



Yeshiva University

Office of the President

Dear Students, Colleagues, and Friends,

I hope this note finds you safe.

A little more than two weeks ago, I received an early morning call from Governor Andrew Cuomo. “Rabbi Berman,” he said, “if I am calling you this early in the morning, it cannot be for good news.” On that call he informed me that we were the first university in the United States to have a student test positive for COVID-19. The world has dramatically changed since that moment. The effects of the Coronavirus are simply unprecedented in its pace, scope and scale. Our deepest prayers and concerns are for our entire community and society, as we collectively work to address the multiple challenges that we confront today.

This letter is a brief summary and update of our recent activity. Due to the herculean efforts of our entire professional, academic and lay leadership team, I am deeply proud to report that Yeshiva University has successfully completed its first week fully online.

By pivoting to new technologies and teaching methods, we have continued our work educating our students and preparing them for their future. Our thousands of students from each of our five New York City campuses continue with their rigorous curricula. Within 10 days of our first notice, we had close to 1700 classes go online, trained our faculty and engaged students in all of our schools, including our two high schools. We have worked with over 40 affiliate schools in Israel on educational continuity for our hundreds of students on the S. Daniel Abraham Israel program. In addition, we have over 1500 personnel, our devoted professional staff and faculty, who are now working via remote access.

We have worked closely with the Academic Deans, Dean of Students, Head of Residence Life and Resident Advisors to confirm that students’ needs are met and that they feel supported. Our health and counseling centers are open online for any students seeking their assistance. Other key campus services—including the career center,

student finance and the registrars' offices—are also available. Students who remained on campus have received meals and care packages. Spiritual connections are kept strong through check-ins with rabbis and faculty. And, as part of our “new normal,” virtual experiences—from Zoom classes to pre-Shabbat community events to student club gatherings—keep everyone connected at a safe distance.

Our rabbinic leadership has led local rabbis and communities within the United States and around the world with clear guidance and direction on all issues that emerged from this virus, including social distancing for Shabbat, daily prayer, weddings, funerals, shiva and bnai mitzvah. Our professional expertise in areas like education, psychology and medicine have been at the forefront of our community's response. And as we were out ahead in this time of crisis, we have channeled our experiences to help other universities and schools deal with their challenges as well.

This is an evolving and unprecedented situation. I am deeply grateful to our incredible faculty and professional staff for their profound devotion, equanimity and professionalism throughout this tumultuous time. Led by our senior leadership team, they have enabled us to make this extraordinary transition. Our alumni, friends and lay leadership have continued to be a bedrock of strength. Many of you have called to assist and we are deeply appreciative of your support at this time which is vital for our future.

Our team meets daily to update our action plan and set our future course. I will continue to update you regularly as the situation continues to unfold.

Throughout this crisis, we have led with our values. They are our compass in these uncharted waters. Our central value is the preciousness of life which directs us to take every measure to protect the safety and health of our students and faculty, community and fellow citizens. Together with our core commitments to learning and education, faith and prayer, kindness and compassion, we have moved forward in this challenging time.

I have to share with you that I am simply overawed by the profound acts of kindness and depth of religious character that have regularly been on display throughout this time from our students. They have consistently and impressively responded to this crisis with our values: from reaching out to local public schools with offers of assistance to immediately signing up to complete the study of the entire corpus of

our ancient Jewish texts to add spiritual merit to help heal a wounded world. They are our future and why we are here.

This crisis has highlighted how essential YU's work is to our community and broader society. The world has changed from that first phone call with the Governor, but what is constant is that we remain deeply rooted in our values and forward focused in our mission. Thank you for your compassion and commitment to our future.

Wishing you a quiet and safe Shabbat,
Ari Berman

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