Profiles of Two Outstanding Queens College Graduates

HADAS FRUCHTER: Finding a Connection Between Judaism and Social Service

YAKOV YABUKOV: Published Neuroscience Researcher and 2012 Student Speaker Sets His Sights on Dentistry

FLUSHING, NY, May 18, 2012 –Hadas Fruchter and Yakov Yabukov are just two of the outstanding students from over 2,500 degree candidates expected to attend the 88th Queens College Commencement ceremony on the campus Quad, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, May 31, at 9 am.

Hadas (“Dasi”) Fruchter is deeply involved in campus life, promoting Jewish social justice activities and dialogue between Jewish and Muslim students. She works with the college’s Center for Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Understanding and started a QC chapter of the organization Challah for Hunger, whose members sell the traditional holiday bread they have baked and donate the proceeds to global disaster relief.

Fruchter is graduating with a double major of urban studies and media studies and a GPA of 3.98. She plans to do graduate work at NYU’s Wagner School of Public Service, where she has been awarded a Wexner Graduate Fellowship. She will do a dual master’s program in public policy and non-profit management, and Jewish studies.

Fruchter’s Orthodox Jewish identity is a central part of her life. After high school, she spent a year studying biblical and Talmudic texts at a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem. Upon returning home to Prospect Park, Brooklyn where she still resides, Fruchter enrolled at QC.

She ultimately found the connection she was seeking between Judaism and social justice when she joined Uri L’Tzedek, a NYC-based group established by Orthodox rabbinical students, where she has been a compliance officer monitoring how kosher restaurants treat their workers.

“The scriptures are deeply concerned with teaching us how to construct a just society,” says Fruchter. It is a concern she holds close to her heart.

When Queens College’s 2012 student commencement speaker Yakov Yakubov was asked what his education has given him, he stated, “A lot of instruction, a lot of meaningful connections and a lot of opportunity.”

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Yakubov’s opportunities began early in life. He left Uzbekistan with several other Bukharin Jews and immigrated to the U.S. with his parents when he was only four years old. The Rego Park resident was fortunate enough to be accepted into Hunter College High School, where in his junior year he was selected to work in QC Psychology Professor Richard J. Bodnar’s neuroscience lab, which he continued as the professor’s research assistant when he enrolled at QC. Together they investigated how brain pathways associated with pleasure and reward affect feeding behavior in mice, particularly the consumption of fats and sugars. They presented their work at conferences in New York, San Diego and Chicago and co-authored an article that was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Brain Research*.

Yakubov also competed for both domestic and international research internships. Last summer he served as a neurobiology research lab assistant at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovet, Israel, and spent the prior summer in a similar capacity at Hunter College.

But Yakubov’s opportunities did not stop at the classroom. Last January as part of a Study Abroad program, he went to the Galapagos Archipelago off the coast of Ecuador, where he was involved in the “immersive” study of the region’s conservation and ecology.

The neuroscience major, who will graduate this May with a 4.0 GPA, plans to study dentistry at Columbia University in the fall. His parents are both dentists.

“I feel very lucky to be in this country,” says Yakubov. “I think my future would have turned out quite differently if I still lived in Uzbekistan. . . . For one thing, I’d never be going to an Ivy League dental school,” says Yakubov.