



From the Dean's Desk

Torah U'Business

In the fall, I was asked an interesting question by a YU student: “Does Torah U'madda apply to Sy Syms? Isn't 'madda' just the sciences and arts that can help us understand the Torah, not the business studies?” I asked him which volume of the Talmud he's learning this year. “Bava Basra.” What does it cover? “Ownership, partnerships, property rights, acquisitions, legal documents.”

I asked him who had been having a bigger impact in shiur at helping add insights to what they were learning: non-business students or business students? “Business students – they understand the economics a lot better, and they can explain ownership issues. The rest of us are learning the basics while they can see the nuances and can help us understand them.” In that case, which type of knowledge was enhancing the Torah learning at YU this year? “Business.”

Every day, he and the rest of the YU talmidim have been seeing our powerful combination of Torah U'Business.

In fact, I told him that he should look at the last mishna in Bava Basra, and the last line of that mishna. Elsewhere, in one of the most prominent debates in the entire Talmud, Rabbi Yishmael, one of the all-time greats, has a debate with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai ([Berachos 35b](#)) about earning a livelihood. Rabbi Yishmael emerges there as the major proponent of Torah U'Madda. At the end of Bava Basra, [what does Rabbi Yishmael tell us?](#) “One who wants to become wise should study monetary law, as there is no greater discipline in the Torah, and it is like a flowing spring” (Bava Basra 175b).

Especially today, Sy Syms embodies YU's values, not only in substance but also in its ethics.

Please read below for a lot more details on how it does so, in addition to examples of how specific students are excelling at achieving the school's mission.

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

Dr. Noam Wasserman
Dean

The Missing "U"

In Torah U'Business, the Torah itself is world class and we similarly aspire to excellence in Business studies. A particular focus is the "U" ("and") that connects them. Otherwise, students are left to themselves to figure out how to wed the distinct parts of their lives.

Two years ago, Sy Syms introduced its [Jewish Values curriculum](#) to fill in the "U." This is perfectly consistent with Sy Syms' mission: To develop Torah-grounded professionals who excel in the workplace and in the community.

The Jewish Values faculty are world-class Talmidei Chachamim who also have real world experience in the fields in which they are teaching, making them much more effective at conveying the "U." The courses they teach include Practical Workplace Halacha, which prepares students for the challenges faced in every workplace by teaching from the sources and from role models how to be a Kiddush Hashem; Jewish Public Policy, which prepares students to play a leading role in the community by understanding communal issues; and Jewish Business Law, which helps them understand the overlap and contrasts between American and Jewish law.

This semester, [we added three electives](#) to complement those three required courses. Students can develop their historical thinking and knowledge by taking "Commerce, Community, & Leadership Through the Ages." They can learn how to think rigorously about key life decisions in "Designing Your Jewish Life." Lastly, students can develop their knowledge of both economic theory and moral and political philosophy in the new Syms Honors course "Jewish Law, Economics, and Philosophy." These courses make the disciplines of history, philosophy, and psychology tangible by connecting them to real-world experiences our students will soon be having, as well as to their Judaism.



At TEDx Yeshiva University, Shoshi Tuchman spoke passionately about "Allowing Your Values to Impact Your Career."

Ethics and Integrity Across the Curriculum

Every Sy Syms student is required to take a business ethics course. Students appreciate the course so much that they awarded Rabbi Robert Greenberg, one of the course's professors, their Professor of the Year Award at the first Sy Syms Awards Dinner I attended. In addition, all Honors students take an ethics course taught by my predecessor as dean, Dr. Moses Pava, a leading expert in business ethics.

However, the coverage of ethics and values isn't limited to those courses, but instead suffuses the curriculum. This was captured beautifully by Tomer Weider, a Sy Syms student who was featured in the Undergraduate Torah Studies newsletter before Pesach. Answering a question about "My Favorite Part of YU," Tomer said: "Outside of the Beis Medrash, many of my Sy Syms classes have been infused with Torah values. My Finance, Accounting, and other secular Professors deliberately include topics about and stress the importance of acting honestly and amicably in business."

When it comes to examinations, projects, and academic integrity, Sy Syms has also been a leader. Two years ago, Sy Syms spearheaded the formation of the YU-wide Academic Integrity Committee (AIC). The AIC has developed best practices and review processes that have had a significant impact on academic integrity across the undergraduate schools.



Sy Syms' students awarded the Professor of the Year Award to Rabbi Robert Greenberg for teaching the required Ethical and Legal Environment of Business course (2019 Award Dinner).

Service to the Community Outside the Curriculum

The summer of 2020, when other college students experienced the Summer of Crisis with nothing to keep them busy amidst Covid, three dozen students participated in the new [YU Consulting Force](#). Through the Consulting Force, those students led high-impact projects for more than a dozen Jewish non-profits, making it the Summer of Chessed and helping fulfill the "excel ... in the community" part of the Sy Syms mission. Then, amidst the ups and downs of Covid, we hoped that we wouldn't have to continue operating the Consulting Force. However, [each spring](#), students have requested to help non-profits, which themselves have asked to participate in our Consulting Force. Those students could take more lucrative jobs for the summer but instead prefer to make a positive impact on the Jewish community.

Outside of those formal routes to helping the community, individual students and groups of students provide endless chessed for the community and beyond. We would expect that of the graduating students on whom we bestowed our Character & Service Awards this week. However, even our academic stars take time away from their coursework to do chessed.

For instance, this year's women's valedictorian, Shoshi Tuchman, works with the homeless every Super Bowl Sunday, helping them feel cared for rather than alone. Shoshi is a top Accounting and Finance double-major, but instead of taking a high-paying job working for a Big Four accounting firm or investment bank after graduation, she plans to specialize in non-profit organizations. [Last week during TEDxYeshiva University](#), she

delivered a stellar talk entitled, "Allowing Your Values to Impact Your Career."

Our men's valedictorian helped the broader community in a different way. Amidst Covid, in order to help small businesses survive, the government provided a lot of funding but many small businesses lacked the knowledge of how to apply for it. Jonah Loskove took time away from work and school in order to help 700 small businesses apply for and receive the desperately needed government funding, a feat of chessed for which [he was awarded a Congressional commendation.](#)

Bottom Line

Today's Sy Syms embodies Jewish values, instills ethics and excellence, prepares students to be communal leaders, and shows how excellent Torah U'Business can be achieved.