The James Striar School/Mechinah Program

The Mechinah Program within the James Striar School is a comprehensive program for students seeking to improve and expand their skills and knowledge of Jewish studies on either the beginning or intermediate level. The Mechinah Program is the only introductory Jewish studies program for college age students in the country designed to be taken simultaneously with a regular college program on the same campus.

The program teaches the fundamentals of Jewish scholarship and heritage through a unique curriculum and exciting out-of-classroom experiences. It offers courses in Hebrew language; Bible; Jewish history; Jewish thought; Hasidism; Jewish mysticism; Talmud; and Jewish philosophy, laws, and customs. In addition to its small classes, the program pairs each student with a member of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) for regular study sessions. These study sessions help students gain textual skills in a relatively short amount of time. Furthermore, the program sponsors regular weekend retreats as well as field trips to enhance the academic and Jewish experiences of its members.

Students who complete the requirements receive the Associate in Arts degree. In addition to formal classes, the program fosters close relationships between teachers and students through continuing individual guidance.

The James Striar School of General Jewish Studies was established in 1956 as the Jewish Studies Program and renamed in 1965 to honor the generosity of the Striar family in memory of their father, James Striar. In 2004, the curriculum was revised into the Mechinah Program. Its location at the Wilf Campus affords stimulating interactions with the university’s other undergraduate schools as well as graduate schools and affiliates, and provides easy access to the major resources of the institution.

PLACEMENT
Every applicant must be interviewed by the director of the program. This provides an opportunity to evaluate the applicant’s background in Jewish studies and to discuss the student’s program and course of study. Students wishing to enter the program must demonstrate an interest in Jewish studies, a respect for Yeshiva University’s distinctive history and tradition, and an ability to learn Jewish texts.

STUDENT ADVISEMENT
The Mechinah Program feels that the key to a successful Torah learning experience is creating a warm relationship between a teacher and his student. To help create this bond, each student is guided toward an individualized course of study.

To register, students meet with the director, who evaluates the skills and interests of the student and then pairs the student with the teachers who might be the best fit for that student. Class sizes are kept small and intimate. Each student is required to meet with the director of the Mechinah Program prior to each registration. Teachers make
themselves available to serve as advisers on an ongoing basis. Most teachers share their home phone numbers and cell phone numbers with their students. Teachers treat their students with respect, concern, and regard. Many teachers live on campus and open their homes on a regular basis to host the students in the program. The regular off-campus weekend retreats also provide many opportunities for students to learn from their teachers and friends in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

REQUIRED COURSES
Students must register for at least 18 credit hours within the program each semester. The cumulative index of these courses will transfer as 3 HES credits in the student’s college record. If a student registers for 21 credit hours in a semester, the courses will transfer as 4 HES credits.

- Bible—six courses
- Hebrew language—four courses: 1101, 1102, 1203, 1204; those who demonstrate to the director that they have advanced Hebrew skills are exempted from courses they do not need and only require successful completion of 1203 and 1204. Students who demonstrate Hebrew proficiency are exempted from this requirement.
- Jewish history—two courses from 1200, 1300, 1400
- Judaic studies—four courses (Jewish philosophy courses also fulfill this requirement) or six courses if one also has two courses of Talmud
- Talmud—four courses or two courses with six Judaic studies or Jewish philosophy courses

Transfer students who have earned at least 54 credits at another institution of higher learning have different requirements.

- Bible-four courses
- Hebrew - four courses: 1101, 1102, 1203, 1204; those who demonstrate to the director that they have advanced Hebrew skills are exempted from courses they do not need and only require successful completion of 1203 and 1204. Students who speak Hebrew fluently are exempted from this requirement.
- Jewish History - two courses from 1200, 1300, 1400
- Judaic Studies - two courses. Jewish philosophy and Talmud courses also fulfill this requirement.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Associate in Arts

A. **Course and credit requirement:** Completion of the required courses listed above for all students and three additional elective courses.
B. **Residence requirement:** Students must complete at least six semesters in residence at the Mechinah Program while taking a full program each semester.

C. **Grade requirement:** Students must achieve an average of 2.0 or better in all Jewish studies courses.

D. **Administrative Requirements:** The prior or simultaneous receipt of a BA or BS degree from Yeshiva College or Sy Syms School of Business. Each student must file an Application for Degree during the registration period of the semester in which he completes all requirements.

**SCHOOL REGULATIONS**

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all their scheduled class sessions and to be present promptly at the beginning of the class, unless prevented from doing so by illness or other compelling cause. A record of each student’s class attendance is kept by the instructor. In courses that meet twice a week, a student’s grade is to be reduced by the instructor if the student has more than three unexcused absences over the course of the semester. For courses that meet four times a week, the final grade is reduced after six unexcused absences.

Every absence after the grace amount causes the final grade to be reduced by half a letter. Thus if a student deserved an A based on his midterm, final, and class participation, his grade would be a B+ if he missed seven classes in a course that meets four days a week. If he missed four classes in a course that meets twice a week, his grade would also be a B+. If a student enters a class 10 minutes after it has begun, he is marked late, and each such event is considered half an absence.

The Mechinah Program expends significant effort and resources on out-of-classroom educational experiences. Students are expected to attend the periodic field trips and at least one off-campus Shabbaton each semester.

A student’s attendance record may be taken into account when determining his status in the university. Continued unexcused absences will result in the student being dropped from the course with a grade of G, which may lead to probation or academic dismissal from the university.

Permission to register late in a course does not in itself excuse the student’s absence from classes already held. Students who register late for a course are responsible to learn on their own the material they missed.

**Probation:** To remain in the university, students must maintain a satisfactory academic level in the Mechinah Program or in another Judaic studies program. Failure in any course in the Mechinah Program results in a student being placed on Judaic studies probation for the next semester. A student who is on probation in the Mechinah Program must pass all his Judaic studies courses. He may not accept employment outside the
university, and he may not participate in extracurricular activities that might distract him from his studies. If the student does not fulfill these terms, he may be dismissed from the Mechina Program and the university.

Students that do not maintain a GPA above 2.0 will be placed on probation for the next academic semester. Students with two consecutive semesters or three semesters overall of work below a 2.0 are subject to dismissal from the school. Students must show positive progression through the program and cannot graduate if in their last semester they receive less than a 2.0 GPA. Students with two semesters of unsatisfactory work are subject to possible dismissal from the school.

ETHICS AND SCHOLARSHIP

Faculty and students alike seek to create an atmosphere that provides and promotes the highest standards of ethical conduct and scholarship in the achievement of personal and professional goals. All rules and procedures delineated in the academic integrity policy on cheating and plagiarism apply to students in undergraduate Jewish studies courses.