

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2024 - 2025



Communicating Value,  
Building Engagement  
and Community





Giving CUNY students access to excellence - Since 1971



## POWERFUL NETWORK

With over 8,000 alumni for over 50 years, the CUNY Baccalaureate has opened doors to students from all CUNY campuses, welcoming students across CUNY, including returning adult students, and students with unique interests.

**8,000+**  
**ALUMNI**

## FUTURE-FORWARD LEARNING

CUNY BA seeks to:

- Make excellent, meaningful, flexible, and innovative, education, and intellectual exploration accessible.
- Empower students to build future forward, interdisciplinary programs of study, allowing learners to draw different disciplinary perspectives to explore topic that is too complex to address with a single discipline.
- Prepare students for fields of studying careers that don't even exist yet.



## STUDENT SUPPORT



- CUNY BA United constellation of student support, including an academic advisor, faculty, mentor, robust community of students, and alumni, and CUNY home campus
- thanks to generous donors, the program gives over \$430,000 of direct students scholarships annually

**\$435,000**

## ALUMNI SUCCESS

### Employment

#### ALUMNI OFFERED JOBS AT

- CitiBank, KPMG, Bank of America
- Google, Microsoft
- Apple
- The Walt Disney Company
- US Department of State
- Columbia Presbyterian Hospital
- Oscar Health

- Spotify
- NYC Dept of Health
- Vera Institute of Justice
- YouTube
- Hetrick Martin Institute
- International Rescue Committee
- Accenture
- BuzzFeed



### Graduate Schools

#### ALUMNI WERE ACCEPTED AT

- Harvard and Berkeley Law
- Yale, Brown, and Penn doctoral programs
- London School of Economics
- Harvard Divinity
- University of Cambridge
- CUNY Graduate Center

## STUDENT SUCCESS & AWARDS

- Over 70% 4-year graduation rate
- Approximately 70% of students graduate with Latin Honors
- Awards include:
  - 20 Fulbright Awards,
  - 1 Marshall Scholar
  - 2 Truman Scholars (plus 2 finalists)
  - 2 Emmy Awards
  - and many more!



**THE POWER OF  
DESIGNING YOUR OWN DEGREE**





## Message from the Dean

The CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies continues to exemplify the very best of CUNY's intellectual tradition – students whose curiosity, rigor, and imagination drive them to create new pathways of knowledge. Our Laureates are bold thinkers, crafting programs that transcend disciplinary boundaries and preparing themselves to shape our rapidly changing world.

Their achievements are made possible by the steadfast commitment of our University Committee and the many faculty mentors across CUNY who guide, challenge, and inspire our students. Their dedication ensures that Individualized learning is also intellectually rigorous and deeply connected to CUNY's mission of access and excellence.

I also want to recognize the extraordinary dedication of the CUNY BA staff, whose creativity and professionalism sustain every aspect of the program's success, and to thank Academic Director Jody Clark Vaisman for her visionary leadership in advancing CUNY BA's mission of access, engaging and belonging.

Special appreciation goes to our CUNY BA Fellows – doctoral students from the CUNY Graduate Center – who bring enthusiastic energy, fresh ideas, and intellectual vibrancy to the program. Their work in mentoring, research, and student development enriches the academic experience and strengthens the bridge between undergraduate and graduate education across CUNY.

This year, we also celebrate the enduring legacy of the Thomas W. Smith Foundation, whose extraordinary generosity has supported more than a thousand Smith Fellows, and we honor the continued contributions of our alumni and donors who open new doors for CUNY BA students. Their investment affirms the transformative power of education and the belief that talent, when nurtured can flourish anywhere.

To our students, faculty, staff, Fellows, alumni and supporters – thank you for advancing this vibrant community of thinkers and innovators. Together, we sustain the unique spirit of CUNY BA.

Brian A. Peterson  
Dean, CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies



Dear CUNY BA Community,

As the 2024-2025 academic year draws to a close, let's celebrate and in true CUNY BA style, reflect on the meaning and highlights of this year.

- We began the academic year celebrating a major milestone: the 30th anniversary of the Thomas W. Smith Academic Fellowship. With over 1,000 fellows supported over the years, this gathering honored the transformative impact of the fellowship and the community it continues to build.
- In the fall, we had our first-ever Students & Alumni Café—an energetic and welcoming event that brought current students and graduates into conversation through speed networking.
- In March, we welcomed alumna author Ladyane Lima to the Graduate Center for a compelling book talk about resilience, reinvention, and the courage to embrace change.
- Our spring Alumni Panel, hosted by the Student Leadership Council, offered a space for candid reflection and shared wisdom, as alumni spoke about the challenges and victories of their CUNY BA journeys.
- We held numerous virtual workshops and events, including a new workshop on the pros and cons of using GenAI; we discussed ethical ways to experiment with a GenAI assistant to explore designing a unique major in a way that safeguards critical thinking and uniqueness.
- The year concluded with our Student Showcase, a dynamic celebration of the creativity, intellect, and interdisciplinary vision that defines CUNY BA. Each project was a testament to the passion our students bring to their unique paths of study.
- We're excited to share that last fall semester five CUNY BA students received Barbara Price Opportunity Grants for Study Abroad and nine additional have been offered this summer.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you who contributed to making it such a vibrant chapter in the life of CUNY BA. We look forward to continuing to build this remarkable community together.


Sincerely,

Jody Clark Vaisman  
Academic Director



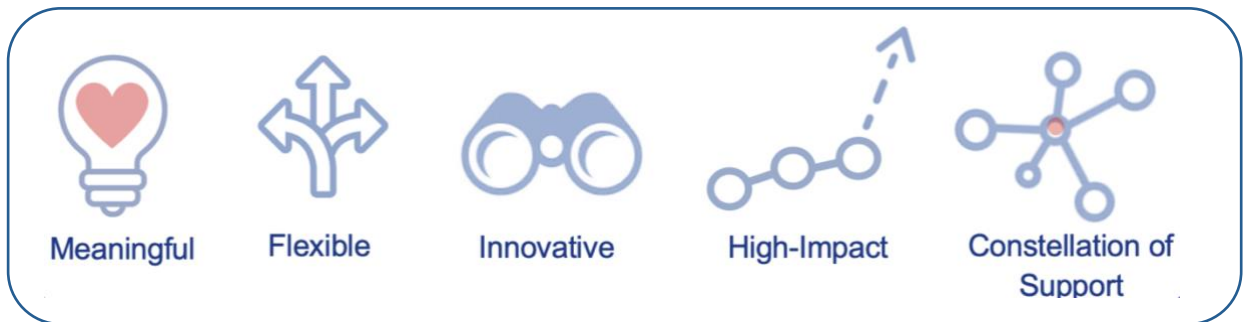
# OUR MISSION

## INTERDISCIPLINARY and INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY

- 
- Make excellent, meaningful, flexible, and innovative education accessible to CUNY students.
  - Empower students to build future-forward, interdisciplinary programs of study, allowing learners to draw on different disciplinary perspectives to explore a topic that is too complex to address with a single discipline (Klein & Newell, 1996) and to prepare for fields of study and careers that don't yet exist.
  - Unite a constellation of support around the student, including an academic advisor, faculty mentor, robust community of students and alumni, funding opportunities, and home campus.

# A Future Forward Education

The CUNY BA is the interdisciplinary, individualized major across CUNY, an award-winning engine of social mobility. Created in 1971, the major allows students to create their own area of specialization outside of traditional majors. The interdisciplinary approach encourages students to draw on different disciplinary perspectives, integrate their learning, and to explore a topic that is too broad or complex to address with a single discipline (Klein & Newell, 1997). Interdisciplinary work represents the future of knowledge, allowing students to “think outside the box,” and in some cases, to consider the world’s great problems. [See sample majors](#), called areas of concentration, on the program website.



Like a more accessible honors program, students receive additional support, such as an assigned academic advisor, exclusive access to scholarships, and the opportunity to build relationships while working directly with faculty mentors and the CUNY BA community, which includes staff, faculty, student leaders, campus coordinators, and allies. Students in the major have greater access to high-impact learning opportunities

Individualized majors are an important nexus of equity, giving students access to excellent, meaningful, personalized education. While requirements to apply to CUNY BA are minimal (12 college credits and a 2.8 GPA), CUNY BA students are highly successful, with an average 73% of students graduating with Latin honors.

## Applied Interdisciplinarity: Breadth and Depth of Fields of Study across CUNY BA





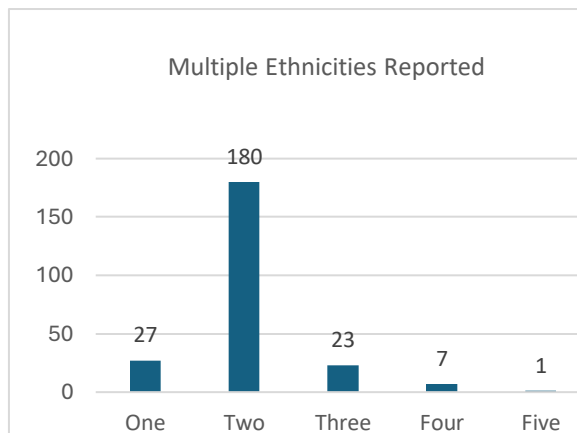
# CUNY BA Students

## Student Profile

Reflecting the diversity of CUNY, the CUNYBA student population is largely multiethnic, with only 5.5% of students reporting a single ethnicity. (In CUNY first, students may identify multiple ethnicities.)

### Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percent
Asian	12
Black	14
Hawaiian	<1
Hispanic	15
Native American	2
Not Specified	33
White	23
Total	487



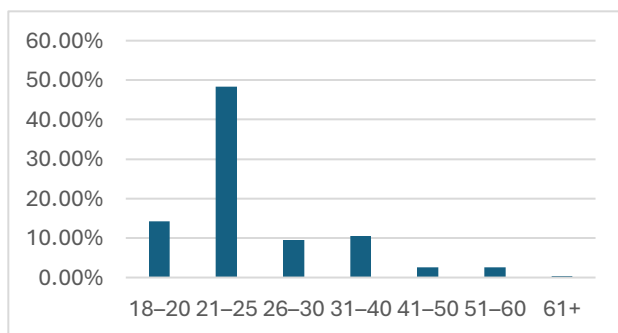
### Sex

Distribution of sex is 59% Female, 37% Male and almost 4% transgender, non-binary, or not specified.

Sex	Number	Percent	%
Female	141	59	0.59243697
Male	88	37	0.3697479
Transgender	2	<1	0.00840336
Non-Binary	6	<1	0.02521008
Unspecified	1	<1	0.00420168
Total	238		

### Age

Average student age is 27, ranging from 18 to 63 years of age.



Age	Number	Percentage
18-20	39	14.3%
21-25	132	48.4%
26-30	26	9.5%
31-40	29	10.6%
41-50	7	2.6%
51-60	7	2.6%
61+	1	0.4%
Total	273	100%

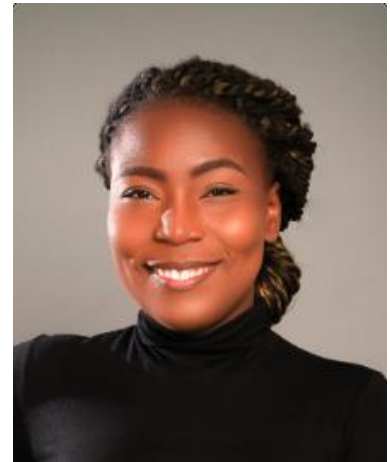


## CUNY BA Students

### Laureate Corner: CUNY BA Students and Alumni

**Stephanie Theolin**, LaGuardia Community College '23, City College '25, is graduating with a CUNY BA degree in **international political communication**. She likes to say she is "making her dreams come true, one at a time." She is passionate about crisis communications and global advocacy and hopes to use media and diplomacy to amplify marginalized voices as she moves forward in her career. Stephanie grew up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and spent school vacations visiting family in the U.S. She briefly worked as a journalist for *The Haitian Times* and migrated to the U.S in 2021 to pursue her studies here.

When she's not studying, Stephanie is working a full-time job at a law office. She has also interned as a court interpreter with the NYS Unified Court System. Stephanie talked about the impact of some of her favorite coursework. "I took this Latin American & Caribbean History course. I loved learning about rich and diverse cultures, revolutionary movements, untold stories and colonialism and its impact. The class also helped me understand my identity as a Caribbean and Haitian woman."



Inspired by her sister who was also graduated from the CUNY BA, **Ella Morton** saw a chance to return to college after previously dropping out. Through CUNY BA's 4+1 **Accelerated Graduate Program with**



**Masters in Liberal Studies** at the Graduate Center, Ella took both undergraduate and graduate courses, completing her BA in **Material Culture**, studying the relationship between people and the objects they create. After she finished, the accelerated graduate program set her up to pursue a master's degree in American Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, which she plans to complete in the fall.

Ella currently also works for JP Morgan Chase as a Senior Associate for Content Design. Since her CUNY BA concentration was focused on real world objects, she didn't expect to work in the User Experience (UX) field, which deals with the interactions between a client and a product, service, system or brand. She shares that her background and experience in anthropology and art history, which she integrated in her BA degree, has helped her in the workplace, especially when determining how to address or influence user behavior with design.

"This is a fundamental part of UX, and CUNY BA helped me develop confidence and curiosity to ask the big 'Why' questions that continue to guide me day-to-day."



## CUNY BA Students



at the New York State Inspector General's Office.

**Iraj Zia** wanted to combine her love for accounting with something that was centered on public service, created a dual concentration in Fraud Examination and Financial Forensics and Public Administration. With the support of personal academic advisors, a general advisor and a professor mentor, Iraj says that she received “the attention one would get from a small school in a large school.” The CUNY BA advising team was a group of “dedicated and supportive individuals.” They didn’t just answer her questions; they also took the time to brainstorm numerous plans to help Iraj achieve her goals. Their expertise allowed them to anticipate potential roadblocks and come up with ways to overcome them. Today, Iraj is an investigative auditor



**Alexandra Rivera**, a current CUNY BA student, aspires to be a social media manager, creating a concentration in Graphic Design and Digital Marketing. After transferring with an associate’s degree in media technology from LaGuardia Community College to Queens College, she joined CUNY BA because it allowed her to merge her creative interests with her interests in technology, graphic design, and video editing. She described the program as “flexible, since it allows me to tailor my major with full control” by allowing her to choose classes with her Faculty Mentor that would fulfill her vision for herself. Alexandra has applied to study abroad and hopes to do so someday.

As someone who has changed their major three times, Alexandra recommends CUNY BA to students who find that searching for a major has been challenging, feel that the major they want does not exist or feel that currently available majors don’t resonate with them.

CUNY BA helped professional artist and muralist **Denise Penizzotto** take her art career to the next level. Through the program, she created her own concentration combining arts, religion and art history into an **Artistic Dimensions of Religion** degree, which allowed her to explore how religious art tells stories about history and how it connects to other forms of art. Denise created a professional portfolio of writing pieces and artwork to apply for credit for life experience.

Denise also applied for and received scholarships through CUNY BA, including the Mellon Foundation Grant. The support she received through CUNY BA helped her win a full scholarship at Harvard Divinity School for her master’s degree. Today, Denise is an adjunct professor in the Religion Department at Hunter College.





## CUNY BA Students

**Ethan Frisch** is the co-founder and co-CEO of Burlap & Barrel, a spice company that partners directly with smallholder farmers worldwide to source spices for professional chefs and home cooks. Before launching his business, Ethan was a CUNY BA student designing his dual concentration in **Conflict Studies and Education** as well as **Social Change**.



His coursework inspired him to become a humanitarian aid worker, leading him to spend two and a half years in Afghanistan, where he helped build schools, roads and bridges. He reports that the knowledge and perspective he gained through his CUNY BA degree prepared him for the reality of understanding the political and social dynamics while he was living there. In Afghanistan, Ethan came across wild cumin for the first time, which sparked the idea for Burlap & Barrel. He launched the company in 2016 and his success has led him to profiles in the *New*

*York Times*, a “Shark Tank” appearance, and collaborations with Martha Stewart and the Jane Goodall Institute. Looking back, Ethan says he wouldn’t be where he is today without CUNY BA. When considering his academic and professional career, his message to students is, “Don’t accept the structures that someone else presents you with. There are other ways of doing things that are better, faster and more fun.”

### National & Prestigious Fellowship Award Winners

Working with CUNY BA Advisement, James Kogan, a 2019 CUNY BA graduate, has been awarded a Fulbright US Student Program Study Research Award to conduct research on the *kaba gaida*, a traditional folk bagpipe, in Bulgaria. While in CUNY BA, James was based at Hunter College, where he completed an area of concentration Social and Cultural Theory in under the mentorship of Professor Jeff Allred (English, Hunter College).



CUNY BA student Laiba Mahmood has been named a recipient of the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship for 2025. The prestigious scholarship, awarded to students pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, supports outstanding undergraduates with strong potential to become leaders in research. She is studying environmental biology and geology, with a keen interest in planetary science and astrobiology, particularly the study of planetary habitability and the evolution of life. She has participated in microbial biogeochemistry research at the University of Michigan and modeled landscape and species evolution in the LEGACi Lab. This summer (2025), she will conduct research in planetary science at MIT/NASA. She hopes to pursue a PhD in planetary science.



## Graduate Center Doctoral Fellows

The CUNY BA Doctoral Fellows Program provides seven doctoral students with the paid opportunity to gain substantive administrative experience, develop professional competencies, and build a distinguished portfolio of accomplishments, while playing a key role in supporting the program. The cohort of Fellows provides vital support to the program in recruitment, grant-writing, assessment, community-building, communication, event planning, student leadership development, peer mentoring, and academic- and professional-skill building workshops and events. Each year, a Senior Fellow is selected to lead the cohort of doctoral students to assist the program in five major areas:

- **Academic enrichment** helping offer regular academic and professional workshops, such as applying to graduate school and national and prestigious fellowships. Workshops focus on increasing access to Kuh's (2008) high-impact opportunities, for example, an undergraduate research skills series and the end of year Student Showcase. Fellows have created and update student resources such as the undergraduate research guide.
- **Recruitment** coaching prospective student applicants; conducting outreach to prospective students on opportunities in the program; represent the program at admissions events; creating recruitment materials; responding to student inquiries, leading events and information sessions.
- **Communication strategies** to engage the CUNY BA community, including current and prospective students, faculty mentors, alumnx, and allies. Projects include writing press releases and student stories for social media, newsletter, and the program webpage. Student stories focus on their creation of majors, lessons learned, outcomes, and advice to other students.
- **Student leadership development** overseeing three paraprofessional opportunities for CUNY BA students: the Student Leadership Council (SLC); Peer Mentor program and student Ambassadors' programs, including recruitment; SLC elections, student leadership development and training, guidance and problem-solving.
- **Special projects** such as grant-writing, assessment, analyzing survey data, and other special opportunities. In 2024-2025, one Fellow received supplemental funding to participate in the CUNY BA qualitative research study on the major-building process. For 2025-2026, one Fellow will work on an eportfolio for CUNY BA students and two Fellows will coordinate microgrants for self-designed service projects, including recruiting students, running the selection committee process, notifying students, and accountability review and reporting.



Queen Carrasco presenting at the 2024-2025 CUNY BA Showcase



## Doctoral Fellows Initiatives

### 2024-2025 GC Doctoral Fellows

- **Laura Rivas**, Senior Fellow, Earth and Environmental Sciences. Her work examines the impact of an insular culture of antislavery on the political territorialization of the Dominican state.
- **Anke Geertsma**, Comparative Literature. Her research focuses on annotation practices and social annotation tools in literature classrooms.
- **Chelsea Joliet**, Political Science. Her research focuses on international relations and political violence.
- **Coline Chevrin**, Geography, specializing in territorial and development studies (currently on a research Fulbright to Argentina).
- **Flora Brandl**, Art History with research interests in global contemporary art, histories of performance art, postcolonial theory, and Cold War studies.
- **Justine Lyons**, Sociology. Her dissertation examines conflict-related violence against women in Cameroon's two regional crises
- **Maria Litvan**, Theatre and Performance. Her dissertation explores the interrelation between absence and presence in performative transmissions in the Americas

### Highlights: GC Doctoral Fellows Initiatives

In additions to successful grant writing, assessment, program development, and innovations in the CUNY newsletter, three special Doctoral Fellows Initiatives were exceptional: creating an “applicant coach”; developing a new alumni-student networking event, and the large increase in participation in the CUNY BA Student Showcase.

#### New Initiative: Prospective Student Coaching

One Doctoral Fellow launched and was dedicated to recruitment of new students, including regular one-on-one coaching sessions to help students create a preliminary course plan for a unique, interdisciplinary major, required to apply. Creating coaching materials, she coached forty-two students this year, creating a strategy for these meetings.



The Doctoral Fellows positions are very competitive. Fellows set learning goals and learn about:

- Project management and team coordination
- University processes, such as program development and high-impact learning experiences,
- Technologies used to develop webpages, surveys, and data tracking
- Facilitation and presentation skills
- Self-reflection, including on their personal StrengthsQuest profiles from GC Career Services
- Advocacy for diversity, equity, and accessibility, helping students from underrepresented backgrounds thrive through recruitment and educational workshops





## Student & Alumni Café

The Fellows created our **first-ever Students & Alumni Café**—an energetic and welcoming event that brought current students and graduates into conversation through speed networking at the Graduate Center.



Alumni speed meeting event (above and right)



## Alumna Book Talk with Ladyane Lima

In Spring, we welcomed **alumna author** Ladyane Lima to the Graduate Center for a compelling book talk on her memoir “The Waves We Ride: – A Woman’s Journey of Overcoming Life Adversities and Embracing Change” about resilience and reinvention. The discussion was facilitated by current CUNY BA student, Syeda Tabassum.

Discussion covered themes of the book, including being a Latina on Wall Street, immigration, gender equality, social justice, and more. In her Book, Ms. Lima thanks the Smith Fellowship for support that was transformational to her work as a student.





## Doctoral Fellows Initiatives

### Student Showcase – Spring 2025

The end of year **Student Showcase**, a dynamic celebration of the creativity, intellect, and interdisciplinary vision, defines CUNY BA. Each project illustrated the expertise students have developed during their unique paths of study. The GC Doctoral Fellows oversaw this important event recruiting students, dramatically increasing participation this year. In addition, Doctoral Fellows coached presentations and helped facilitate the event. At the Fellows' suggestion, the host of the ceremony was a CUNY BA student, Madeline Scrace, a terrific addition to this and future events, held in the Graduate Center William P. Kelly Skylight Room.

### Showcase Participants

**Jack Cameron** studies **Neuroscience and Social Epidemiology** through CUNY BA and the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy's 4+1 MPH Program in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. His



research interests focus on developing novel methods to assess and predict cognitive decline along the dementia continuum, with particular attention to how multimorbidity and structural inequities shape cognitive aging. Jack is currently involved in research at both the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Brooklyn College, CUNY. His work includes efforts to validate the Remote Cognitive Aging and Alzheimer's Disease REsearch (R-CARE) Toolbox in a diverse Bronx sample and to investigate how common medical comorbidities influence the endorsement of subjective cognitive concerns among older adults. He has also contributed to projects at University College London examining the clinical and research utility of a portable, ultra-low-field MRI scanner for dementia-related neurodegeneration. Before moving to New York, Jack worked as an emergency medical technician in coastal New England.

Jack now serves as both the Recitation Coordinator and a Recitation Leader for General Chemistry I at The City College. As a JK Watson Fellow, he will join Partners in Health this summer in Malawi to conduct mixed-methods research on the role of community health workers in reducing the morbidity of non-communicable diseases and to support the development of social health interventions in remote communities.



Community turnout for the Showcase. Emcee Madeline Scrace is in first row, far right

## Doctoral Fellows Initiatives



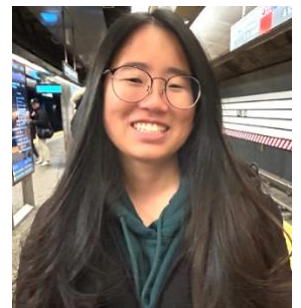
**Queen Carrasco** (she/they) is a junior in the CUNYBA program with areas of concentration in **Social Data Science and Curatorial Studies**. She presented her independent curatorial project *In Our Glory: A Tribute to the Diaspora*, travelling through the history of photography as a tool for black communities to control their own narratives.

**Miguel Frías** is a CUNY BA student with areas of concentration in **Romance Languages & Linguistics**. He studies the linguistics behind the most commonly spoken Romance languages—Spanish, Portuguese, Italian & French—with a special focus on phonology and phonetics. After graduation, he plans to study for a PhD and eventually become a professor. Besides languages, other areas of interest include political science, music, fitness & LGBT affairs. CUNY BA has been the perfect avenue for exploring his interests and satisfying his thirst for knowledge. He is very thankful to have come across the CUNY BA program!



**Bella Hubbard** is a senior at Hunter College. She is a violinist and an activist, and her areas of concentration are **Music and Public Advocacy**.

**Lela Pines** is a CUNY BA student in the class of 2025, completing her degree in **Creative Advocacy**, which focused primarily on creative writing, political science, and sociology. For her final capstone she has been working on an exploration of libraries. In the fall she will be starting her Masters in Library Science at CUNY Queens College. She's especially grateful to CUNY BA, the CUNY BA Fellows, her mentor, and her project interviewees for the opportunities to explore and share her interests this semester and across her entire degree.







## Doctoral Fellows Initiatives



**Alexandria Thylane Rohn** is a software engineer turned interdisciplinary researcher exploring cognitive science, gender theory, philosophy of mind, and artificial intelligence. After eight years working at prominent Silicon Valley companies, including Reddit and Apple, she returned to academia to merge her technical skills with philosophical inquiry. Alexandria's current research integrates the embodied framework of 4E cognition with gender theory, critically examining how identity is constructed, experienced, and represented, especially within transgender experiences and artificial intelligence. A passionate tech builder, public speaker, and educator, Alexandria actively supports the queer community and other marginalized identities. She plans to pursue a PhD in philosophy.

**Eva Schmidt** is a senior in the CUNY BA program at Hunter College, with areas of concentration in Research Methods and Asian American studies. Originally from Arizona, with a background in the performing arts, she continually looks for ways to blend and find connections within her varied interests. Inspired by her personal experiences, she seeks to contribute to these fields in a meaningful and representative way where voices, often marginalized and underrepresented, are amplified and celebrated.



**Claire Schwimmer** is a senior at CUNY BA with an area of concentration called Access, Equity and Holistic Health. She is learning about the multitude of factors that impact a person's health and the policies we can enact to improve our collective health. Her research combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to explore whether LGBTQ+ people have access to a "good death". She is currently working at a pediatric primary care practice helping connect people to necessary social services. Prior to CUNY BA, she spent ten years working in tech startups helping build software removing barriers to accessing healthcare.





## Doctoral Fellows Initiatives



**Nedelka Sotelo** is a singer/songwriter, actress, and independent artist from Mexico City. A graduate of The American Musical and Dramatic Academy of New York, she moved to NYC to expand her career and transition into arts and culture administration. With over six years of experience in organizations like Queens Public Library, Culture Pass, and Queens Rising, Nedelka has developed expertise in production, planning, budgets, marketing, and advocacy. Currently pursuing a degree in Arts in Creative Economy as a CUNY BA student, she combines her passion for the arts with her commitment to supporting performers, presenters, and the community through her work.

**Celine Zhang** is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice centers on sculpture, particularly ceramics, while also exploring collage, printmaking, and mixed media. Her work often reflects a deep sensitivity to materiality, form, and the environment, drawing inspiration from natural textures and sustainable practices. With a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, Celine integrates eco-conscious methods into both her creative process and daily life. Beyond the studio, she finds joy and balance through reading and playing guitar, pursuits that nurture her artistic curiosity and inner rhythm. Her evolving body of work speaks to the interconnectedness of art, nature, and everyday living.



2024-2025 Showcase presenters, coached by Doctoral Fellows



## Student Support

### Scholarships

This year, CUNY Baccalaureate offered seven scholarships exclusively to CUNY BA students.

- **B. Diane Gibson Memorial Fund** (for Nontraditional Students) honoring CUNY BA alumna B. Diane Gibson, this \$1,000 scholarship is for nontraditional CUNY BA students who embody Diane's spirit.
- **The Memorial Scholarship** (for Students in Social Work, Human Services, Health or Education) from Mary Beth and Richard Ketchum in memory of their parents, for CUNY BA students studying, working in, or preparing for careers in health, human services, social welfare or education.
- **Barbara Price Opportunity Fund** (for All CUNY BA Students) offers opportunity grants that increase access to three types of high-impact experiential learning opportunities: study abroad, undergraduate research, and unpaid internships.
- **Barbara Price Scholarship** (for First-Semester Students) supports first-semester CUNY BA students. It is a one-time award of \$2,500 designed to assist new students in the program.
- **The Thomas W. Smith Academic Fellowship** (renewable award for academic excellence) are funded through a donation by Mr. Thomas W. Smith to recognize academic excellence. Awards are renewable and full-time students receive up to \$4,000 per semester, more than the cost of attendance.
- **The Anne Duncan Somsen Memorial Fund** (for First-Generation Students) CUNY Baccalaureate alumna Pennell Somsen established this fund, in memory of her mother, to support CUNY BA students who are the first in their families to pursue a college education.
- **The Barbara Sproul Scholarship** (for students in Religious Studies) Established in honor of Religious Studies Professor and CUNY BA Faculty Mentor Barbara Sproul, supporting CUNY BA students who are pursuing religious studies or a related interdisciplinary field.

The Barbara Price endowment is currently at

**\$3.4M**

for scholarships and experiential grants.

For 2024-2025, CUNY BA gave seven types of scholarships, totaling 167 awards and \$420,000 direct to students for 2024-2025.

Award	FA24	SP25	TOTAL
Gibson Scholarship	8	8	16
Memorial Scholarship	5	7	12
Price Scholarship	13	12	25
Price Opportunity Grant	7	12	19
Smith Fellowship	38	43	81
Somsen Scholarship	6	5	11
Sproul Scholarship	2	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>167</b>

Total 2024-2025  
167 Scholarships  
**\$420K**



## Five Years of Scholarships: Fall 2020 – Spring 2025

In the past five years, thanks to generous donors, CUNY Baccalaureate gave 666 student scholarships and opportunity grants, totaling **nearly \$1.5 million**.

Nearly  
**\$1.5M**  
in scholarships  
2020-2025

Year	Awards	Total Amount
2020-2021	124	\$255,445
2021-2022	118	\$232,370
2022-2023	116	\$218,185
2023-2024	154	\$344,490
2024-2025	172	\$431,830
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>\$1,482,320</b>

## Celebrating 30 years of Smith Fellows

Founded in 1994, this fall we celebrated the over 1,100 students who have received renewable Smith Fellowships. Full-time awards cover more than tuition costs. Students are required to give service as part of the Fellowship.



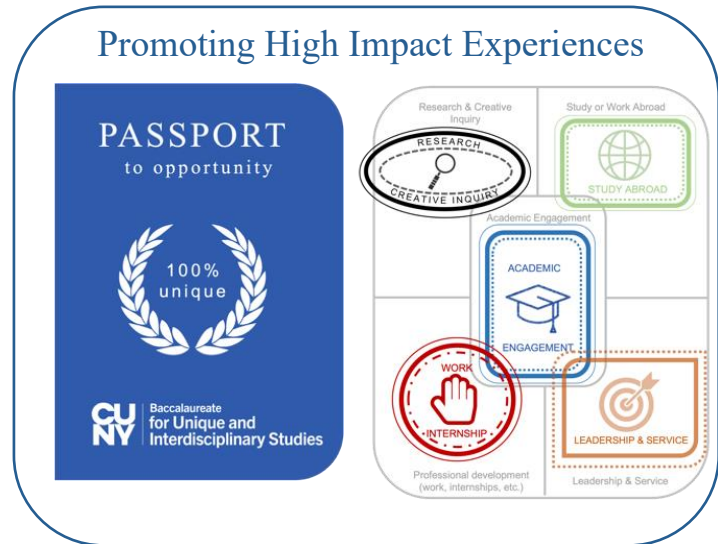
Smith Fellows at 2024-2025 Commencement, with Mr. Smith (center)



# Student Support

## Academic Advisement

- Advisors provided general academic advisement, meeting with students, conducting credit checks and graduation audits, and support as needed throughout the year. During the admissions process, advisors meet with each incoming student, helping them complete applications and register (e.g., navigating ePermits and registering for courses University-wide.)
- Three times a year, (October, April & July), the advisors, Academic Director, and Registrar conduct a holistic review of active students and twice a year (January & June), review sessions to track academic standing and student success, offering additional support and intervention if needed.
- The advisors facilitated workshops and events, including Finding a Faculty Mentor, New Student Orientations, and others. The advisors revised materials, including the Student Handbook, CUNY BA 101 Orientation online module, and other materials for the admissions onboarding process. New materials include a refreshed program website, and new materials supporting the Narrative roadmap assignment.
- Kate McPherson serves on the cross-CUNY Advisement Council and this year served on an ad hoc University committee ePermit policy.



## Promoting Study Abroad

- Advisors continued to partner with Scholarships and the CUNY BA team to promote study abroad and to help confirm eligibility for Barbara Price Study Abroad opportunities grants.
- This academic year, CUNY BA students studied abroad in Costa Rica, France, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain, the Netherlands, and UK. They received at least four Gilman Scholarships.

This year, Laureates studied abroad in:  
Costa Rica, France, Italy, Japan, Mexico,  
Spain, the Netherlands, and UK,  
winning four Gilman Scholarships





## Laureate Leaders: Student Leadership Opportunities

Two CUNY BA Doctoral Fellows oversee three student leadership groups for CUNY BA: the CUNY BA Student Leadership Council, Peer Mentor program, and student ambassador program. These programs require partnership with recruitment, admissions, event planning, and program governance. Doctoral Fellows recruit, train, supervise, and oversee these three initiatives.

### 2024-2025 Student Leadership Engagement

#### Peer Mentors

##### Mentors & Mentees

- Fall: 39
- Spring: 40
- Total: 79

#### Student Leadership Council

##### Executive Board

- 7 Members

#### Ambassadors

- Fall: 4
- Spring: 4
- Total: 8



# Community Building

## Community Building Activities

This year, with the goal of building community, CUNY BA staff and Doctoral Fellows hosted 58 events, including academic and professional workshops, alumni events, student leader trainings, and information sessions.

### Fall 2024 Events

- August 19: New Student Orientation
- August 21–23: Fellows Orientation (internal event)
- September 6: Study Abroad
- September 9: AOC Strategy Workshop
- September 13: Scholarships & Funding Opportunities
- September 16: Applying to Graduate School
- September 17: Mentor Leadership Training (student leadership training)
- September 20: Peer Mentor Program Orientation 2 (student leadership training)
- September 25: CUNY BA Info Session
- September 25: Finding a Faculty Mentor Workshop
- September 27: Peer Mentor Program Orientation 1 (student leadership training)
- September: Student Ambassador Trainings (paraprofessional training)
- October 1: Peer Mentor Program Orientation 2 (student leadership training)
- October 2: Mini Research Series: How to Find Research Opportunities
- October 8: CUNY BA Info Session
- October 9: Mini Research Series: How to Read a Research Article
- October 16: Smith Fellowship Awards Ceremony & 30th Anniversary Celebration
- October 21: Fellows Roundtable on Applying to Graduate School
- October 24: CUNY BA Info Session
- October 30: Telling My CUNY BA Story Persuasively
- November 4: Mini Research Series: Annotated Bibliography
- November 8: Student Showcase Info Session
- November 11: CUNY BA Info Session
- November 12: Student & Alumni Café Round Robin Networking Event
- November 18: Mini Research Series: Organizing Your Research Paper with a Thesis Statement
- November 26: Student Showcase Info Session
- December 6: Peer Advising Session on Fine and Performing Arts
- December 10: CUNY BA Open House
- December 11: CUNY BA Info Session





## Spring 2025

- January 22: New Student Orientation
- February 4: Leveraging AI to Design Your Unique Major
- February 7: Study Abroad Workshop
- February 10: Student Showcase Brainstorming Session II
- February 12: Peer Mentor Leadership Training (student leadership training)
- February 14: Scholarships and Funding Opportunities
- February 18: AOC Strategy Workshop
- February 21: Peer Mentor Program Orientation 1 (student leadership training)
- February 24: CUNY BA Info Session
- February 25: Finding a Faculty Mentor Workshop 1 (student leadership training)
- February 25: Peer Mentor Program Orientation 2 (student leadership training)
- February 26: Your AI Assistant: Research and Feedback
- February 27: Finding a Faculty Mentor Workshop 2
- March 3: Telling My CUNY BA Story Persuasively
- March 5: CUNY BA Info Session
- March 7: Community trip to MoMA
- March 11: Alumna Book Talk: Ladyane Lima presents *The Waves We Ride*
- March 14: Peer Advising Session on Business and Entrepreneurship
- March 25: CUNY BA Info Session
- March 26: Resume & CV Workshop
- April 1: Alumni Networking Social Event
- April 7: Personal Statement Writing Workshop
- April 9: CUNY BA Info Session
- April 23: Fellows Roundtable on Applying to Graduate School
- April 24: CUNY BA Info Session
- Early May: Student Showcase Virtual Dress Rehearsal
- May 6: Student Showcase
- May 14: CUNY BA Info Session
- June 4: CUNY BA Commencement



CUNY BA hosts its unique Commencement ceremonies



# Student Success

## Fast Facts

On average, 70% of graduates achieve graduation Honors!

## CUNY BA Admission and Enrollment Year 2024-2025

	Applications					Selection				Yield (Enrollment)							
Semester	Total	Complete		Incomplete		Offers Made*	Rejected**			Offers Accepted	Enrolled^ (Yield)		Discontinued For Not Enrolling^^		Declined Offer+++		
	n	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Fall 2024	135	77	57.0	58	42.9	74	96.1	3	3.8	66	89.1	59	79.7	7	9.4	8	10.8
Spring 2025	103	69	66.9	34	33.0	66	95.6	3	4.3	60	90.9	57	86.3	3	5	6	9.0
Year 2024-25	238	146	61.3	92	38.6	140	95.8	6	4.1	126	90	116	82.8	10	7.9	14	10

\*Offers Made (of completed applications)

\*\*Rejected (of completed applications)

^Enrolled (i.e., accepted and registered)

^^Discontinued for Not Enrolling (i.e., accepted but didn't register-could potentially enroll next semester)

+++Declined Offer (i.e., application accepted but student declined offer of admission)

## Enrollment

### Fall 2024

Active*	Registered	LOA	In Review	Enrollment
230	217	2	11	259

\*Total active: registered + Leave of Absence + in review

^ In review: Potential graduates but not registered

**Fall 2024: increase over September 2023 (229 total students; 212 active students)**

### Fall 2024 Active Students by Home College

College	Active	MHC	College	Active	MHC	College	Active	MHC
Baruch	22	4	BMCC	2	NA	Bronx	0	0
Brooklyn	32	9	City	38	3	CSI	4	3
Guttman	0	NA	Hostos	0	NA	Hunter	75	1
John Jay	21	3	Kingsboro	0	NA	LGCC	2	NA
Lehman	9	1	Medgar	1	NA	NYCCT	5	NA
Queens	12	0	QCC	0	NA	SLU	0	NA
SPS	7	NA	York	0	NA			

MHC: 24 Macaulay Honors College students included in total (NA indicates it is not a MHC campus)



## Student Success



### Spring 2025

Active*	Registered	LOA	In Review^	Enrollment
264	242	6	16	283

\*Total active: registered + Leave of Absence + in review

^ In review: Potential graduates for January 2025 but not registered

**Spring 2025 increase over May 2024:** 262 total students; 243 active students. Represents an almost 15% increase over Fall 2024.

### Spring 2025 Active Students by Home College

College	Active	MHC	College	Active	MHC	College	Active	MHC
Baruch	33	5	BMCC	3	NA	Bronx	0	NA
Brooklyn	33	9	City	54	4	CSI	5	2
Guttman	0	NA	Hostos	0	NA	Hunter	88	1
John Jay	23	4	Kingsboro	0	NA	LGCC		NA
Lehman	10	1	Medgar	3	NA	NYCCT		NA
Queens	14	1	QCC	1	NA	SLU		NA
SPS	9	NA	York	0	NA			

MHC: 27 Macaulay Honors College students included in total (NA indicates it is not a MHC campus)

On average  
**70%**  
 of CUNY BA students  
 achieve graduation Honors



## Special Initiatives

### Qualitative Research Study

With the \$5,000 funding of a PSC research grant, the CUNY BA is interviewing 23 students twice over the year to understand how students build a unique interdisciplinary curriculum, the challenges and opportunities to better serve students.

### Allstate Grant Award for Service Projects

This year, the CUNY BA successfully applied for a \$15,000 Allstate grant to give microgrants to CUNY BA students creating their own service projects. The microgrant application process will run for 2025-2026.

### AI and Individualized, Interdisciplinary Learning

While recommendations and rules on use of GenAI are evolving quickly, based on a mandate from CUNY Central emphasizing the importance of developing AI literacy in students to remain competitive in the workplace, the CUNY BA hosted a conversation on using AI *while preserving writing as an important tool for reflective metacognition when designing a unique major*.



Discussion focused on a potential policy and strategies to use (and not use) AI. Students are allowed to use AI in background research for a unique concentration, such as for research into disciplines and existing majors; exploring intersections of disciplines; and identifying timely topics at the intersection of disciplines. While difficult to monitor, students have been asked not to use AI in writing their personal narratives or scholarship applications.

Dr. Clark Vaisman, Academic Director, co-presented at a national conference on use of AI in developing a unique concentration while preserving critical thinking skills essential to learning outcomes in an individualized major at the 2025 IMP Network for Interdisciplinary and Individualized Major Programs Network, in Orlando Florida.



### Faculty Mentor Onboarding

To help onboard new faculty Mentors, CUNY BA continues to update the Faculty Mentor Handbook and watched a new introductory video this year. See the CUNY BA YouTube channel.



# Thank You



On behalf of the CUNY BA, a special thank you to the CUNY BA University Committee (governance group) and other supporters of the program.

## CUNY BA University Committee

### Students

Jack Cameron, Hunter College  
Nitu Farhin, Macaulay Honors College at Brooklyn College  
CeCe Hori, Baruch College  
Kilhah St. Fort, Macaulay Honors College at Lehman College  
Yariza Sencion, Lehman College

### Faculty

Bettina Carbonell, John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
Margaret Carroll, Medgar Evers College  
Alex Costley, York College  
Tamrah Cunningham, New York City College of Technology (City Tech)  
Sharona Levy, Brooklyn College  
Joanne Spurza, Hunter College  
Emily Sohmer Tai (Chairperson), Queensborough Community College

### Administrators

Dean Brian Peterson, GC President's designee  
Dr. Michael Guy, Executive Vice Chancellor designee  
Dean Dara Byrne, Dean of Macaulay, representing the CUNY Council of Presidents

## Staff of CUNY BA

- *Brian A. Peterson*, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration; Dean for Academic Initiatives and Strategic Innovation; Dean for CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies
- *Jody Clark Vaisman*, Academic Director
- *Peter Altman*, Coordinator of Admissions and Recruitment
- *Ann Marie Doering*, Registrar
- *Kate McPherson*, Senior Academic Advisor
- *Rafal Szczurowski*, Academic Advisor
- *Tracy Mejia Urena*, Scholarships and Events Specialist
- *Analie Cruz*, Assistant Program Officer
- *Isabel Griffin*, Office Assistant

Thank you, also, to the CUNY Weekly Newsletter and Sabrina Kippes of the CUNYverse for featuring "CUNY BA and Its Unique Students" (April 23, 2025) student stories.

## About the Graduate Center

The CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies makes its home at CUNY Graduate Center, the focal point for advanced teaching and research at The City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest urban public university. With over 40 doctoral and master's programs of the highest caliber, The Graduate Center fosters pioneering research and scholarship in the arts and sciences and prepares students for careers in universities and the private, nonprofit, and government sectors.

The Graduate Center's commitment to research and scholarship for the public good is exemplified by its more than 30 centers, institutes, and initiatives, including its Advanced Science Research Center, a 200,000-square-foot facility designed to promote collaboration among scientists in five areas of global research and innovation: environmental sciences, nanoscience, neuroscience, photonics, and structural biology. The Graduate Center benefits from highly ambitious and diverse students and alumni—who in turn teach hundreds of thousands of undergraduates every year. Through its public programs, The Graduate Center enhances New York City's intellectual and cultural life.

*Joshua Brumberg*, President, The Graduate School and University Center

*Norm Carey*, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President, The Graduate School and University Center

*Joel Christensen*, Provost and Senior Vice President, The Graduate School and University Center



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