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Overheard in a Forbes hallway

Student Running for USG Office: (Knocks on Door)

Guy: (Answer door) Hello!

Student Running for USG Office: You are so great at hearing!

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## The Yoga Elite

### A studio examined

#### Jeff Winters

The studio is located in prime real estate: a secluded loft on Nassau Street away from noisy traffic and close to Princeton's boutique cafés and upscale stores. A small door and a sign on the sidewalk are the only parts of the space visible from the street. "Yoga Above," the sign reads, "Michael Cremonoe's Open Flow Yoga."

Yoga Above feels like a perfect reflection of Princeton's unique character: the blending of college town taste with the style and exclusivity of affluence. The result is a donation yoga studio with deluxe décor and an amazing location that serves a clientele that is stunningly homogeneous.

It's 9:30 in the morning on a Tuesday and around thirty women in their late thirties and early forties have just filed into the West Studio of Yoga Above and oriented themselves towards its downtown-facing windows. The yoga is going to be intense, but the self-presentation of the yoginis is equally impressive. Many of the students look like they have just walked out of one of the glossy yoga lifestyle magazines set out in the dressing room. Multi-hundred dollar outfits consisting of Lululemon brand yoga attire are the standard, along with ponytails, light skin, and trim physiques punctuated by breasts buoyed with the gravity-defying power of silicon. The women's gold wedding bands and glittering engagement diamonds signify both marital status and financial situation.

Not everyone in the class fits this template. There are four men in the room, including an off-duty yoga instructor and myself. One of the male yogis leans over to me conspiratorially to say "I'm always glad to see another guy in class." There are also a few students with darker skin and the rows of trim bodies are occasionally punctuated with heavier forms.

Despite these exceptions, there appears to be an archetype of the ideal yoga student for this class: a poised woman who is both athletic and tastefully dressed, earthy and yet refined. To find a representation of their ideal, students need to look no further than the class' instructor, Linda. Linda's demeanor and appearance are the distillation of the Yoga Above spirit. She has long dark hair, which she wears up, and yoga gear to match the best dressed in the room.

Linda's presentational style says much more about the Yoga Above than her appearance. She operates the class like a liturgy in which she is the trendy, modern pastor. Linda is a good shepherd. She learns student's names the moment they enter the studio and frequently calls on yogis individually. She offers

the first pose and leads with a brief sermon of sorts, which announces a theme for the class.

“Spaciousness,” Linda says, “we all need it in our lives and in our practice.” As with any other good worship service, the theme of the day is woven together throughout the rest of the experience. “We create spaciousness by practicing yoga,” Linda notes, “and we practice yoga best when we are spacious.”

Linda’s evocation of a spiritual leader is reinforced by her supernatural abilities. As the students pant and sweat, struggling to keep up with postures that test flexibility, strength, and endurance, she paces the room making corrections and bantering. When a new posture is introduced, Linda appears at the front of the room to demonstrate it. Her body moves smoothly and precisely, sliding from position to position with elegance that makes clear her many years of practice. Her makeup, tastefully blushing her cheeks and highlighting her eyes, remains perfect even as she does crunch after crunch in front of the class.

Like the instructor, the women in the class are charming, chatting amongst each other before it begins and sharing parting words once it ends. The exacting dress of the women in the class and warm interactions match Linda’s pastoral style: good manners and Sunday-best clothing have always been associated with worship. Linda creates more than just a space in which to exercise, her class is a spiritual community, a community in which she is the priest, the standard-bearer and ideal.

Linda and her class reflect the larger spiritual sensibility of her studio. The name Yoga Above describes more than just the physical location of the practice spaces; it is the spiritual mentality of the place and the practice. Yoga is above charging a fixed rate, above the frustrations and complications of the everyday world, above the blemishes and imperfections that often mar it, above the restrictions that prevent us from being “spacious.” Yoga is transcendent and divine and through its practice we can become closer to our own ideal, reflected both in yoga’s virtues and the lithe form of the instructor.

This blending of churchgoing attitude and intense athleticism gives Yoga Above its unique quirks. The private changing rooms in most gyms or yoga studios do not have mirrors. Serious exercise is, after all, not supposed to be a dressy activity. Yoga Above seems to pay homage to this ideal by not including unadorned mirrors in its rooms. Its mirrors are tastefully painted with birds and other motifs – which leave enough reflective space to fix your hair before going to class.

Evan Larson's evocation of a spiritual leader is reinforced by his supernatural [Nassau Weekly](#).

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