

Consistent with our millenia-old Jewish mission, it is **Sy Syms' mission to develop Torah-grounded professionals who excel in the workplace and in the community.**

During their years in college, our students are **building their foundations** for the next several decades of life and ensuring that they will be able to fulfill this mission statement.

Fulfilling it is not an easy task because it requires being able to bridge worlds that can come into conflict. To help our students learn how to do that, almost two years ago [we introduced a new curriculum](#) called **the Jewish Values curriculum.**

The first part of the curriculum had already debuted on the women's campus in the form of Rabbi Aaron Cohen's course on practical workplace halacha. It then developed more fully on the men's campus, with **three required courses**: Practical Workplace Halacha, Jewish Public Policy, and Jewish Business Law. In turn, the Jewish Public Policy course will be debuting on the women's campus this Fall.

**This semester, we added three Jewish Values electives**: one with a historical lens on Jews and commerce, the other focused on helping students make successful life choices, and the third our first [Honors Program](#) offering in the Jewish Values curriculum. Please see below for further details.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Noam'.

Dr. Noam Wasserman  
Dean

## *Commerce, Community & Leadership through the Ages*



[Dr. Chaviva Levin](#)

Students in Sy Syms will be future business leaders and Jewish communal leaders. This course gives students the opportunity to use a **historical lens** to explore a variety of **Jewish relationships with majority cultures**, to consider **the role of commerce** in shaping Jewish life and in informing perception of Jews by others, as well as to examine a range of **communal challenges and leadership responses**. Students consider how Jewish values have been enacted—or not—in a range of Jewish contexts and assess how this consideration can inform their own lives and leadership.

Students assess the effectiveness of Jewish leadership in a range of contexts or case studies and consider **how they might have responded as leaders** as well as how they can use this knowledge to deepen their thinking about their own circumstances. Through their encounters with primary sources, students hear voices from the past; through their examination of secondary literature, students take into account how contemporary historians and other scholars have considered the contexts and cases under discussion. All of these enable students to bring a sense of the range of past Jewish experience to bear in thinking about their own life and leadership.

## *Designing Your Jewish Life*



[Prof. Ari Wasserman](#)

Designing Your Jewish Life shows how to design your life to maximize your chances of success along many dimensions. Life requires that we make a number of critical decisions, each of which will have **a significant and often long-term impact** on our living a meaningful and fulfilled life. Early in life, though, we often don't have the foresight to know that we're making a fateful decision, or the range of options we should consider, or the longer-term consequences of each option. In this course, we discuss many of those **decisions and the processes to decide on each**.

Topics include what to look for in a spouse, career, job and community in which to live; balancing work, religious and home life; how hard to work

(effort and bitachon); fiscal responsibility; community involvement; maintaining mental health; how to measure your life and success; and whom to include on your “personal board of advisors.” We learn from role models who faced these issues, from the halachic and hashkafic **wisdom of our Sages**, and from readings and materials that capture the **challenges and best practices**.

### *Jewish Law, Economics, and Philosophy*

[Honors Program course]



[Rabbi Dr. Itamar Rosensweig](#)

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with central topics in Jewish business and civil law and to have them engage the material through the lens of **both economic theory and moral and political philosophy**. The course covers topics such as charity, welfare, taxation, the dignity of people, a just allocation of resources, fair competition in the marketplace, the nature of property rights, the value of economic efficiency, and whether Judaism is best conceived of as a rights-based system or an obligation-based one.

On one level, the course trains students to appreciate the **fundamental principles of economic theory and the extent to which those principles find application within Jewish law**. Here we critically engage with the works of the late Prof. Aaron Levine (former chair of Yeshiva's Economics department) who argued throughout several books that whole sections of Jewish law are organized around principles of classical economics and are designed for society to achieve economic efficiency. We examine the extent to which Jewish law seeks to “internalize externalities” or to promote efficient outcomes (e.g., does bal tashchit instantiate a principle of **economic efficiency**?). We also examine the **Coase theorem** and its application within Jewish law, as well as whether contemporary law and economic approaches to torts, such as Calabresi's lowest cost avoider theory, resonate within Jewish law.

At a second level, the course analyzes topics through the lens of moral philosophy to consider **which moral principles animate Jewish civil law**: What grounds our obligations to other members of society? How much wealth am I permitted to hold on to? In what sense, can my property be regarded as mine? To what extent is my economic success a function of arbitrary market distributions or my own desert? What principles explain a tortfeasor's liability to compensate the victim he harms? Here we analyze the topics through the framework of Kantian, utilitarian, and contractarian principles. Particular emphasis will be placed on Jewish law's conception of distributive justice, market fairness, and the rights and freedoms of employees.

Students will emerge from the course with a richer understanding of our core Jewish values and with a sophisticated framework for implementing them.