Literary Excellence with Mentorship at Its Core

Award-winning MFA alumni Helen Phillips and De’Shawn Charles Winslow on community and creativity

Also inside

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Dear Alumni and Friends,

I am proud of the many accolades that Brooklyn College has garnered in recent months. Prestigious literary award committees have heralded our faculty and alumni. Our science faculty have gained new scientific breakthroughs in their laboratories. Last spring, the Murray Koppelman School of Business at Brooklyn College obtained accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, a recognition that puts us in an elite group of the top 5 percent of business schools globally. The college has also achieved important national rankings for offering the highest quality of undergraduate teaching, providing exceptional social mobility to our students, and ensuring that our students have the least debt at graduation. Finally, for the second year in a row, U.S. News & World Report ranked Brooklyn College as having the most diverse student body among regional universities in the Northeast.

These strong rankings reflect Brooklyn College’s historic and ongoing mission to educate immigrants, first-generation college students, and others who represent the diversity of this great borough. We have recently deepened our mission by launching our new Immigrant Student Success Office to coordinate needed resources for students at the college. We are extremely grateful to Irwin ’56 and Concepción Federman, whose generous support has helped make this dream a reality.

Our alumni help every day to celebrate and enhance the good news at Brooklyn College.

Warm regards,

Michelle J. Anderson
President, Brooklyn College
Business Management Professor Ngoc Cindy Pham (above, far right) celebrates the Lunar New Year at a post–New York Fashion Week event at the New-York Historical Society.

With Pham are Brooklyn College business major Lairab Tahir (third from right) and Imani Jones ’16 (third from left) from brand development company Find Your ID NYC, with whom Pham collaborates on assignments. Right: Brooklyn College senior Samantha Blafford (with Professor Pham) dreamed of working in the fashion business. “But I had no experience working retail, or dealing with fabrics,” says Blafford, a vocal music performance major. That changed when she enrolled in Pham’s international business and consumer behavior class. With help from Pham, who assisted her in interview preparation, Blafford applied, through the Magner Career Center, for an internship at Style.Me, a 3-D virtual shopping site that invites users to enter their measurements for a custom fit. She got the internship, which recently became an actual job as a sales and operations associate. “I was able to use what I learned working with Find Your ID NYC on the Fashion Week show in a real-world situation,” says Blafford.
From day one, students understand that class with Business Management Professor Ngoc Cindy Pham is going to be different. She brings doughnuts. It’s a tradition that began when she was teaching in Texas and brought tamales. It’s her way of injecting a warm informality into her classes at the Murray Koppelman School of Business. But she also does something else a bit different for her students: She takes them off campus to learn in the bigger classroom of New York City.

For the past two years, Pham has given her consumer business and international business students assignments relating to New York Fashion Week. To accomplish this, Pham works with Imani Jones ’16, who runs FYID NYC (Find Your ID NYC), a company with close ties to the Gotham fashion world that specializes in marketing, events, branding, and content creation. With Jones’ input, Pham tasks the students to produce shows that are mini versions of those on the famed runways. The assignment encompasses all aspects of a Fashion Week show, including creating a budget, marketing and promotion, production, working with designers, and hiring models. The business management professor also invites designers and fashion show producers to her classes to critique the students’ work. “This fall I am working with students from the Brooklyn College Chapter of the International Business Association to host a music and fashion festival on campus. Designers and artists from New York Fashion Week are appearing pro bono.”

Pham’s assignments reflect well her philosophy about using the city and its bustling activity as inspiration for lesson plans. In addition to the fashion world, she often assigns projects related to real estate. “The housing market here is of great interest to my students,” she says.

For now Pham continues to work with FYID NYC, and her students are looking to participate in Nike X Jordan events during the February 2020 shows. But she wants everyone, students and their potential employers alike, to know, “FYID NYC is just one of the companies I work with. I seek internships and job opportunities for my students at a variety of companies in New York, in all sectors of marketing.”

Swapping the Classroom for a Runway

The Murray Koppelman School of Business Professor Ngoc Cindy Pham takes her students off campus and into New York City’s fashion world for real-world lessons in all aspects of business management.

BY MARTIN JOHNSON
A Bright Forecast

With help from the Magner Career Center, Hope Osemwenkhae ’18 gained a top internship with an award-winning meteorologist. Now she is on TV in front of her own weather map.

BY JAMILAH SIMMONS

For Hope Osemwenkhae ’18, the forecast is mostly sunny with winds that look primed to carry her all the way to her dream job. The former Earth and Environmental Sciences major, and Television and Radio minor, landed a position last summer as a meteorologist for News 12 The Bronx.

After interning with Emmy Award–winning WNBC meteorologist Raphael Miranda ’06—a connection facilitated by the college’s Magner Career Center—Osemwenkhae leveraged her relationships there to land her current position.

“This is such a big opportunity to start my career in the top market,” says Osemwenkhae, who thought she’d have to move to a much smaller market to get her foot in the door. “I’m in more than 700,000 households. To start in my hometown at such a young age is huge.”

Osemwenkhae learned the ins and outs of weather forecasting during her internship, so when she was put to the test during her interview with News 12, she nailed it. She explains, “That day, we had some easterly winds and they wanted to know what that means. The sea breeze is cooler around the coast than in urban areas because of that wind, which has a significant impact on how it’s going to feel outside. The interviewer asked, ‘Why is it cooler along the coast?’ I responded, ‘The easterly winds are due to a sea breeze making it cooler along the coast compared to inland.’”

Osemwenkhae—who decided she wanted to be a weather forecaster after watching the movie The Day After Tomorrow when she was eight years old, and growing up watching Sam Champion and Lee Goldberg on WABC7—is currently enrolled in a 12-credit online certificate program in weather forecasting at Pennsylvania State University. She plans to complete it by December 2020.

She says she’s happy for the opportunity to be at News 12, which has outlets all over the tristate area, because she can fill in as needed in other markets like Long Island and Connecticut. “That means more flexibility and more eyes I can be seen by.”

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Brooklyn College’s Murray Koppelman School of Business has earned accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International, the global accrediting body for business schools. The college has joined an elite group of the world’s schools that confer business degrees at the bachelor level or higher and holds the distinction of being the only AACSB-accredited business school in Brooklyn.

“We have always been accredited through the Middle States Commission as part of Brooklyn College. But the AACSB accreditation is different. It’s the gold standard for business schools. We have seen a significant uptick in the number of companies reaching out and saying ‘Let’s do business,’ ” says Susanne G. Scott, interim dean of the Koppelman School. “There has been tremendous growth in internships from the best companies, some of which would not have approached us before. The accreditation is a signal to potential students, and parents; we are now on a list that includes less than 5 percent of business schools internationally. But just as importantly, it is a point of pride for our current students and faculty.”
Education Graduate Wins Fulbright to Teach English in Taiwan

BY JAMILAH SIMMONS

Jennifer Tam ’18, a former double major in Early Childhood Education/Art Education and Children and Youth Studies, headed to Taiwan this summer for an 11-month Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Fellowship.

“I like to go to new places, so this is great because I get to hone my professional skills and travel at the same time,” says Tam, who wants to either be a classroom teacher or work in museum education.

Tam, who minored in Chinese, is helping teach English to elementary school children who are mostly native Mandarin speakers in Hualien City, on the east coast of Taiwan.

When she herself was a young student, her parents did not speak much English. During her time at Brooklyn College, she conducted fieldwork in New York City schools with kids who were native Mandarin speakers.

“Working with this population is something I wanted to pursue,” she says. “It’s really rewarding to me to help them understand.”

A former Macaulay Honors College student, Tam has studied abroad twice—in Brooklyn College’s three-week Study Abroad China program and through a six-week Queens College program in South Korea. She has also visited China twice with her family. Additionally, she is a member of Kappa Delta Pi, the International Honor Society in Education, and interned at the Children’s Museum of the Arts in New York City.

Magner Stipend Helps Business Major Gain Internship at a United Nations NGO

BY JAMILAH SIMMONS

Ariana Noka, a junior and business administration major, won a Magner Career Center Internship Stipend, which allowed her to work during the spring and through the summer at the Arab African American Women’s Leadership Council, a United Nations–affiliated nongovernmental organization.

“This internship has allowed me to further the next steps of my academic career by introducing me to areas of interest I would never have thought of,” says Noka, who is considering becoming a financial analyst or possibly going into business law.

The stipend pays undergraduates or graduate students $1,000 to $5,000, and was designed to help them take nonpaying, off-campus internships or other volunteer opportunities that they would otherwise not have been able to afford. The award was established in 2004 with a gift from Marge Magner ’69, and has provided funds for an average of 77 students per year for the past three years.

Noka got to help organize International Women’s Month activities, for which she met with consulate officials, planned a fashion show, and participated in many conferences, seminars, and workshops on issues involving women’s empowerment.

“Simply being in the United Nations every day made me feel like I was accomplishing something golden,” she says.
A humanities and social sciences education provides the intellectual grounding that is the cornerstone of higher education, and that prepares our students to seize the shifting range of opportunities emerging in the 21st century. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences is the intellectual hub of the college, the foundational basis for general education, and the central link between Brooklyn College’s other schools.

While we cannot fully envision what opportunities the economy of the future will offer, we know from employers that the skills that humanities and social science students develop are those that they most value. Employers want college graduates who have “soft skills,” such as being a good listener or thinking critically, but they have difficulty finding such candidates, according to a new report. The survey was conducted online in September by Morning Consult for the educational content, technology, and services company Cengage, among more than 500 hiring managers and 150 other human resources professionals. More than 1,500 current and former college students from two- and four-year institutions were also surveyed.

Cengage found that the most in-demand talent among employers was listening skills—74 percent of employers indicated it as a skill they valued. This was followed by attention to detail (70 percent) and effective communication (69 percent).

Critical thinking, effective communication, and information analysis and assessment equip our students to be flexible, adaptable, and resilient in a changing world. Abdalla Hassan ’94, for example, worked in Egypt for nearly two decades as a journalist, with a six-month leave as a fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University in 2010. Before he launched his career in journalism, Hassan spent his undergraduate years at Brooklyn College as a history major, taking an eclectic range of courses.

The value of particular technical expertise ebbs and flows, but the capacity to absorb, synthesize, and analyze information and communicate those analyses makes our students highly effective in any occupational context.

Kenneth A. Gould is the new dean of the Brooklyn College School of Humanities and Social Sciences. He is a leader in the field of environmental sociology, and his research focuses on the political economy of environment, technology, and development. Gould has served as chair of Brooklyn College’s Department of Sociology, and later as director of the Urban Sustainability Program. He has served as chair of Brooklyn College’s Department of Sociology, and as director of the Urban Sustainability Program. Gould also serves as professor of both sociology and earth and environmental sciences at the CUNY Graduate Center.
Guiding the Way to Success

Brooklyn College opens a new office that provides mentorship, counseling, advisement and more for immigrant and first-generation students and their unique challenges. The goal is to help them navigate their way to graduation.

BY JAMILAH SIMMONS

Jesús Pérez ’95 hardly has time to settle into his new corner office in Roosevelt Hall, with its view of the bustle across Bedford Avenue and the West Quad. He’s bursting with ideas, and there’s no shortage of campus-based groups to reach out to, community organizations to connect with, and college services to coordinate.

In August, Brooklyn College President Michelle J. Anderson announced the opening of the new Immigrant Student Success Office (ISSO) and tapped Pérez, formerly the director of the college’s Center for Academic Advising and Student Success, to head the effort to coalesce some new, and many existing, campus programs in order to offer a one-stop-shopping experience for immigrant and first-generation students.

“We want to create a space where students feel at home, where they can connect with people who can help them with all of the challenges that come with navigating college life,” says Pérez, who came to this country from Mexico when he was nine years old. “Our main objective is to provide the necessary resources and guidance students need to graduate.”

With 38 percent of Brooklyn’s residents hailing from a foreign country, and low college completion rates for first-generation students nationally, Pérez says it would be a “educational crisis” if the college did not take steps to alleviate some of the barriers to higher education for a large segment of the local population.

“Part of our core mission is a commitment to educate the diverse communities that make up our city and state,” adds President Anderson.

It is a long-standing commitment at Brooklyn College that has paid many dividends. A graduate from the 1930s who went on to become an endocrinologist, and the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Europe, Estelle Ramey ’36 rose to national prominence when her self-described “sharp tongue” led her to pen a widely-circulated letter to a congressman who said that women were unfit for important jobs because of raging hormones. Raul Hilberg ’48, an Austrian immigrant, became one of the world’s preeminent scholars on the Holocaust.

More recently, a poet and refugee from Vietnam, Ocean Vuong ’12—who was the first in his family to learn to read,
at age 11—was awarded a 2019 MacArthur “genius grant.” Two of Brooklyn College’s three Rhodes Scholars are immigrants—Zujaja Tauqeer ’11 from Pakistan and Eugene Shenderov ’05 from the former Soviet Union. (The other, Lisette Nieves ’92, is from Puerto Rico.) Of the college’s previous two finalists for the prestigious award, Sofia Ahsanuddin ’16 emigrated from India and Peter Lee ’17 is the son of Chinese migrants. Indeed, the list of accomplished immigrant and first-generation alumni is distinguished and includes elected officials, college professors, celebrated authors, and economists.

In a college that’s home to students from 139 countries, “we have the opportunity to do something here that’s really different,” says Carolina Bank Muñoz, a sociology professor and Chilean immigrant who has served as a mentor to many students in her 15 years at Brooklyn College.

“At colleges across the country, these kinds of centers are largely focused on Latinx students. But at Brooklyn, we have all these other groups: Caribbean, Asian, white ethnic. This is a much broader issue and I think we have a real opportunity to shift the narrative a bit to make it about a broader swath of immigrant and first-generation students,” she adds.

In fact, we have students at the college that come from such geographically disparate countries as Bangladesh and Israel. Many more are from Russia, Jamaica, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, and Pakistan, among others.

When Bank Muñoz first arrived at Brooklyn College in 2004, she served as the faculty adviser to a student club made up of mostly Caribbean students who were Dreamers.

“I know that it really makes a difference when you develop deep ties with faculty and staff on campus, someone you can trust and reach out to for any number of things. First-generation and immigrant students don’t always know to seek these things out,” says Bank Muñoz, who was part of an ad hoc group of faculty and staff members who in recent years have banded together to coordinate some services and programming for immigrant and first-generation students. That has included hosting an academic town hall, making “know your rights” cards to pass out and post around campus, compiling lists of campus, university, and other community contacts of people and groups that help immigrant populations, and conducting training sessions for faculty and staff about how to be an ally for students.

Many of those efforts will now fall under the umbrella of the new office, which was made possible by a grant from Irwin ’56 and Concepción Federman. Irwin, the son of immigrants, is a venture capitalist and a member of the Brooklyn College Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

The grant will help support the office’s operations and initiatives, which will include work that Pérez has been doing for some time, even when it was not officially part of his job duties. In his role in academic advising, he has always connected students with the resources and ties he has built over the years. Recently, he has worked with the college’s scholarships office to help coordinate its participation in the nationwide TheDream.US scholarships program, which provides up to $29,000 in college funding for Dreamers. More than a decade ago, he served as the director of a CUNY-wide task force that assembled to address the fact that the Mexican-American community was among the fastest growing in New York City but has among the lowest educational attainment rates. He has consistently made a point of working with community leaders, elected officials, and church groups.

“I’ve experienced that sense of coming to this country and starting over,” he says. “It’s always been natural for me to say, ‘How can I help?’”
Pérez’s first few weeks in his new post had him juggling myriad tasks, from assisting an Israeli student who needed help with class registration, to participating in CUNY’s Citizenship Day at John Jay College, and making the rounds during student club hours.

He is planning outreach to high schools and other community-based organizations for recruitment, helping to connect students with scholarships and employment opportunities, financial aid workshops, and a speaker series in which Pérez hopes to enlist alumni who can relate to the struggles of many of the students. He got some of his first recruits at the Brooklyn College Foundation’s September board meeting when he made a presentation to the trustees.

Daniel Menendez ’09, a current board member, was undocumented as a student and can relate to the struggles of many of the students. He got some of his first recruits at the Brooklyn College Foundation’s September board meeting when he made a presentation to the trustees.

“Professor Bank Muñoz is part of the reason I’m a sociology professor today. She always encouraged me and served as a mentor, long after I graduated. As someone who also came from another country, I saw her as a role model. Now I participate in an initiative to help first-generation students. I know that having a mentor can make all the difference.”

KAYA HAMER-SMALL ’09, ’11 M.A. SOCIOLOGY Sociology Professor, Broward College Born in Barbados

have access to financial aid or be able to go to a bank for a loan. He hasn’t forgotten what the uncertainty feels like.

“I didn’t know if my situation would ever be fixed,” he says. “I look forward to sharing what it was like to overcome that.”

Trustee Doris Bien-Aime ’13, who was a first-generation student, is also anxious to connect with the new center, especially after hearing that the Federman funding also provides completion grants for students who have a financial hold that prevents them from graduating or registering for classes. When she was a student, she had her bursar’s hold removed after going through a series of health problems.

“It was beautiful for me to see how one act had an exponential impact not only on my ability to grow personally and professionally, but also put me in a position to pay it forward,” says Bien-Aime, who founded an annual workshop at the college to help business students transition into life after school.

Yasmin Ali ’01, ’07 M.A., the executive director of Student Financial Services, administers the grants for Brooklyn College, which she says will likely end up going to roughly 70 students each semester.

“We set up a process where they check in with financial and academic advisers to help them work on a plan to pay for the rest of their courses and to map out what courses they have left so they can finish,” says Ali, a Sudanese immigrant who came to the United States in the 1980s. “We want to help get them on track and to be able to say that this gift allowed them to graduate.

“It’s exciting to show students that Brooklyn College cares and identifies with the immigrant experience,” she says. “I’m proud to be a part of it.”

At left, Luz Medrano, a staff attorney from CUNY Citizenship Now!, a free legal assistance program available to CUNY students, at the Immigration Student Success Office in Roosevelt Hall.
Looking Back, Giving Back

One of alumnus Irwin Federman’s main concerns is that Brooklyn College students should have the same opportunity he had to earn their degrees. With his wife Concepción’s encouragement, the couple is helping to give a new generation of students a chance.

BY AUDREY M. PETERSON

When asked what his experience was like when he attended Brooklyn College, venture capital executive Irwin Federman ’56 admits that working 30 to 40 hours a week while going to school did not leave him much room to think about anything else. He graduated with a bachelor of science in economics, and became a CPA after winning the Forbes Gold Medal, given to those who attain the highest grade on the California CPA exam. Federman worked in public accounting, then as chief financial officer for three successive Silicon Valley startups, including a semiconductor company, Monolithic Memories, where he was CEO. During his 10-year tenure there, he served two terms as chair of the US Semiconductor Industry Association. In 1990, he became a general partner of U.S. Venture Partners, an early-stage venture capital investment firm, and senior adviser there in 2015.

“Looking Back, Giving Back” by Audrey M. Peterson

When it came to my college experience, everything registered retrospectively for me,” says Federman. “I realized afterward that if I hadn’t had that opportunity of going to a fine school tuition-free, there was no way I could have afforded it by myself, and my family couldn’t have paid for it. I’ve had a growing appreciation of my education over the years. As I’ve prospered and gotten lucky, the impact of Brooklyn College has become very clear.”

It is this same chance at higher education that Federman, a member of the Brooklyn College Foundation Board of Trustees, and his wife Concepción would like to give to others “who are trying to break out of an economic bind not of their doing,” he says. In 2005, Federman endowed a fund in early childhood education, the Sheila Federman ’58 Memorial Scholarship, in honor of his late wife, who had been a teacher. Concepción, recognizing the importance of the college to so many generations of people, urged him to do more. Her encouragement led to a $500,000 gift for the college to use the best way it could to accomplish its most urgent priorities.

“‘The motive for the gift was thank you, Brooklyn College. Thank you for what you’ve done for me, here’s a little something that I can do for you.’”

“The motive for the gift was thank you, Brooklyn College. Thank you for what you’ve done for me, here’s a little something that I can do for you,” says Federman.

The Federmans were delighted to hear that the gift would be used in three crucial areas—for grants to help students in financial need to complete their degrees, for the School of Education, and to provide seed funding for a new Immigrant Student Success Office.

“Brooklyn College demographics have changed a lot since I was a student,” says Federman. “However, similar to today’s student body, most of us were the children of immigrants, and almost all of us were economically constrained. Although 60-odd years have passed, the opportunities provided by this terrific school are remarkably the same.”
A Literary Full Circle

At a time when they are both receiving accolades, authors Helen Phillips ’07 M.F.A. and De’Shawn Charles Winslow ’11, ’13 M.A. meet on campus to reflect on their beginnings in the Brooklyn College creative writing program and how far they have come.

BY AUDREY M. PETERSON
like to read the newspaper reviews, but I really like to read Goodreads reviews, even the ones that aren’t glowing, to see how people are feeling about things,” says author De’Shawn Charles Winslow ’11, ’13 M.A. as he reflects on the success of his first novel. “I care about the reader; if I’m honest, I care about the reader more than the big publications because I feel like those are the people who come back to you. Newspapers may not like your second book. But a person who went into the bookstore and bought it and enjoyed the first one, they are more likely to come back.”

“I’m not courageous enough to read my Goodreads reviews,” says Helen Phillips ’07 M.F.A., herself a novelist and Winslow’s one time professor. “But I think that’s a really cool way to think about it, whether it’s a good review or a bad, you’re really connecting with someone, you’re having some kind of exchange with them.”

“I don’t reply to them, though,” adds Winslow.

“Never reply!” says Phillips, and the two, sitting side by side in the Brooklyn College Library’s Woody Tanger Auditorium, break into laughter. They have met on the occasion of the recent publication of their award-nominated novels to catch up and consider how they got started with their writing careers and what the future holds.

Winslow opens up with a confession. The native North Carolinian, who plays the piano, relocated because he was thinking of a career in music and believed New York City would be the best place to start. He also admits that he wanted more independence from his family. “They weren’t bothering me,” he says, laughing. “But in the mind of a 23-year-old, if your mother or aunts can show up at your door, they are too close.”

He soon realized that “I was not nearly as talented as most other musicians I met, so I abandoned that.” Following a series of jobs in data entry, at coffee shops and a cupcake store, and behind the front desk in gyms, he was spurred to complete his B.F.A. and M.A. after his father died. “I was 30, and his passing made me want to write about him,” he says. This decision landed him in Helen Phillips’ creative writing class in the spring of 2011.

“That was a strong, exciting class,” says Phillips, whose own debut book, And Yet They Were Happy (Leapfrog Press), was about to be published that May. She has since written four more books, including The Beautiful Bureaucrat (Henry Holt and Co., 2015), praised by the renowned science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin as “funny and sad, scary and beautiful,” and Some Possible Solutions (Henry Holt and Co., 2016), called by The Los Angeles
“I feel like so much of our job as creative writing instructors is to build communities out of our classrooms....”
—HELEN PHILLIPS

Times “part dystopian fantasy, part thriller,” and likened to Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale.

Phillips recognized Winslow’s talent early on. “Recently I pulled up a workshop critique that I had written to De’Shawn, and it really emphasized the dialogue in his piece.... Obviously, he’s come a long way since then, but the dialogue was so good,” she says, turning to Winslow. “And you were using [North Carolina] dialect to some degree then, really getting people’s voices on the page and getting the cadence of conversation on the page. Even at that time it was just shining and striking. I have read so many thousands of student pieces over the years, but that piece, it just stays with me. It has a tactile quality for me still,” says Phillips.

Winslow credits two of his professors—Phillips and Helen Rubenstein—with giving him the entrée to writing about subjects that are important to him: black rural life, black community, and the black family. “Both professors encouraged me to pursue a career in writing. They nurtured the writer in me right after reading my work for the first time,” he says. “I believe it’s rare to find instructors who so badly want to see their students succeed.

Their mentoring at the very early stages is why I pursued an M.F.A.”

Now peers, the novelists talk shop—teaching lit courses versus teaching creative writing is one topic on Winslow’s mind. “I feel guilty that I enjoy teaching published literature more than I do hot-off-the-press works,” he says. “It makes me feel like I’m such a selfish writer who doesn’t want to teach other people. This is not my intention.”

“It’s a completely different endeavor to select something for your syllabus that you think is the best story ever written and is really fun to talk about with people,” says Phillips. “It’s rare that someone is going to hand in for workshop the best story ever written. I feel like so much of our job as creative writing instructors is to build communities out of our classrooms and figure out ways to make us a further community.”

Phillips has a question for her former student. “This has been such a long journey for you De’Shawn, and it’s gone so phenomenally well. I think that so much of being a writer means you’re in solitude, you don’t know how what you’re doing will land with other people. And arriving at that moment where you actually get to connect your brain to other brains by having them read your book—I find that to be one of the most terrifying moments of writing, but also one of the most ecstatic. How does it feel to have gone through this whole process?”

“It feels...good,” says Winslow. “The question reminds me that it happened. When it’s just me by myself, I still feel like an M.F.A. student, still climbing for it. There’s always ‘What’s next?’ You write the book, good. Now get an agent; OK, good. Now get it sold. Now you hope people will like it. There’s always something next. So it takes other people reminding me that I did it,” he says. “In these moments it’s ‘YES! I did it!’”

In turn, Winslow has a question for his former professor: When does she have time to write?

“When I’m teaching in the midst of a busy semester I carve out one hour per day and
set a timer,” she says. “It’s usually after I get my children to school and before I turn my attention to all of my teaching and other responsibilities. To some degree I feel like, yes, it’s only five hours a week, but that time does add up. I once read a writer’s quote in an interview (I think it was with Sarah Manguso, though I haven’t been able to re-find the quote), that said basically, ‘I don’t want to read books by people who have time to write books.’ And that really inspires me and I think it’s such a good point, about the book you are writing in that stolen hour, and the book you don’t really have time to write, and the book that you’re rushing to. I try to comfort myself with that idea. That I don’t always have time to write books, but I squeeze them into the cracks, and that brings urgency to them.”

“There is something quite powerful about having a creative writing program in a city, and a borough, with such a vibrant literary scene and such a storied literary history,” says Helen Phillips, “but on a campus like Brooklyn College—which has a feeling of serenity and intimacy, and is somewhat removed from the sometimes frenetic energy of the city—that provides a pool of quiet for creative risks.”

This fall, Helen Phillips and De’Shawn Charles Winslow added award nominees to the list of experiences they share. Phillips’ book The Need (Simon and Schuster, 2019) was longlisted for the National Book Award and Winslow’s In West Mills (Bloomsbury, 2019) is on the shortlist for The Center for Fiction’s First Novel Prize, the winner to be announced in December. Brooklyn College and its writing programs have been the wellspring for a number of award-winning novelists, playwrights, poets, and authors who have joined a “storied literary history” of which Phillips speaks. Below are a few of the alumni and faculty who have earned some distinguished accolades. For more of the college’s literary lights, visit brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/literary-lights.

Annie Baker ’09 M.F.A. was awarded a 2014 Pulitzer Prize, as well as an Obie for Excellence in Playwriting, among other honors, for her play The Flick. The drama draws on the disorientation Baker experienced while watching a digital projection of an Ingmar Bergman movie.

Paul Beatty ’89 M.F.A. won the 2016 Man Booker Prize for Fiction for his novel The Sellout (Oneworld, 2015), a biting satire about race in America. Beatty was the first American to capture the top British literary prize, known as the award that honors “the finest in fiction,” and which comes with a cash prize of £50,000 British pounds and a designer bound edition of the book.

Rosamond S. King, associate professor in the English Department and director of the college's Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities, won a Lambda Literary Award, the signature honor of the nation's leading organization advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer literature, for her poetry book Rock|Salt|Stone (Nightboat, 2017).

Ben Lerner, distinguished professor of English, is the author of three books of poetry (The Lichtenberg Figures, 2004; Angle of Yaw, 2006; and Mean Free Path, 2010—all Copper Canyon Press) and three novels (Leaving the Atocha Station, Coffee House Press, 2011; 10:04, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011; and The Topeka School, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), among other publications. Lerner is a recipient of the MacArthur “genius grant” as well as Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowships.

Ocean Vuong ’12, a MacArthur “genius grant” winner, is the author of the poetry collection Night Sky with Exit Wounds (Copper Canyon Press, 2016) and a debut novel, On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous (Penguin, 2019), for which he has been nominated for the 2019 National Book Award and the Center for Fiction’s First Novel Award.

“…”
On Writing and Their Latest Books

Helen Phillips’ *The Need* finds Molly, a paleobotanist and mother of two, in a fight to protect her children from a foe who is both terrifying and shockingly familiar. Called at once a thriller, science fiction, and a literary novel, the book resists categorization. “There are a lot of genres I’m borrowing from,” says Phillips when asked whether mixed genres were on her mind when she began to write the novel.

“The central conceit of the book is a speculative or science fiction element. And since it’s been published, although I was not thinking of this as I was writing it, people have called it horror as well. So I get a lot of energy out of borrowing from other genres. Still, I borrowed from them because I was not able to express what I needed to without them. It was the only way I could see to write about this ferocity and dread and ecstasy of maternal love. I had to have the thriller-like momentum. I had to have the perfect nemesis arising out of the cosmic void. I needed those things in order to express it because I think for me that makes it more concrete, it makes the metaphor feel more lived in. So I’m borrowing from them, but I don’t think the book is them.”

De’Shawn Charles Winslow’s debut novel *In West Mills*, set in the eponymous fictional North Carolina town, focuses on Azalea “Knot” Centre and her best friend and next-door neighbor Otis Lee over several decades. The characters are based on people from an earlier era in Winslow’s hometown of South Mills. The author set out to write what he calls a “commercial” book.

“To be honest, I did not want to write a literary novel, because I wanted to write to people like the people in my novel. I wanted to make it as accessible as possible with not a lot of figuring out involved,” he says, smiling. “When I started to send it out, people just kept referring to it as literary, literary. And I said, ‘It’s not what I was going for, but I guess that’s what I did.’”

Winslow first tried to write an essay after his father died. Eventually, he scrapped the project and decided to write short stories. *In West Mills* was a story that grew to be an entire book, creating the people his parents might have met and known in their early lives. “I had to take what little bit I knew about the real people in his life and build on it, make up the rest, to try to answer things about his life that I had no way of finding out,” says Winslow about his father. He also tapped into a subject that is rarely explored in literature: platonic friendships between heterosexual people of the opposite sex. In his novel, the character of Azalea eschews a conventional romance by choosing moonshine over her boyfriend, but forges a solid friendship with her neighbor, a married man.

“There is a tendency to make protagonists like that into love interests,” says Winslow of his characters. “One of my mother’s best friends was a man. I think people thought they were courting each other, but they weren’t. And my father was completely fine with this relationship because he knew they had a history before him that was not romantic. I think that’s part of the reason I did that in my novel.”

Unlike *In West Mills*, where Winslow built a story around the imagined life of his father and his friends, *The Need*, although not autobiographical, turns inward. At its core is an intense examination by the author of the life of a working mother, mixing what she calls “mundane domestic moments with existential questions about what it means to have an identity and what it means to be a mother. The most cosmic questions are contained in daily life,” she adds. Along with the everyday fear of doing it wrong that can come to a person navigating parenthood, Phillips shares the sometimes-surreal experiences that come with being a mother, specifically breastfeeding.

“Though it is a very instinctual thing, it is also a science fiction thing: You become a food source for another creature and your body is generating milk. I craved representation of this experience, and it seemed like such rich territory for writing about because it is such a concrete manifestation of the bond between a mother and child. It’s a river of milk connecting you to your child. I really conceived of *The Need* as largely being a book about the body and the way the body bears love and the way the body bears grief. And for me, breast milk was an essential part of that.”

Phillips will again turn to science as a driving theme in her next novel. “It’s about climate change and technology, but it’s really through the lens of one particular family, and imagining a future where we have limited access to the natural world and where a lot of our daily experience involves technology.”

Winslow says that going forward he will continue to explore platonic relationships between heterosexual men and women in everything he writes. “I’m also big on community-based tales. *In West Mills* has two main characters; this next project will have more. Not a large cast, but four characters to watch instead of two. And all four of them will be watching each other.”
When an asteroid struck Earth 66 million years ago and wiped out the entire dinosaur population, it paved the way for the emergence of mammals. Brooklyn College Assistant Professor of Anthropology Stephen Chester was a key collaborator in a groundbreaking discovery of thousands of exceptionally preserved animal and plant fossils from the critical first million years, including the mammal skulls and lower jawbones shown here. “This discovery has produced a lifetime’s worth of fossils to work on, which will continue to provide us with a clearer view of the beginning of the age of mammals,” says Chester. The findings have been published in the recent issue of *Science* magazine and are appearing on the NOVA documentary *Rise of the Mammals*, streaming on PBS. For more on this unprecedented discovery, including a complete list of collaborators visit [brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/chester](http://brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/chester).
Studying the microbiome of duckweed may sound like one of those arcane subjects for specialists in the field of biology and microbiology. Still, for Associate Professor Theodore Muth, the inquiry holds an essential key to far more accessible issues like environmental sustainability and clean water. Muth, a recipient of a Leonard ’50 and Claire ’52 Tow Faculty Research Travel Fellowship, has recently returned from a six-week fellowship to study duckweed in Japan.

“Protection of our natural resources and sustainability in the face of climate change and other anthropogenic stressors is a significant issue,” he says. “I have young kids and I worry about what type of world we will be handing off to them.”

Muth, who joined the faculty of Brooklyn College in 2000, and is today deputy chair in the Biology Department, has published numerous articles on cell biology and microbiology. A focus of his lab is to investigate the diversity and dynamics of urban microbial communities. One area of study

The Tiny but Mighty Duckweed May Help Clean Up the Planet

Associate Professor of Biology Theodore Muth’s research on the small aquatic plant focuses on how its microbiome might help it mediate pollutants in our freshwater sources.

BY MARTIN JOHNSON
involves duckweed, a small flowering aquatic plant, and how it functions in bioremediation, a process where naturally occurring or deliberately introduced microorganisms are used to consume or break down pollutants. His students have studied the waters from ponds in Prospect Park, Central Park, and other freshwater sources in the New York area, and Muth says that their work refined his interest.

“We particularly wish to understand how the bacteria that are growing on the surface of the duckweed plants (their microbiome) can help the plant itself tolerate stressful conditions, and how the bacteria in the duckweed microbiome might be able to enhance the use of duckweed in bioremediation of pollutants.”

Muth chose to use his travel fellowship—a grant of $4,000—to travel to Japan and work with two leading scientists in the field, Professor Masaaki Morikawa at Hokkaido University in Sapporo and Professor Tokitaka Oyama at Kyoto University. Morikawa has pioneered the identification and study of bacteria that can boost the growth of duckweed and facilitate their ability to counteract pollutants in contaminated waters.

Muth believes the research done with the Tow travel fellowship will help him to better train his students, the scientists of the future, to do battle with issues of pollution and sustainability. “This new knowledge and these new skills, and new professional connections, will help my lab, my students, and my colleagues at Brooklyn College in our efforts toward making New York City a more resilient and sustainable city.”

“Protection of our natural resources and sustainability in the face of climate change and other anthropogenic stressors is a significant issue. I have young kids and I worry about what type of world we will be handing off to them.” —Theodore Muth

For a complete list of faculty awards, visit brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/facultyawards
Jennifer McCoy, a professor in the Brooklyn College Art Department, and her husband, Kevin McCoy, an associate professor in the Department of Art and Art Professions at New York University, have been creating celebrated works that marry film, installations, new media, and technology for more than two decades. Recently, they were approached by the Whitney Museum of American Art about a project.

“At the time, we had also been thinking about how art moves in the art world and who controls it,” says Jennifer, explaining how much influence museum board members and moneyed arts enthusiasts often have in deciding what a museum will collect. “It’s wonderful that museums have their doors open and we can buy more and more expensive tickets to see the art on display, but it’s the same circle of interest that defines what you see there.”

The McCoys found that system problematic. So they decided to donate a piece of their work, a three-minute 16mm film called Public Key/Private Key, to the Whitney and open its ownership up to 50 people who filled out a ledger on the museum’s website with essays on why they were interested in being a donor of record. Those chosen received digital certificates based on a blockchain—the technology used in cryptocurrencies—to ensure the uniqueness of the transaction. They were also given a print that is a collage of different still frames from the film.

Public Key/Private Key is a relatively simple short with a 1960s experimental feel that features a woman walking up a set of stairs with numbers embedded in them while a voiceover riffs on labor, Bitcoin, and numbers.

Those who applied for ownership ranged from blockchain buffs to academic theorists to “I just want to donate something to the Whitney, and this is the only way I will ever be able to say that I did,” as Jennifer describes them. (The final donors of record include two Brooklyn College professors—David Grubbs of the Performance and Interactive Media Arts program and Jennifer L. Ball of the Art Department.)

Jennifer, who has taught at Brooklyn College for more than 20 years, says that it was exciting to bring a more diverse group into the process; she also noted that the art world has a long way to go before museum collections truly reflect a more varied perspective.

“This is not a huge step in that direction, but there have been very few efforts to do anything like this,” she says. “It’s a little foot in the door, maybe.”
Rivka Levitan, assistant professor of Computer and Information Sciences, knows that you’re more likely to engage with an avatar, or virtual assistant, if it talks like you—in pitch, pace, and a variety of other factors. For her dissertation, Levitan designed a game that required users to ask for help from an avatar, and found that people preferred the one that began to match their speaking style.

What’s not well understood is how all the variables that contribute to entrainment, or the phenomenon by which conversational partners start to talk more like each other, combine to increase trust and rapport.

Earlier this year, Levitan received a National Science Foundation CAREER award to study entrainment in order to improve human-to-computer communication, and to learn more about human-to-human conversation while she’s at it.

“The focus of the grant is to take a bunch of different factors that we previously identified as being important to entrainment, and to start building a more integrated model so that we know how all these things work together and we can be more specific about how people behave in different circumstances,” explains Levitan, who obtained her undergraduate degree in computer science and went on to earn a Ph.D. in computer science from Columbia University.

The CAREER award supports junior faculty who show exceptional promise and exemplify the role of teacher-scholars. It comes with $500,000 in funding over five years. Levitan was one of five CUNY professors to receive the award in 2019.

As part of the research, Levitan intends to establish a corpus, or a collection of audio recordings of dialogue that will include multiple conversations. She will then tease apart who is entraining to whom.

“It will allow us to answer more definitively things about gender dynamics and power dynamics, and to look at people’s intrinsic behavior and how it is modified by their partner,” she explains.

The research has implications for analyzing corporate dialogue for quality control and for technology, such as virtual assistants.

“Entrainment is known to be associated with rapport and trust, so there’s this idea that if Alexa entrains, you might like it better, you might use it more, or you might have longer conversations,” Levitan says. “There’s a lot we still don’t understand about how or why this happens. This research aims to contribute to that understanding.”

Rivka Levitan, assistant professor of Computer and Information Sciences
Television and Radio Professor’s Work Highlighted at MoMA PS1

Professor Irene Sosa documented the works of feminist artist Nancy Spero over decades. Last spring, her videos were a key feature of a major retrospective.

By Jamilah Simmons

When Associate Professor of Television and Radio Irene Sosa was finishing her master of fine arts in film and television at New York University, she and a friend decided to start a cleaning business.

“We figured we would clean houses until we got the big job,” she says.

What Sosa didn’t realize was that cleaning houses would lead to the big job. She ended up scrubbing the New York City home of the renowned artist and activist Nancy Spero (1926–2009), whom she eventually befriended. Spero was celebrated as a feminist who took on oppression, war, violence, and more in work that ranged from sketches and collages to epic-scale paintings. Sosa asked if she could produce a documentary about her. Spero said yes. Since then, Sosa has gone on to make 13 documentaries tracking the radical artist and her processes as she matured and gained more recognition. When Spero was commissioned for new work, she would often ask Sosa to tag along. The documentaries include much biographical information and at times capture Spero working with art students, but mostly follow Spero as she created her many installations and other projects over the years.

Many of those documentaries were on display earlier this year at Paper Mirror, a critically acclaimed MoMA PS1 exhibit of Spero’s work. The documentaries—culled from an anthology of the Spero documentaries that Sosa was commissioned to put together by Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea in Galicia, Spain—played on monitors throughout the exhibit. The show included a separate room on the first floor of the museum with four monitors featuring Sosa’s work.

Sosa’s career as a documentarian has won her much acclaim, including an Individual Artist’s Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, a fellowship from the Andrea Frank Foundation, and an Individual Artist grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. She has also received five PSC-CUNY Research Awards as well as a Brooklyn College Creative Achievement Award.

“Having my documentaries shown as part of MoMA’s retrospective of Spero’s extraordinary work this spring was a thrill for me as it recognized my 35 years as a documentary filmmaker,” says Sosa. “Having such a show, which was also at the prestigious Rufino Tamayo Museum in Mexico City a few months before, was a dream come true for me and a great tribute to my work.”
Irving Alan Kaye, a Brooklyn College Chemistry Department faculty member from 1945 to 1984, passed away in May of 2019, just days shy of his 103rd birthday. Professor Kaye taught organic chemistry and his research centered on synthetic organic chemistry and the development of organic laboratory techniques. One of the proudest achievements of his long career as a professor was the lifelong bonds he established with many of his students. Professor Kaye’s family wanted to honor his legacy with a brick in his name which was laid this fall at the college's Tribute Plaza. There, brick by brick, hundreds of students, alumni, parents, relatives, and friends reach across generations to tell stories of personal accomplishment, pay tribute to those who have touched their life, and share advice, encouragement, and inspiration. Add your voice—acknowledge your achievements; recognize a professor, faculty member, or special graduate; celebrate a friend; or remember a loved one. Let your contribution inspire our community today and tomorrow. Find out more at brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/brick.
Igniting the Creative Spark

Through her fellowship program, Florence Cohen Rosen ’59 helps inspire students to design projects that will give them unique real-world experiences and set them on their career paths.

BY JAMILAH SIMMONS

In less than a decade, the Rosen Fellowship has funded the out-of-classroom adventures of 84 student projects, which have included anthropological fieldwork in the American West, beekeeping in Greece, swimming with (and studying) sharks in the Bahamas, and completing a law firm internship in Israel.

Conceived of by Florence Cohen Rosen ’59 in 2011, the program provides a stipend of up to $5,000 to Brooklyn College freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who self-design an experience or project that will promote their creative or career advancement.

“It gives them real-world experience and insights into things they probably would not have run across until later into their careers,” says Rosen, the president of Rosen Associates Management Corp., which manages and develops shopping centers and other commercial properties throughout the United States.

Rosen joined the Board of Trustees of the Brooklyn College Foundation in 2007. She has also served on the board of directors of Roundabout Theatre and the board of trustees of Fisher House Foundation, Inc. With her husband, retired Rear Admiral Robert A. Rosen, she founded the Florence and Robert A. Rosen Family Wellness Center for Law Enforcement and Military Personnel and Their Families at Long Island Jewish Hospital.

The Rosens attend semiannual meetings at the college at which the students present their projects. From eight to ten fellowships are awarded annually. When it comes to selecting fellows, Rosen is quick to emphasize that a high grade point average is not the criteria, that it is the quality of the projects, the diversity of learning experiences that are taken into account. “I’m glad that we’re giving these young people a chance,” she adds.

“Florence has an intuitive nature about forming relationships and making things happen that will morph into something bigger,” says Evelyn Guzman, director of scholarships and honors recruiting at Brooklyn College. “One of the things we did from the start was to hold a post-selection dinner for new fellows so that they could meet one another. The next year she said, ‘Let’s do it again, and let’s invite the students from the prior group.’ Over the years, it’s become a tradition of new fellows meeting former fellows.” The most rewarding takeaway, Guzman says, comes out of conversations with former fellows. “When we ask them what the fellowship has meant to them, across the board they point to their experience as pivotal, putting them on a trajectory that has landed them where they are now.”

One example is Sofia Ahsanuddin ’16, today an M.D. candidate at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. She used her 2015 Rosen Fellowship to travel to Hyderabad, India, conducting field interviews to investigate the beliefs and practices of Hyderabadi Muslim women regarding breast and cervical cancer screening. With a view toward becoming a public health specialist, Ahsanuddin has interned at the United Nations, served as a delegate to the Clinton Global Initiative University, and was executive director for a critical study at Weill Cornell Medicine on microbial life in New York City subways. In 2017, she was invited to speak on microbial resistance at the Third International German Forum on Health and Innovation.

For Rosen, the fellowships provide opportunities for students like Ahsanuddin, but they are also about investing in the future. “When I come to Brooklyn College and we speak with the students, my faith is renewed that America is going to be well served. This inspires me the most.”

Florence Cohen Rosen ’59 and her husband, retired Rear Admiral Robert A. Rosen
On the first day of her internship, Tori McGregor ’19 found herself so close to a shark that she could reach out and touch it. She’d never been on a dive before nor seen a shark so close up.

“Having a chance to see them in their natural habitat,” the Brooklyn native says, “is an experience that’s hard to put into words. For me, it was calming.”

McGregor, who majored in urban sustainability, used her Rosen stipend to help fund her summer at the Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation in the Bahamas, where she did everything from catching tiger sharks from a catamaran to bait fishing and fixing equipment.

McGregor hopes to attend graduate school for marine biology conservation. She’d like to focus on saving endangered marine apex predators for her career because “they protect the ecosystem,” she says.

“I want to make sure they receive the protections they need, and I can achieve that through research.”

Aakaash Varma ’16 traveled to India and Pakistan in 2015 to research his family’s history and that of the two countries. The former Coordinated B.A.-M.D. Program student knew parts of the story of his family’s experience during the 1947 split of the two South Asian nations. Still, with his Rosen funding, he was able to retrace those steps and document more of his family’s experiences through interviews with witnesses who still live there.

With the help of the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, a nongovernmental organization that seeks to promote the oral histories of Pakistan and foster Indo-Pak unity, he interviewed 12 people. He also found his family’s home village, where he met the oldest surviving resident, who remembered his great-grandmother.

“All I had was a few names; still, I sought to recover history,” he says.

In 2013, health and nutrition major Sitrat Bassey ’15 headed to her home of Lagos, Nigeria, to educate midwives, or, as they are called in her country, birth attendants, in rural communities.

“Traditional birth attendants are the go-to people for obstetric care there,” she explains. “Yet we had some astoundingly high numbers of newborn and maternal fatalities.”

Her idea was to find a way to lower those numbers by offering training to lesser-skilled birth attendants. In the process, Bassey, who worked at a clinic in her village, solved an ongoing problem.

“There was a rift in the village between the skilled and more unskilled attendants, and this was causing a big problem. We got the skilled attendants to help teach better ways and techniques of delivering babies.”

Rather than working against each other, all the attendants will be “working hand in hand,” says Bassey.

For more on the Rosen Fellows and their projects, visit brooklyn.cuny.edu/mag19/rozens
The Shirley Chisholm State Park, named after the Brooklyn native and one of the college’s most famous alumnae, opened in the summer of 2019 in East New York. At 130 feet above sea level at its highest point, and built on just over 400 acres of repurposed land, it is New York City’s largest state park.

“Throughout my career, I’ve looked to Shirley Chisholm as a role model and a strong woman who fought for her community,” said New York Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul at the opening of the new park in July. “It is an appropriate recognition to name this park for a congresswoman and presidential candidate who spent her time in office working to move Brooklyn and our nation forward.”

More than 35,000 trees and shrubs, and native grasses, make up a coastal meadow, woodland, and wetland ecosystem that has the added bonus of preventing erosion and boosting sustainability. The park, with hiking and biking trails, picnic areas, fishing piers, and guided bird walks, is open from 9 a.m. to dusk, 365 days a year.
Matthew Freedman ’99

Matthew Freedman had his students in mind when he won a prestigious Fulbright Distinguished Teaching Award this year, enabling the Hudson Valley–based high school English teacher to study education in Finland.

He was particularly interested in the Nordic nation as its renowned education system struggles to adapt to the recent influx of refugees. He wanted “to conceptualize something that might help immigrant students back in New York,” he says. Freedman, who obtained a bachelor’s degree in English from Brooklyn College and an M.F.A. in poetry from The New School in 2003, is focused on creating culturally diverse and inclusive curricula; the student body in his Newburgh, New York, school district is nearly 50 percent Latinx or Hispanic.

“It’s my experience that underserved schools demand a more aggressively holistic solution; to effect positive change we need to address the entire person, not simply the person as student,” he says, noting that this approach has helped break some of the institutional paralysis that he’s encountered in his teaching career.

Freedman credits his time as an undergraduate with shaping his approach and worldview. “Brooklyn College was a godsend! My first teacher was Allen Ginsberg; he helped me look at learning as an opportunity to change the way we think as humans, not simply as intellectuals or academics,” says Freedman. “And Professor Wendy Fairey showed me that we all learn differently, at our own pace and in our own space...I teach to her idea that every space in our lives is a place for learning—home, school, the community—and that the more we actively think about the hierarchy of learning that exists in spaces, the more we are able to break free from that structure and learn our way. Wendy allowed me to see that great things come from this.”

—Martin Johnson

Sharon Koskoff ’74

It’s no exaggeration to say that Sharon Koskoff ’74 lives for art. As a teenager, she was painting murals on the walls of her home and those of her siblings. Today, she is a noted expert on both murals and Art Deco—that symmetrical, streamlined style reflective of the modern machine age that flourished in the 1920s through the 1940s. She has written and curated two books, Art Deco of the Palm Beaches (Arcadia, 2007), chronicling the unique style of architecture of south Florida called Streamline Moderne, and the recent Murals of the Palm Beaches (Arcadia 2019), the latter of which won a 2019 silver medal award from the Florida Authors & Publishers Association.

Koskoff enrolled in Brooklyn College in 1970 on her 16th birthday. She majored in fine arts with honors in sculpture and photography. She cites professors Barney Cole and Ron Mehlman as key influences. “At Brooklyn College, creativity and art was inspiring and all-engaging.” She went on to earn her master’s degree in color theory at the New York School of Interior Design in 1977, and a degree in printmaking at the School of Visual Arts in 1982.

As a muralist, Koskoff has worked with communities across Palm Beach County over the years to bring the art to interiors and exteriors of schools and public buildings. She remains committed to advancing the cause of preserving Art Deco survivals. “I aim to educate the public about the significance of saving these notable structures from the wrecking ball,” she says. —Martin Johnson
2019 Bulldogs, clockwise, from top left: Sophomore Justin Vasquez helped men’s tennis squad to a 4–2 conference record; Michaela Appel was named CUNYAC Women’s Volleyball Player of the Year; Head Coach for men’s basketball Jeffery Jean-Baptiste was named conference coach of the year. Sophomore Chanel Jemmot was named a first-team CUNYAC All-Star.
The 2019 Commencement Ceremony took place on May 30 in Barclays Center. Clockwise from top: Brooklyn College President Michelle J. Anderson with keynote speaker and recipient of the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Tarana J. Burke and Distinguished Alumnus Jimmy Smits ’80; Members of the 50th Anniversary Class; Students celebrate their new status as graduates.
Clockwise from top left: Brooklyn College theater students perform at the **14th Annual Weasel Festival** at The Public Theater, a showcase of new work by recent graduates; Students participate in the annual **Involvement Fair** held on campus each year to help welcome incoming freshman and transfer students; **Marge Magner ’69** (center) with President Michelle J. Anderson and director of the Magner Career Center, Natalia Guarin Klein at the annual internship luncheon. **Carol Zicklin ’61** (seated at center) with students and President Michelle J. Anderson at the Zicklin Summer Fellows awards luncheon in September.
At left: Dancer Gregory Manning II from Bloodline Dance Theatre performs with the Symphonic Choir and Conservatory Singers at a Freedom Concert in The Leonard & Claire Tow Center for the Performing Arts. The concert, conducted by Professor Malcolm J. Merriweather, was held during John Hope Franklin Day, an annual event in honor of the renowned historian and former Brooklyn College faculty member.

Below: Leonard Tow ’50, seated third from right with President Michelle J. Anderson, at right, faculty, and students at the Leonard ’50 and Claire ’52 Tow Student and Faculty Research Travel Fellowships Luncheon in May.
The tale about the Vanguard, the Brooklyn College student newspaper of yore, getting its charter revoked back in 1950 is legend in journalism circles. The paper’s staff had published a story about then-President Harry D. Gideonse, who vetoed a history professor’s appointment as department chair because the professor had been openly critical of him. Gideonse notoriously changed the locks on the paper’s office doors, which prompted the students to take up a collection and publish a new paper, the Draugnav, or the Vanguard spelled backwards. Gideonse suspended the paper’s student editors. Eventually, the paper was shut down permanently and replaced by The Kingsman. Still, it turned out to have been a good way for the staff to cut their teeth, as most of them went on to storied careers in the business, working at outlets like CNN, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times. One of the former editors—William L. Taylor ’52, who became an influential civil rights attorney—was bestowed with an honorary degree from Brooklyn College in 2001. In 2006, a plaque honoring the Vanguard went up in Boylan Hall. Last spring, the editors—many of whom remained close over the years—came back to campus for a reunion, where they also met with some members of the current staff of the new Vanguard, which was reconstituted this fall when The Kingsman and another student paper, The Excelsior, merged.

—Jamilah Simmons

At top: President Michelle J. Anderson with former members of the original Vanguard; (from left) Myron Kandel ’52, Rhoda Hendrick Karpatkin ’51, Giselle Cohen Stevens ’51, Connie Serouya Goldfarb ’51, President Anderson, Albert Lasher ’51, and Trudi Novina Coakley ’50. Above: The first issue of the new Vanguard. Opposite: The first and only issue of the Draugnav was published by the students after the Vanguard was shut down. Inset: Students in the Vanguard offices in 1950.
FSCP Move Stops Publication Of Vanguard

Failure of Faculty Members To Approve New Adviser Blocks Operation Of Paper

Vanguard, the official Brooklyn College undergraduate newspaper, will not appear on campus today. The suspension of the paper's activities is a result of the action of the Faculty-Student Committee on Publications (FSCP), which failed last Wednesday to approve the nomination for a new Vanguard faculty adviser, after the resignation of Dr. Julius Portnoy last Friday. In the committee meeting, the four student members approved leaving Vanguard without a faculty adviser.

However, the four faculty members on the FSCP and the new adviser for the paper have not yet been named, and the issues of the paper are in limbo. According to Dr. Herbert Gerst, chair of the Student Council, the decision of the FSCP to suspend publication was made to prevent the paper from continuing to publish until a new adviser had been appointed.

The original issue prohibiting publication had been lifted on March 31. On April 17, the FSCP Faculty Committee voted to continue publication. However, the FSCP's recommendation was not accepted by the Student Senate, which rescinded the suspension.

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