



# **CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies Commencement Exercises**

The Graduate School and University Center The  
City University of New York

June 4, 2025

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*“American students need to learn to think across disciplines since that’s where most new breakthroughs are made.”*

—Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist and author

## ABOUT CUNY BACCALAUREATE FOR UNIQUE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

In the late 1960s, a group of faculty and students asked CUNY to allow individual faculty and students to define programs of study, with access to courses across campuses. On February 22, 1971, the NYS Board of Higher Education authorized a university-wide B.A.; soon after, the B.S. was approved. First known as the CUNY Baccalaureate Program and renamed CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies in 2008, the degree is commonly called CUNY BA.

Faculty mentoring is the cornerstone. Over 400 professors have mentored CUNY BA students as they have built their individualized degrees, which have ranged from American Revolutionary History to Zoological Photography. Student-mentor opportunities have proven invaluable in the personal development of CUNY BA students, leading to independent research projects, internships, and study abroad opportunities.

CUNY BA has received grants from renowned foundations and organizations, and was recognized by the University Design Consortium, an international organization that challenges public universities to develop innovative strategies to address complex issues, and nationally as a top military-friendly institution. In addition, CUNY BA has its own academic fellowship established by the Thomas W. Smith Foundation and has received a multi-million-dollar bequest from the Barbara J. Price estate for scholarships and grants.

Five decades later, the goal of helping students and faculty pursue intellectual innovation continues. There are over 8,000 alumni; the majority report that they have received raises and promotions or have successfully changed careers, have gone on to graduate school, and are working in careers related to their self-designed areas of study.

[cunyba.cuny.edu](http://cunyba.cuny.edu)

# ORDER OF EXERCISES

## PROCESSIONAL

### OPENING OF CEREMONY

Emily Sohmer Tai  
Professor of History, Queensborough Community College  
Grand Marshal

### THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Laurel Naomi Creighton  
Current Student

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Jody Clark Vaisman  
Academic Director, CUNY Baccalaureate

### ON BEHALF OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY CENTER

Joshua C. Brumberg  
President, The Graduate School and University Center

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Juan Battle  
Presidential Professor, The Graduate School and University Center

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Nitu Farhin  
June 2025 Graduate

### ON BEHALF OF THE ALUMNI

Ethan Frisch  
CUNY Baccalaureate, 2008; University of London, 2011  
Co-Founder & Co-CEO of Burlap & Barrel

### PRESENTATION OF COMMENCEMENT AWARDS

Jody Clark Vaisman  
Academic Director, CUNY Baccalaureate  
&  
Malika M. Pegues  
CUNY Baccalaureate, 2022; Brooklyn College, 2024

## REMARKS TO THE GRADUATING CLASS

Norman Carey

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

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President, The Graduate School and University Center

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Jody Clark Vaisman

Academic Director, CUNY Baccalaureate

&

Malika M. Pegues

CUNY Baccalaureate, 2022; Brooklyn College, 2024

## CLOSING REMARKS

Jody Clark Vaisman

Academic Director, CUNY Baccalaureate

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Kate McPherson, Senior Academic Advisor

Rafal Szczurowski, Academic Advisor



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Gershon Engel  
International and Middle East Studies  
Documentary Film

Charlie Le Grice  
International Human Rights and Ethnolinguistic  
Perspectives

Milton Jones  
Theatre - Acting and Directing

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Pilar Amaya  
Wildlife Conservation Biology

Alisa Leshchenko  
Mathematics and Machine Learning  
Cognitive Neuroscience

Eva C. Deans  
Molecular, Systemic, and Integrative Physiology

JoAnna P. Monroe  
Language and Literacy

Efeh Ibojie  
Cultural Heritage and Information Studies

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Art Therapy  
Philosophy

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Contemporary Political Discourse

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Restorative Justice

Hamad Naroze  
Story Crafting

Emma K. Coyle  
Cultural Performance Studies

Donna Paysepar  
Performing Arts

Mariam Faye  
Afrocentric Consciousness

Giovannah Marveige Philippeaux  
Identity Formation and Creative Expression

Samuel Griffith  
Spanish Language and Latin American Culture  
Arabic Studies

Marie Grace Pugliano  
Dance and Creative Arts

Ashera Viking Drury Schwartz  
Urban Ecology

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Biological Anthropology

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Neuroscience  
Computer Science

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Keyeara Malika Newsome  
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Arlo Banta  
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Screenwriting

Sibil Frimponmaa Owusu  
Global Cultural Studies  
Transcultural Film

John Capistrano  
Hermeneutics

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Social Justice for Cultural Change

Louckenson Dorestil  
Foundations of Criminal Law  
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Lela Pines  
Creative Advocacy

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Women in the Health System  
Biopsychosocial Considerations in Health

Michael Poorun  
Game Narrative and Design

Sydney Greta Gdanski  
Forensics and Behavioral Science

Ekaterina Pugachova  
Political Economy  
International Criminal Justice

Mark Hamer II  
Inclusive and Independent Filmmaking

Vance-Allen Christian Rawles  
Black Gender Studies and Experimental Theatre

Ana Maria Hernandez-Pfeffer  
Women in Media and Arts Management

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Cognitive Neuroscience  
Biochemistry

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Sociology  
Multidisciplinary Storytelling

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Child and Developmental Psychology  
Spanish Legal Translation

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Database Design and Implementation

Alex Cazan  
Concept Art

Chelsea Chacha  
New Media Content Creation  
Social Influence Marketing

Jean Chen  
Counterterrorism and International Relations  
Cybersecurity

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Business Entrepreneurship and Management

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Digital Design and Innovation

Shadasia Maria Diaz Baez  
International Retail and Luxury Management

Nicole Gregorits  
Acoustic Ecology

Adelia Honeywood Harrison  
Restoration Ecology

Yukako Hori  
Morality and Ethics  
Financial Risk

Luming Huang  
Technology Integration for Multidisciplinary Arts

Ashley Jean-Francois  
User Experience and Design

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Healthcare Administration

Benicio U. Ladines  
Game Design Education

Byron Madera  
Narrative for Games

Anna Maguire  
Harm Reduction

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Russian Studies  
Political Economy

Malia Morioka  
Neurobiology  
Studio Art

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Cybersecurity

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Game Design

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Holistic Psychology  
Creative Communication

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Business Management



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Global Executive Leadership

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Game Character Design

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Arts and Entertainment

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Behavioral Neuroscience  
Music History

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Forensic Counseling

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Game Programming

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Journalism and Media Studies

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Megumi Shauna Arai  
Borders and Belonging

Isabella Francine Craven  
Performing Arts

Laurel Naomi Creighton  
Cinematic Performance  
Cinemas of Resistance

Amanda Lum  
Game Character Art

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Contexts of Conflicts

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Language and Metaphysics  
Dance Technique and Composition

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Dance Science

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Business Studies

Jasmine Greenfield  
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Business Statistics and Quantitative Modeling

Pablo Lopez Duque  
Exercise Physiology and Nutrition Science

\*Subject to successful completion of degree requirements

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