

# TOURO LINKS

DIVISION OF GRADUATE STUDIES • SUMMER 2015



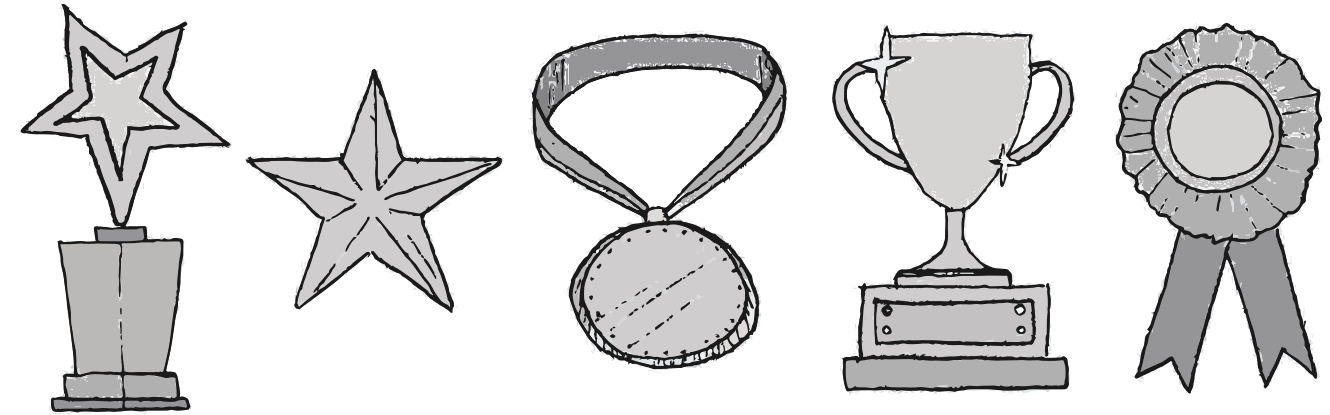
## Keeping Kids Safe

Social Work Student Champions Personal Well-Being

## ABOUT THE TOURO COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Touro is a system of non-profit institutions of higher and professional education. Touro College was chartered in 1970 primarily to enrich the Jewish heritage, and to serve the larger American and global community. Approximately 18,000 students are currently enrolled in its various schools and divisions. Touro College has branch campuses and programs in Berlin, Jerusalem and Moscow. New York Medical College, Touro University California and its Nevada branch campus, as well as Touro University Worldwide and its Touro College Los Angeles division are separately accredited institutions within the Touro College and University System. For further information on Touro College, please visit [www.touro.edu](http://www.touro.edu).

## VICE PRESIDENT'S HELLO



## Our Message to You

Dear Alumni,

We are pleased to present the Summer 2015 issue of Touro LINKS. As you read the stories of innovation and inspiration, I hope you will feel moved to engage further with the Touro community. Our new initiatives and our alumni who have gone on to make a difference in so many professional arenas are shining stars to us. From research labs to social service agencies and the Halls of Congress, Touro alumni are changing lives in myriad ways.

We are proud of the outstanding accomplishments of those profiled in these pages and of all of you. It is well known that along with achievement comes a sense of responsibility. We all have a responsibility to ourselves, our professions, our communities and to Touro.

For ourselves, we must never accept mediocrity and therefore must constantly set the highest personal standards for both achievement and ethical conduct. In our professional lives, we must aim to break new ground and relentlessly pursue opportunities to keep learning and

growing. To our communities, we should be thinking of ways we can serve and give back. And to Touro, the responsibility to express gratitude for the education that has propelled us onto a successful career path can take many forms. Stay in touch with fellow alumni, learn more about Touro's initiatives and consider contributing so that others may have the same opportunity to realize their professional dreams.

We hope you enjoy this publication and welcome your feedback and updates about your personal and professional lives. Please visit our website and social media platforms for more about the exciting events and minute-to-minute happenings at Touro and share your own news and views by contacting [esther.ingber@touro.edu](mailto:esther.ingber@touro.edu).

Best,



**Dr. Nadja Graff, Vice President,  
Division of Graduate Studies**

This particular strain of the ebola virus, otherwise known as ebolavirus zaire, is responsible for the current North American outbreak.

SUMMER  
2015

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Ebola affects the lives of millions today.

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→ At Touro's Colleges of Pharmacy (TouroCOP) and Osteopathic Medicine (TouroCOM), professors are sharing with students their knowledge of and experiences with this virus, both clinically and via secondary research. Their goal? To publicize the importance of identifying precautions and seeking treatments for infectious diseases such as Ebola. Touro professor, Kathleen DiCaprio, Ph.D. and her team developed a potential Ebola vaccine proven to work with monkeys.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TOURO COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AT [TCOP.TOURO.EDU](http://TCOP.TOURO.EDU)

A learning app for the youngest among us

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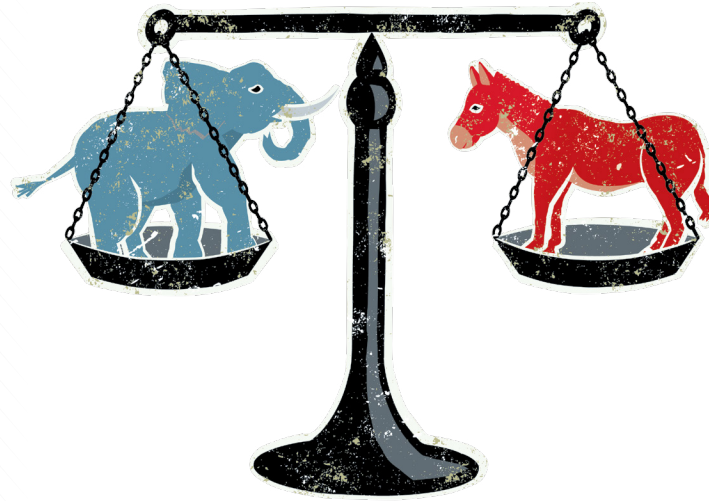
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**KATHLEEN RICE**

*"I went to law school knowing I wanted to use my skills and the knowledge I gained there to advocate for others. And this was part of the message I received at Touro, too."*



**CHANGES ABOUND**

## In It to Fix It: Congresswoman Rice Focuses on Solutions

When Congresswoman Kathleen Rice considered her career path following graduation from college, her father's words came to mind. "He used to tell me, you like to argue so much, why don't you get a law degree?" says Rice, who in January 2015, was sworn into office to represent New York's Fourth Congressional District, Nassau County.

Back then, however, Rice could not have imagined that this love of arguing would carry her through three years of law school at the Touro Law Center, an impressive career as a prosecutor in Brooklyn and Philadelphia, as district attorney for Nassau County and most recently, help her win a seat in the United States Congress. Since earning

her law degree, Rice has made a name for herself as an advocate and a problem solver. While serving as D.A., she earned a reputation for cracking down on drunk drivers, combatting public corruption, closing the pay gap between men and women in her office, developing reforms to reduce cheating on college standardized tests, and creating education programs for teens focused on minimizing bullying and drug use. A gun control advocate, she also supported gun buy-back programs.

One of 10 children, Congresswoman Rice learned early on how to speak up for herself and to compromise. "I think this was a factor in my pursuing a career as a prosecutor and ultimately

Congresswoman Rice with Senator Chuck Schumer at her swearing-in ceremony

entering politics," she says. Rice's ability to find common ground, along with her respect for differences of opinion, are qualities that have served her well throughout her career, and these too, were learned at home. "I was raised in a Republican household. My father was a Republican and my uncle founded New York State's Conservative Party," explains Rice. "There were always issues we didn't agree on and those we didn't discuss, but we never lost respect for each other, or the important things we did agree on."

Rice's father, who passed away recently, didn't let politics get in the way of his support for his daughter.

He switched parties and registered as a Democrat when Rice ran in the primary race for Nassau County D.A. Congresswoman Rice's work has always focused on helping others. "Service is something my parents always stressed," she explains. While in law school at Touro, Rice appreciated how the concept of service was incorporated into a legal education. "I went to law school knowing I wanted to use my skills and the knowledge I gained there to advocate for others," says Rice. "And this was part of the message I received at Touro, too."

Always up for a challenge, Rice describes herself as "naturally optimistic." These qualities will come

in handy in Washington as she focuses her energies on keeping the country safe, through her work on the U.S. House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee, and as she works to help maintain and build the middle class.

"I try to keep myself focused on how things can be and what I can do to be part of the solution," she says. For Rice, building relationships on both sides of the aisle is a priority. "I genuinely believe there are good, reasonable men and women in Congress who feel the same way and I'll work with anyone from any party who wants to get things done for the people we serve." ■

 TO LEARN WHAT SETS TOURO LAW APART, GO TO [WWW.TOUROLAW.EDU](http://WWW.TOUROLAW.EDU)

Professor Kathleen DiCaprio,  
second from left



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF THOSE

TOUCHED BY

# EBOLA

The 2014 outbreak of Ebola in West Africa, the most widespread in the history of the virus, has evolved into one of the gravest and most urgent medical concerns of our time. At Touro's Colleges of Pharmacy (TouroCOP) and Osteopathic Medicine (TouroCOM), professors are sharing with students their knowledge of and experiences with this virus, both clinically and via secondary research. Their goal? To publicize the importance of identifying precautions and seeking treatments for infectious diseases such as Ebola, and to inspire future healthcare leaders to pursue research in the field.

## A FONDNESS FOR "BUGS" AT THE COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

On the first day of Microbiology and Immunology class at TouroCOM, Professor Kathleen DiCaprio, Ph.D., flashes a photo on the lecture screen of herself in what she calls her "blue space suit," along with some powerful images of Ebola's lethal impact. Ten years ago, Dr. DiCaprio worked at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, where she researched the Ebola virus in a BSL-IV lab, one of a handful in the world at the time.

There she and the team that she was part of developed a potential Ebola vaccine proven to work with monkeys. "When my students first see this photo and hear my story, their mouths drop. They aren't expecting this at all," says the diminutive five-foot, 98-pound, Dr. DiCaprio.

"I describe what it is like to work in the field as a young researcher in my specialty of microbiology and infectious disease. After this kind of introduction, I have their attention for the rest of the year." Dr. DiCap-

rio loves teaching and watching her students grow excited about what she fondly calls, “bugs,” aka bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi. “Infectious disease is the one subject that is part of every medical specialty out there -- surgeons worry about sepsis, pediatricians worry about ear infections.”

The vaccine that Dr. DiCaprio helped to develop, rVSV-EBOV, which was found to be 100% protective in primates, eventually was held up in the approval stages for use in human subjects. “Back then, Ebola wasn’t impacting large groups of people or geographic areas,” says Dr. DiCaprio.

“As a young scientist, I was impatient. I wanted to keep working to help people.” Dr. DiCaprio made a career move into education where she could devote her passion and energy

**“ I EXPECTED THIS LEVEL OF WORRY IN SOME SETTINGS, BUT HERE IN THE WEST WHERE THERE IS ACCESS TO GOOD HEALTHCARE AND ANTIBIOTICS, THE AMOUNT OF FEAR IN THE COMMUNITY WAS UNEXPECTED.”**

to teaching and inspiring future doctors and researchers. “There are so many people in the field of infectious disease doing great work. I am honored to be teaching future healthcare leaders here at TouroCOM.”

Today things have come full circle. While working as a young researcher, Dr. DiCaprio had imagined a severe outbreak similar to the current one in West Africa. Now the rVSV-EBOV vaccine is undergoing testing on people, to see if it can prevent Ebola’s spread. “It had been sitting on the shelf for years,” Dr. DiCaprio said. “I’m happy to have been part of something that might help.”

## LOOKING AT PATTERNS AND TRIGGERS AT THE COLLEGE OF PHARMACY

Faculty members and students at the Touro College of Pharmacy have been investigating ways to shift the medical community’s response to Ebola from reactive to proactive by exploring novel treatments and precautionary measures.

The article, “Exposing the Origin of the Ebola Outbreak: Urging for a Shift in Response from Reactive to Proactive,” authored by Assistant Professors Priyank Kumar, M.S., Ph.D. and Paramita Basu, M.S., Ph.D., as well as third-year students Arooj Akhthar and Eyerusalem Befkadu, was published in *The American Journal of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology* in November 2014. The article analyzed a range

of influencers in the transmission and spread of the virus.

For Dr. Basu, the fear that developed in response to last year’s Ebola outbreak was surprising. “I expected this level of worry in some settings, but here in the West where there is access to good healthcare and antibiotics, the amount of fear in the community was unexpected.” Among the goals of this research was to identify ways to improve early screening procedures and to monitor and control infections through healthcare worker training. “Our research examined methods for communicating to at-risk populations and the ways these groups could mini-

## SIDE NOTE

### TREATMENT IN SIGHT

In August 2014, after participating in an Ebola forum at the United Nations, Haregewein Assefa, associate professor, Touro College of Pharmacy, felt inspired to apply her knowledge of anti-infective agents, mainly antibacterials and antimalarials, to the discovery of agents that could be used for the treatment of Ebola.

Through a comprehensive review of existing research, Professor Assefa’s goal was to identify a starting point from which scientists could pursue discovery of Ebola virus disease therapeutic agents. The review, which appeared in the *Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Pharmacology* in 2014, assesses the efforts that are currently underway in discovering molecules that can potentially be used to treat Ebola virus disease. Says Professor Assefa, “One molecule that appears to be promising is Favipiravir. This drug is being studied for its efficacy in Ebola patients and initial results show that it may help in the early stages of the disease.”



TouroCOP Assistant Professors Priyank Kumar and Paramita Basu



Students at the Touro College of Pharmacy doing research

mize their risk of infection by modifying certain behaviors and practices.” For Dr. Kumar, some of the findings related to Ebola’s spread were intriguing. After examining the dynamics of transmission and the impacts of community size and location in the spread of the virus, the team explored the underlying patterns of outbreaks and possible triggers. Among them: lower temperatures, high humidity, seasonal shifts, deforestation, porous borders and micronutrient deficiencies in populations. “I was surprised to see how the virus spread to other countries because of porous borders,” says Dr. Kumar. “This finding made me look at the outbreak in a way that I hadn’t before. As the world is made smaller

through increasing connectivity, it is important to shift methods to deal with infectious diseases from reactive to proactive, to prevent future global epidemics.” ■



SEE WHAT OUR PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS ARE UP TO. CHECK OUT [TCOP.TOURO.EDU](http://TCOP.TOURO.EDU)



**SHANI VERSCHLEISER**

*She selected Touro's Graduate School of Social Work because of its emphasis on the social welfare of individuals. "It's is a very special place, very people-oriented and very open. It's exactly the kind of program I was looking for."*



SEE HOW THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOU AT [GSSW.TOURO.EDU](http://GSSW.TOURO.EDU)

COMMUNITY GROWTH

## Keeping Kids Safe: Social Work Student Champions Personal Well-Being

**W**hile working at Our Place, a shelter for at-risk Orthodox Jewish teens, Shani Verschleiser noticed that a number of those seeking help for drug and alcohol problems had been victims of sexual abuse. "I told my husband Eli, who was also a volunteer and Our Place's founder, that we have to work backward to help kids by reaching them before this cycle begins," explains Verschleiser.

"Every child has the right to explore the world without being worried about personal safety," says Verschleiser, a student at Touro's Graduate School of Social Work. "People don't want to think that these things are happening to our kids," explains Verschleiser. "I decided that something needed to be done."

Three years ago, she and her husband launched Magenu, an organization dedicated to protecting children within the Orthodox community by promoting personal safety education. "Magenu's goals are to teach our children how to respond to potentially dangerous situations, and to stand by and support victims."

Verschleiser, a mother of four who grew up in an Orthodox area in Brooklyn, understands the concerns that parents and educators have about balancing children's safety and issues of modesty. "I found that if we approached this issue from the perspective of education, people were open to it," says Verschleiser, who serves as Magenu's director. "Education is empowering."

Magenu has provided training in dozens of Hebrew schools and Yeshivas throughout New York, Florida and Washington, DC, offering a full educational program and curriculum to parents, staff and students. "Magenu reaches children in their classrooms with age-appropriate materials and trained facilitators," explains



People don't want to think that these things are happening to our kids," explains Verschleiser. "I decided that something needed to be done."

Verschleiser training children at an educational event

Shani. Parents attend an event where they become familiarized with the program and receive advice for helping children stay safe at home and in public places and learn how to recognize warning signs of possible abuse. Magenu's work with teachers and administrators raises awareness and provides guidelines for schools in dealing with suspected situations.

"Part of our message is let's educate kids about what is healthy in order to help them recognize what is unhealthy, and provide them with strategies for staying safe." In addition to personal safety, Magenu

seeks to train children on handling a range of emergency situations, including getting lost in public places and seeking appropriate help.

At Magenu's annual Safety Day last year, over 4,000 parents and children attended a day-long event featuring national, state and local public service personnel and their emergency vehicles, which children had a chance to explore. Amid the carnival-like atmosphere of a day filled with rides, live performances, games and food, the families were also presented with information on summer safety topics specifically geared towards a child's personal safety.

Although trained as an audiologist, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, Verschleiser's work with Magenu now demands all of her time and focus. Recognizing a need for additional training in order to continue educating communities, helping victims and nurturing Magenu's growth, Verschleiser entered social work school in 2014. She selected Touro's Graduate School of Social Work because of its emphasis on the social welfare of individuals. "It's a very special place, very people-oriented and very open. It's exactly the kind of program I was looking for." ■



SMART SCHOOLS

# UNLOCKING THE KEYS TO LEARNING

## TOURO'S LANDER CENTER for EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Every day, students of all ages in schools across the country are tasked with learning and mastering knowledge, procedures, facts and skills. But how, exactly, does this take place? Recently, Touro faculty members had a chance to deepen their understanding of the learning process while attending a Lander Center Idea Exchange, "Attention and Memory."

Under the facilitation of Lander Center Director Dr. Marcella Bullmaster-Day, slips of paper were handed out to participants, each printed with a concept such as "my phone number," "names of my family members," "elements of the Periodic Table," "words to my favorite song," "classification system of biology," "where I was on September 11," and "the 10 Amendments to the Bill of Rights." Participants were asked to order these by how easy they were to remember.

Almost without exception, participants identified names of family members, phone numbers, and what they were doing on September 11th as easier to recall, while classifications in biology and the Bill of Rights Amendments were considered difficult. This simple exercise revealed to participants key aspects of learning and memory.

Explains Professor Bullmaster-Day, "Concepts that someone can relate to on a personal level, such as family names, or those that are vivid and emotionally arousing such as 9/11, or those that are often repeated, like phone numbers, are retained. So teachers need strategies to help students make a personal connection to academic concepts, -like the Bill of Rights Amendments, the Periodic Table, or biology classifications, - if we want students to recall them."

*Bullmaster-Day has devoted her career to the questions, patterns and connections that make up the building blocks of learning*



Left to right- Marcella L. Bullmaster-Day, Ed.D., Elina Lampert-Shepel, Ed.D., Velma L. Cobb, Ed.D., CPCC, ACC

As today's global economy evolves ever more swiftly, K-12 students must be prepared to manage the high-level intellectual demands of college coursework and the competitive challenges of the increasingly complex 21st century workplace. Recognizing this need, U.S. policymakers and educators have raised the goals for K-12 schooling. Closer to home, the Touro College Graduate School of Education's Lander Center for Educational Research is responding to this need through a range of programs that initiate, promote and support research, policy and practice to help educators identify ways to instruct students from diverse settings, particularly underserved populations.

Bullmaster-Day has devoted her career to the questions, patterns and connections that make up the building blocks of learning. "I want to know, what are the pieces? How do they work together? How are quality learning experiences designed?" she says. During her various roles teaching, developing curricula and serving as an educational administrator and researcher, which have included decades of work with underserved populations in South Central Los An-

geles, Newark, New Jersey and Harlem, she has always focused on how learning happens, putting insights into practice in the classroom and in the training of educators.

"A great benefit of my job at Touro is interacting with my co-workers and the collaborations that occur daily," she says, explaining that work at the Center currently focuses on several areas. In terms of research, several projects are taking shape, including a study of co-teaching practices in a Harlem middle school and a survey project about what people remember most vividly from their elementary schooling.

A significant effort based in the Lander Center is the federally-funded Region II Equity Assistance Center (EAC), directed by Dr. Velma L. Cobb, which serves New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The EAC provides services, upon request and at no cost, to states and school districts to effectively address equity issues of race, sex and national origin affecting student achievement and opportunity. Through Lander's educator training sessions and specially created instructional materials, the Center helps educators develop ways to

promote learning for students with limited proficiency in English, and teaches how bias can influence instruction and student evaluation. The Lander Center also trains educators on ways to help schools reduce harassment, bullying and prejudice.

The Lander Center also houses the Touro Teacher Residency Program, directed by Dr. Elina Lampert-Shepel, which offers a master's degree in Childhood Education/Special Education (Grades 1-6) in conjunction with two partner charter school networks. This program allows full-time teachers to pursue degrees while utilizing their in-classroom experiences as part of their curriculum.

In addition, the Lander Center offers professional development services to pre-K - 12 school teachers and leaders to strengthen learning strategies to meet more rigorous state standards and strategies to promote social/emotional learning and positive school climate. Another aspect of the Lander Center's work is the Faculty Resource and Development Program (FRDP), which hosts Touro faculty dialogues about learning and teaching in the form of Idea Exchange meetings and panel discussions. "The ultimate goal of our team's work is to make a difference in the lives of students, educators and communities," reflects Dr. Bullmaster-Day. "It's exciting to come to work knowing that what we accomplish today may have far-reaching positive impacts on individuals for years to come." ■



FOR MORE INFO ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM AND CURRENT HAPPENINGS, VISIT [GSP.TOURO.EDU](http://GSP.TOURO.EDU) 



**RABBI REUVAN BOSHNAK**

*Rabbi Boshnack's busy week includes teaching courses in Judaic studies at Touro's Lander College for Women – The Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School and teaching Psychology and Counseling at his alma mater, the Graduate School of Psychology. He also runs a thriving psychotherapy practice.*

**“I meet with students one-on-one to review Jewish texts as well as to talk about anything relevant to their lives, including relationships, school/life balance, religious observance and family.”**

**EARS OF GOLD**

**A Man of Many Talents: Boshnack Focuses on Helping Others**

**R**abbi Reuvan Boshnack wears many hats. Rabbi, psychologist, college professor, author, father and husband are some of his official titles. His unofficial ones include spiritual mentor, gifted Torah educator, guitarist, chicken cutlet chef and tour guide. “Really though,” he says, about his current position as an educator for the Orthodox Union’s JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus) at Brooklyn College, “My wife, Shira, and I see ourselves as being uniquely privileged to service one of the most dynamic and diverse communities anywhere.”

On any given Shabbat (Friday and Saturday), there is usually a group of students camped out in their Brooklyn home. Together,

he and his wife plan Friday night socials, retreats, trips and discuss Torah teachings and lend an ear to the thoughts and concerns of the 150 to 200 students who frequent the OU-JLIC programs. Their kitchen is busy as they prepare food for their own children – Levi, Gitty, Shimi and Chumi – and any students who have turned up. “We hope that these young men and women find an ideological and emotional home here,” says Rabbi Boshnack. “Our goal is to help them see that it is possible to have a Jewish identity that is compatible with being a professional in the secular world.”

Also an accomplished author, the Rabbi has published writings and translations on religious and spiritual topics. In his role as a religious leader, he combines teaching of Jewish thought with spiritual counseling. “I meet with students one-on-one to review Jewish texts as well as to talk about anything relevant to their lives, including relationships,



I see my work with students and others seeking my counsel as a Rabbi who is psychologically informed.”



Rabbi Boshnack in the classroom at Touro College

school/life balance, religious observance and family,” he explains.

But this is only part of Boshnack’s busy week. He also teaches courses in Judaic studies at Touro’s Lander College for Women – The Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School, and Psychology and Counseling at his alma mater, the Graduate School of Psychology, where he where he earned a MS Mental Health Counseling and has kept strong ties.

He also runs a thriving psychotherapy practice.

Born and raised in the New York area, Boshnack studied psychology as an undergraduate and later became ordained as a rabbi. He and his wife, also from the New York area, then relocated to Florida for several years where they served as educators in various schools in Boca Raton. When an opportunity at Brooklyn College arose, they moved back to New York.

Once settled, pursuing an advanced degree in psychology seemed like the natural progression for the Rabbi’s work. “My focus is always on helping others and in finding additional ways to achieve this,” he explains.

Much of this rabbi’s day is dedicated to helping others. “I see my work with students and others seeking my counsel as a rabbi who is psychologically informed.” For his work with patients, many of whom seek him out because of his religious background, it is reversed. “With my patients, I try to act as a rabbinically informed psychologist,” he explains. “I walk a very fine line between both and find that there are places where the points intersect.” Ultimately, Rabbi Boshnack’s message is optimistic. “I believe firmly in the wellsprings of strength and resilience within each person. I see my work as a counselor or psychotherapist as a means to access those strengths.” ■



**MARACH  
TREEKUNPRAPA**

*"A lot of the students arrived to Touro with more of a design background than I had," he said. "But Professor Epstein supported me and helped me to develop my abilities."*

*Every scene in Mo's Adventure is designed to help preschoolers learn to count. This is from the opening scene.*



HAVE A PASSION FOR PROGRAMMING? CHECK OUT THE TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT [WWW.LEGACY.TOURO.EDU/GST](http://WWW.LEGACY.TOURO.EDU/GST)

**WORLD TECH**

## Counting On It: A Programmer Takes His Passion Around the World

**F**resh out of engineering school in Thailand, Marach Treekunprapa landed a job in Bangkok and thought his life was set. But after several months of dissatisfying work, Treekunprapa realized he'd need to head down another path. He renewed his passport, traveled to New York City, where he knew not a soul, signed up for English classes and tried to figure out what to do with his life.

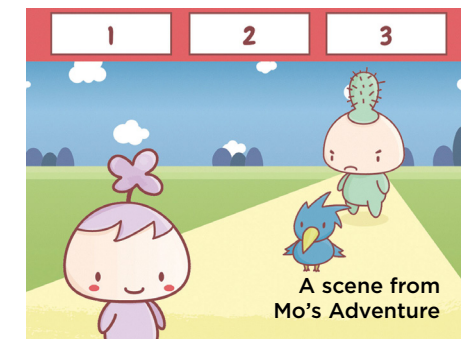
Three years later, after enrolling in a Touro master's program for web and multimedia design in New York City, Treekunprapa is now the proud developer of "Mo's Adventure," an educational app that teaches counting to young children. "Back in Thailand, I'd made an animation video for some friends' wedding and loved the work," he said. "I began researching New York schools that offered training in digital media."

Treekunprapa learned about Touro, discovered the master's program and was intrigued. At a school open house, he met Assistant Program Director Prerana Bhusel, who described the course offerings and encouraged him to follow his passion. "I had been trained as an engineer. It was a big change for me. But after looking at the school and meeting the people there, I knew it was what I wanted."

During his first class, Design and Theory, Professor Jesse Epstein helped Treekunprapa learn design basics. "A lot of the students arrived to Touro with more of a design background than I had," he said. "But Professor Epstein supported me and helped me to develop my abilities." From then on, Treekunprapa's confidence in his decision and his abilities grew, along with his enthusiasm for web and multimedia studies.

By the time he reached his second year in the program, Treekunprapa was developing a counting app for young children. "My mother was a teacher and so I naturally gravitated toward the educational aspects of multimedia design," he says. Turning one of his boyhood "doodles," whom he calls "Mo," into the application's main character, this digital game for two-to three-year-olds, Mo's Adventure, came into being.

"When I was young, my dad asked me to memorize all the times tables, even though we were studying the much easier addition and subtraction tables at school," he explains. When the time came to learn multiplication, Treekunprapa already knew them all. "When my friends saw how much I knew, they called me a 'Multiplication Ninja,' and I felt really good about myself," he recalls.



Treekunprapa believes this experience gave him the confidence to pursue many goals, including relocating to New York and learning an entirely new field. He hopes that his app will impact children in the same way. "My dream is that their experience with 'Mo's Adventure' will help them develop a confidence in themselves that they'll carry with them throughout their lives." ■



**VANESSA OKONTA**

*Okonta was drawn to the school's welcoming atmosphere and the warmth and supportiveness of Dean Sabra Brock.*

GLOBAL DIFFERENCE

## Going for the Gold: NYC Mayor's Scholarship Recipient Pursues MBA at Touro

**V**anessa Okonta is a planner. With a calendar jammed with reminders and to-do lists, she maps out her life in years, months, weeks, days and hours. In the spring of 2013, Okonta had a pretty detailed plan. She'd graduated from Pace University and

**An announcement for the Mayor's Graduate Scholarship Program offering grants to outstanding NYC government employees arrived in Okonta's e-mail box. As she read about the program, she grew excited. This was an opportunity she couldn't pass up.**

had just landed a job with New York City's Human Resource Administration as a fraud investigator. The position provided many opportunities for growth and advancement, a chance to make a difference in the lives of others and steady income to help pay off her college debt. She planned to attend graduate school one day and assumed that was far off in her future. And yet, the best laid plans often go awry, especially when opportunity knocks.

In the fall of 2013, an announcement for the Mayor's Graduate Scholarship Program offering full and partial grants to outstanding New York City government employees at participating schools arrived in Okonta's e-mail box. As she read about the program, she grew excited. This was an opportunity she couldn't pass up. Okonta knew that she wanted to move into a managerial role and for this,



My program has so many different types of people: international students, people fresh out of college and those who are working as well as others who are much older and bring different life experiences to the table. Together, we enrich the learning experiences of one another."

  
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Mayor's Office at City Hall.

she would need an advanced degree. She also hoped to one day start a nonprofit devoted to empowering young girls and building self-esteem, either in the U.S. or her country of origin, Nigeria where she lived until the age of five. "Life's greatest rewards come from enriching the lives of others by sharing, giving and spreading knowledge. I believe that's how I will find my greatest satisfaction."

For Okonta, an MBA from Touro with a concentration in human re-

source management was an obvious route toward these goals. "I took the next step and attended an informational session at Touro's Graduate School of Business where I listened, asked questions, and learned about its offerings."

Immediately, Okonta was drawn to the school's welcoming atmosphere and the warmth and supportiveness of Dean Sabra Brock and Administrative Director Harriet Fenner. Soon afterwards, she submitted an application. In late 2013, she learned both of her acceptance to Touro's Graduate School of Business and her receipt of the scholarship which totaled \$10,000. "I was thrilled!" says Okonta, who matriculated at Touro in January 2014 and now attends classes after work two to three nights a week. Needless to say, her calendar is crammed with more lists and reminders than ever before but with all that she is expected to graduate December 2015 with honors.

"Touro is so convenient — just 15 minutes from my job — and I've already learned so much from the coursework and professors," says Okonta. Her favorite course to date has been Human Capital Management, taught by faculty member James (Skip) Vaccarino. "In that course, I really learned how to navigate delicate situations with co-workers and began to grasp the concept of setting boundaries," explains Okonta.

She's also found the diversity of the school's student body to be an added bonus. "In my program are students from diverse cultures and backgrounds My program has so many different types of people: international students, people fresh out of college and those who are working as well as others who are much older and bring different life experiences to the table. Together, we enrich the learning experiences of one another," explains Okonta. ■



**RABBI RASHI SIMON**

*At Touro "I became exposed to new vistas of Jewish wisdom. We studied rabbinic texts, philosophy, history and literature that I found inspiring and fascinating. Jewish studies in an academic context were so different from learning at the Yeshiva."*



**PAY IT FORWARD**

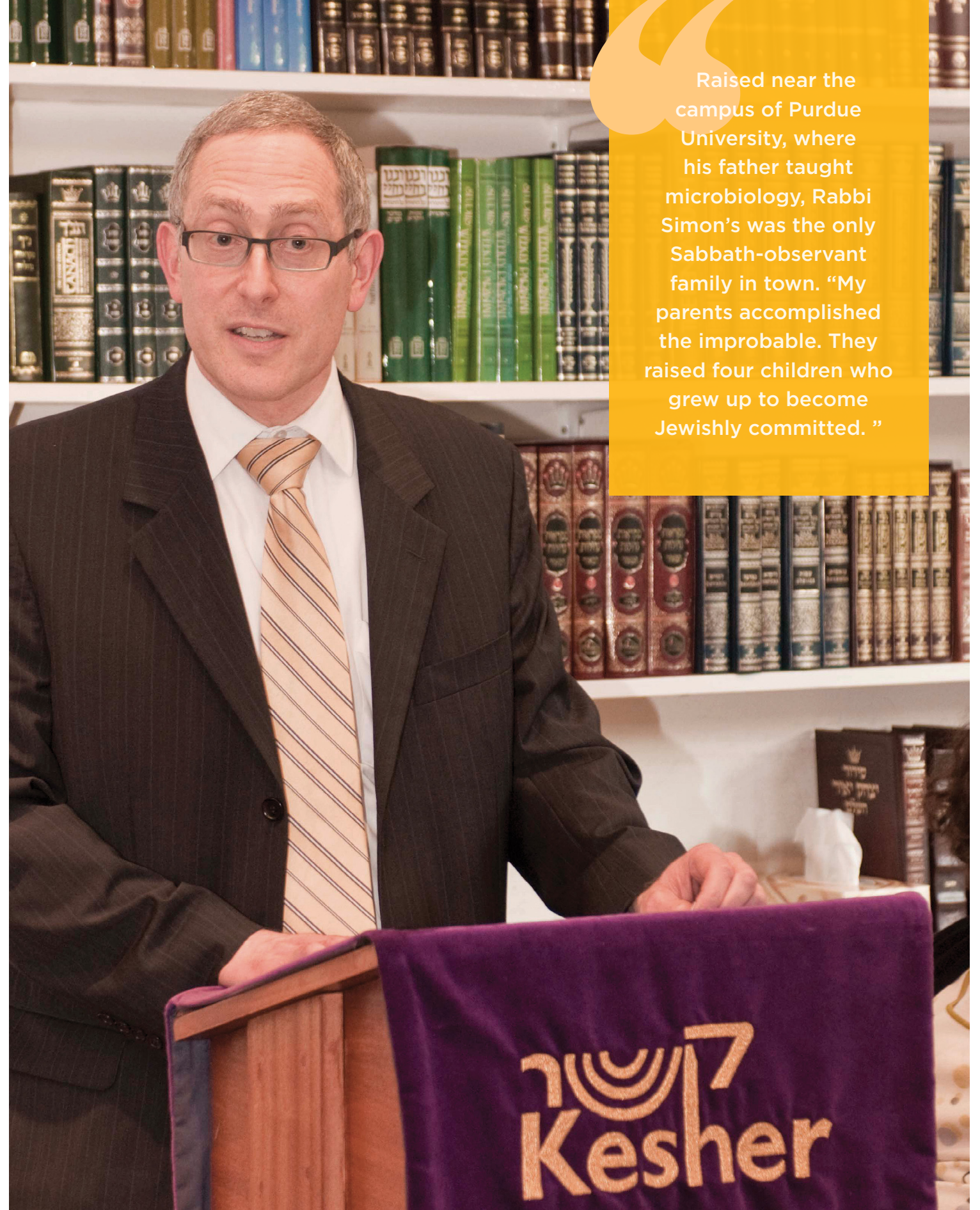
**Mitzvah in the Making: Jewish Studies Alum Inspires Thousands to Reclaim Their Heritage**

**T**he course title, "How to Read a 5000-Year-Old Language in Five Easy Lessons," offered by the Jewish Learning Exchange (JLE) in London, caught the attention of the young, well-heeled professional set who were searching for Jewish meaning and identity. Rabbi Rashi Simon, an insightful and witty American who founded JLE in 1989, drew people to the organization with his energy and creativity, along with trailblazing, explanatory crash courses in Judaism.

Fast forward more than 25 years. Rabbi Simon's outreach has touched thousands via his teaching, as well as his work inspiring and helping to set up

regular Shabbat and annual High Holiday explanatory services in 30 synagogues around Great Britain. In 1997, he founded Keshet/The Learning Connection in London as an outreach organization, and then in 2004 he expanded it into a synagogue community, Keshet Kehillah, where today he is the Rabbi.

At Keshet, he's pioneered concepts such as "Lunch & Learn" Jewish education sessions in the City of London. He has created a community that is welcoming to Jews of all levels of observance in an environment that is halakhically authentic, intellectually stimulating and spiritually fulfilling. Young Londoners interested



Raised near the campus of Purdue University, where his father taught microbiology, Rabbi Simon's was the only Sabbath-observant family in town. "My parents accomplished the improbable. They raised four children who grew up to become Jewishly committed."

 WANT TO KNOW HOW THE JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM CAN HELP YOU HELP OTHERS? GO TO [GSJS.TOURO.EDU](http://GSJS.TOURO.EDU) TO FIND OUT.



Rabbi Simon speaks to the crowd at one of Keshet's many events throughout the year

in finding out more about their Jewish heritage are drawn to Simon and his wife, Ruthie, a native of Los Angeles, who is a full partner in her husband's efforts.

Rabbi Simon can trace influences on his work all the way back to his upbringing in Indiana and his education, including the years he spent at Touro where his eyes were opened to Jewish studies. Raised near the campus of Purdue University, where his father taught microbiology, Simon's was the only Sabbath-observant family in town. "My parents accomplished the improbable. They raised four children who grew up to become Jewishly committed. The two boys became rabbis and the two girls married rabbis," explains the Rabbi.

While studying at the Rabbinical Seminary of America (Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim) in Queens, NY, Rabbi Simon attended Touro College, majoring in psychology with plans to go on to law school. While at Touro, he also took a few courses in Jewish studies and was introduced to a whole new world.

"I became exposed to new vistas of Jewish wisdom. We studied rabbinic texts, philosophy, history and literature that I found inspiring and fascinating," Simon recalls. "Jewish studies in an academic context were so different from learning at the Yeshiva." Upon

**"Life's greatest rewards come from enriching the lives of others by sharing, giving and spreading knowledge. I believe that's how I will find my greatest satisfaction."**

earning his undergraduate degree, he entered Touro's graduate school where he pursued a master's degree in Jewish History. "Jewish studies in an academic setting sometimes can be overly critical of and antagonistic to religious traditions. At Touro, they offered an approach that was appreciative and respectful but also rigorous, academic and illuminating."

Upon earning his M.A. from Touro's Graduate School of Jewish Studies in 1987, he entered rabbinical school in Israel. Once ordained, "a job in Lon-

don came looking for me," he recalls, and work building the Jewish Learning Exchange (JLE) began. The organization's outreach and educational programs aimed to show the relevance and a deeper meaning of Judaism to enable Jews to make informed life decisions. "Americans in England are seen as innovative and forward-thinking, and this novelty and appeal made the programming more attractive," explains Simon. Since he began, his focus had been to provide the highest quality educational and social opportunities in a relevant and welcoming environment.

"Throughout my work, I've drawn upon my Touro education," says Rabbi Simon. "The skills and knowledge that I acquired there, I still remember more than 30 years later." Judith Bleich, Ph.D., who taught modern Jewish history, and Michael A. Shmidman, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate School of Jewish Studies, left lasting impressions. "Their approach and teachings and the knowledge they imparted are still with me today and I've drawn upon these tools in my work ever since." ■



# CARING THROUGH *Communication*

Meeting the Challenges of Today's Healthcare Workplace  
with Interprofessional Training



**"STUDENTS FINISH THE DAY FEELING THEY'VE LEARNED HOW COLLABORATION CAN IMPACT PATIENT CARE"**

“Early on in my career as a physician assistant, I looked after patients with multiple chronic conditions and illnesses that needed several specialists involved in their cases. Communication was critical,” recalls Nathan Boucher, director of graduate education Physician Assistant Program at Touro’s School of Health Sciences. “With transitions between workers taking place every eight,

traditional methods of healthcare delivery and training. At the School of Health Sciences, the teaching of new, more collaborative approaches to patient care are meeting these challenges and transforming how students are trained.

“A patient’s well-being hinges on how well a healthcare team communicates and shares information and ideas,” explains Professor Boucher. At

During clinical rotations, Touro students bring their training to the workplace. In settings where interprofessional teamwork is not yet a key part of care, Touro students’ collaborative skills can make a difference.

This focus on interprofessional training began several years ago when Dean Louis H. Primavera, Ph.D., began laying the groundwork to prepare students for this new workplace. In 2013, he formed the Interprofessional Education Committee within the School of Health Sciences and tapped Mr. Boucher as its chair. “Communication and collaboration is an important part of PA training,” explains Mr. Boucher. “So naturally, I was eager to become involved.”

Today, the results of this shift in focus can be seen throughout the School’s academic and clinical coursework, especially during a student’s senior year, at the School’s annual Interprofessional Education (IPE) Symposium. This important day-long event, which grew

out of the Committee’s work, brings together seniors from all the health sciences degree programs, including occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant, physician assistant, physical therapy, nursing, speech and language pathology, as well as faculty and facilitators. The day of presentations, discussions and breakout sessions includes panelists from areas outside the School’s disciplines who address healthcare challenges in their patient populations and how IPE is helping to solve these issues. Hearing from experts in social work, community pharmacy, physical medicine and rehabilitation, aging services, nutrition and hospital administration helps expand students’ understanding of the totality of patient care.

In preparation, each degree program utilizes, as part of their cur-

riculum, the same case study in its section on safe discharge planning. On Symposium Day, students break into small groups comprised of a mix of disciplines, where each member describes how they evaluate cases to determine a patient’s readiness for discharge.

“Students see how much more comprehensive a patient’s plan becomes with input from other disciplines,” explains Jill Horbacewicz PT Ph.D. Chair/Director of the Physical Therapy Department and who has had a key role in the planning and implementation of the Symposium.

“Students finish the day feeling they’ve learned how collaboration can impact patient care,” explains Professor Boucher. “As a result, they feel better prepared to enter the workforce and to practice team-based care.” ■



**Masha Gollub (PA student), Yisroel Schonfeld (PA student), Nathan Boucher Director of Graduate Education, SHS, Physician Assistant Program)**

## A special Thank You

**These Touro Interprofessional Education Committee members planned the event and worked hard to make the day happen. We couldn't have done it without you!**

- Nathan Boucher ( PA)**
- Jill Horbacewicz (PT)**
- Suzanne White (Nursing)**
- Steven Blaustein (SLP)**
- Andrew Siegal (Assistant Dean SHS)**
- Rivka Molinsky (OTA)**
- Alexander Lopez (OT)**



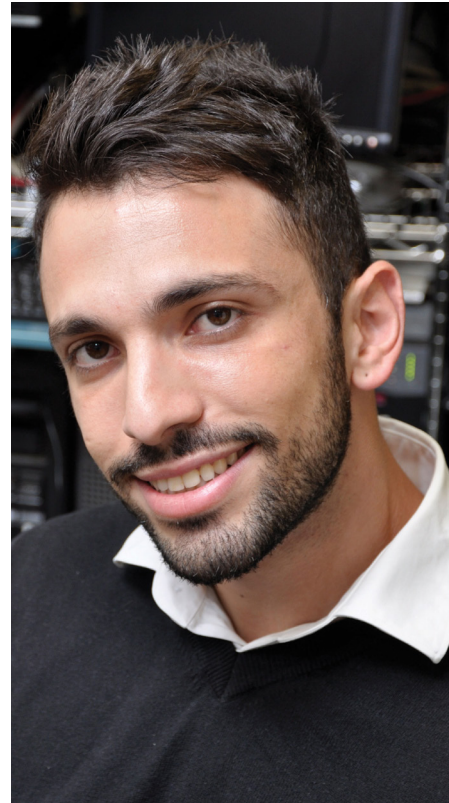
### "A PATIENT'S WELL-BEING HINGES ON HOW WELL A HEALTHCARE TEAM COMMUNICATES AND SHARES INFORMATION AND IDEAS"

12 and 24 hours, there were a lot of chances to drop the ball.”

The increasing complexity of today’s healthcare environment as well as the demands placed on our current system from millions of the newly insured under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), are challenging

Touro, collaboration is demonstrated in both classwork and hands-on training. “Our students hear from practicing professionals who present case studies. A portion of each session focuses on how collaboration has or hasn’t been applied, and how this impacted patient care.”

## Alumni News & Notes



### ↑ LOUCAS KARIPIS

Graduate School Of Technology,  
2014 (Information Systems)

Moved from FreshDirect IT  
desktop Support to new  
position as Tier II support  
Engineer at KJ Technologies.

*“Touro College and my  
Masters degree helped  
me land good positions  
in the IT industry... as an  
international student from  
Cyprus, I am grateful for  
this opportunity to succeed  
in the U.S.”*

### → LARA WEST

School of Health Sciences, 2010  
(Physician Assistant)

Received the Outstanding Clinical  
PA Award from the NJ State  
Society of Physician Assistants.



### ESTHER HERTZ

School Of Health Sciences, 1990  
(Physician Assistant)

Just celebrated her 25th  
wedding anniversary.

*“When I was growing up,  
my pediatrician had a PA  
who was my inspiration for  
entering the field. He was  
a graduate of Touro’s early  
PA program and I enjoy  
telling people that I am from  
the second generation of  
PA graduates. I feel that we  
helped pave the way for this  
generation of new PAs.”*

### SHARRON COHEN

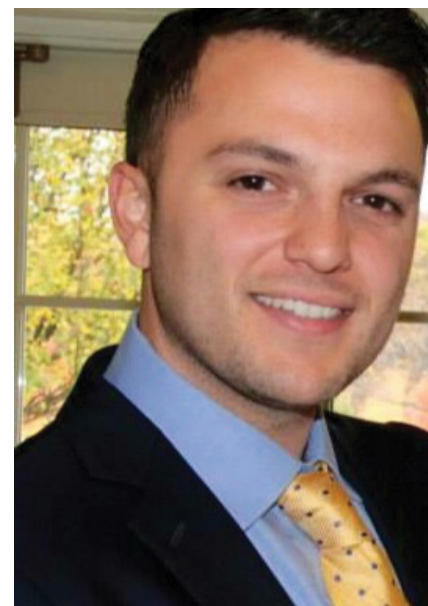
Graduate School of Social Work,  
2013 (MSW)

Just landed a position as  
therapist at Ohel Regional Family  
Center in Far Rockaway, NY

### LORINDA MOORE

Graduate School of Business 2014 (MBA)

*Earning another graduate  
degree...a Master’s in Industrial  
Organizational Psychology. “My goal  
is to open a school that will help offer  
options to young people needing a  
second chance in life.”*



### ← CHRISTOPHER SCIOCCHETTI

Graduate School Of Business,  
2011 (MBA)

Serves as Chief Operating  
Officer at Barberry Rose  
Management.

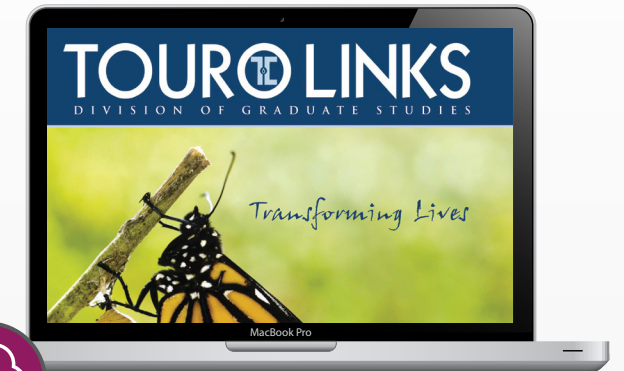
*“I’m responsible for day  
to day operations and  
development of their  
New York City portfolio,  
including over 1,000 units,  
numerous retail space and  
a condo development.”*

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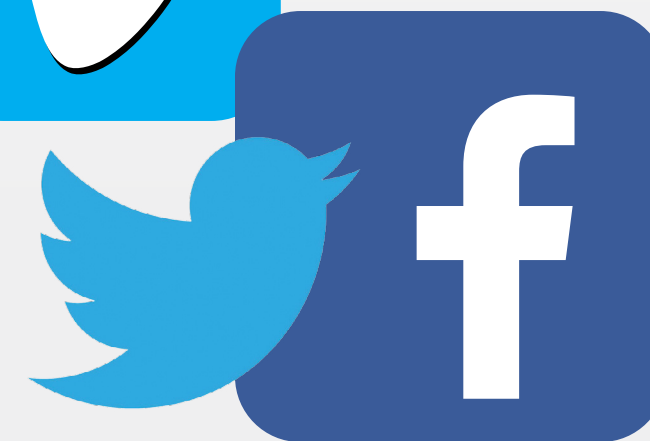
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Founder  
(of Blessed Memory)

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Graphic Designer

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### **Toby Adler**

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