



*Touro College*

*For Immediate Release*

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## **Lander College for Men Students Win Awards for Behavioral Research**

New York, N.Y., January 19, 2012 – Students from Touro College’s Lander College for Men received two of five awards for outstanding student researchers at the 23rd Greater New York Conference on Behavioral Research. The Conference’s 2011 Scarpetta Award for outstanding undergraduate research was presented to Eric Gottlieb and Ezra Cowan. Joseph Reich, of Lander College of Arts & Sciences at the Lander College of Men, received the 2011 Guzewicz Award for outstanding cross-cultural research.

This year’s papers were submitted by students from many universities including Columbia, Rutgers, Boston University, Hunter, Fordham and others. All awards were determined by an independent awards committee.

The annual awards are offered to students to encourage and recognize excellence in behavioral research. Both of the winning research papers involved the famous philosophical quandary known as the “Trolley Dilemma,” a hypothetical scenario commonly used by psychologists and neuroscientists to explore aspects of moral reasoning, in which a speeding train is about to run over five people lying on the track. The conductor has the option to switch tracks and run over just one person and participants are asked to decide if they would change tracks or stay where they are. Thus the participant can choose whether to let five people die because of circumstances beyond their control or be directly responsible for killing another.

Cowan and Gottlieb submitted a paper entitled, “Evaluating Responses to the Trolley Dilemma with Conjoint Analysis.” The students changed some of the variables in the Trolley Dilemma to determine if people were more likely to avert the train if the single person tied to the track was a communist, a murderer, a 95-year-old man, someone with a terminal illness or obese. In each of those scenarios, people in the study were more likely to change tracks and run over the individual, possibly indicating that people feel less of an ethical dilemma about killing someone they consider to be morally reprehensible, close to death or unhealthy. Additionally, Conservatives were more likely to run over the individual if he or she were a Liberal, and vice versa.

“It was fascinating to construct the study and to actually find aspects of human nature so significant that people felt we deserved an award,” said Cowan, 24, who graduated from the Lander College of Men last year with a B.A. in Psychology. Cowan, who is from Jerusalem, Israel, is currently enrolled at the Lander College Beis Medresh L’Talmud to become a rabbi. Gottlieb, a senior at Lander College, and Cowan both plan to pursue doctoral studies in psychology.

Reich examined the Trolley Dilemma from the perspective of Orthodox Jews and other unique cultures that might think differently than others when it comes to moral reasoning.

“Most people will say that it’s OK to kill one person to save five,” said Reich, a senior from Brooklyn who is majoring in psychology. “Orthodox Jews, who have been primed to make decisions halakhically (according to Jewish law), are less likely to do so.”

The students singled out Professor Leib Litman, the mentor and guide to the students at the Lander College for Men for his role in the development of their research and for making them aware of the awards.

“He is an extraordinary professor who cares for his students,” Cowan said. “He takes extra measures for the sake of our future and success.”

Held at Touro’s Lander College for Women, over 140 students and faculty researchers from over 20 institutions as far as California and Moscow attended the conference which included 41 scientific presentations by 59 researchers, selected by a review committee of faculty from area colleges.

*Touro is a system of Jewish-sponsored non-profit institutions of higher and professional education. Touro College was established in 1971 primarily to enrich the Jewish heritage, and to serve the larger American community. More than 18,000 students are currently enrolled in its various schools and divisions. Touro College has branch campuses, locations and instructional sites in the New York area, as well as branch campuses and programs in Berlin, Jerusalem, Moscow, Paris, and Florida. Touro University California and its Nevada branch campus, as well as Touro College Los Angeles, are separately accredited institutions governed in common by the same Board of Trustees as Touro College. For further information on Touro College, please go to: <http://www.touro.edu/media/>.*

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