We’re Back!
The Class of ’22’s Joyous In-Person Commencement

Jeanette Bayardelle ’02 (fourth from left) was the 2022 commencement speaker.

Dave Basnet, Hunter’s second-ever Rhodes Scholar, flanked by his proud parents at graduation.

Girl from the North Country Tony nominee Jeanette Bayardelle ’02 (fourth from left) was the 2022 commencement speaker.
The Covid Test: Here’s How Hunter Aced It

W e made it! Hunter came through the pandemic with flying colors, meeting challenge after chal-

lenge for more than two years, culminating in our first full-scale in-person commence-

ment ceremony this June at Brooklyn’s vast Barclays Center. COVID is not entirely over,

but we are moving forward as we develop our Strategic Plan for the future, and we couldn’t

be prouder!

How did the College do it? From the start of the lockdown in the spring of 2020 onward, we kept
classes going, whether remote or in-person. Our highest priority — driving every decision we made —
was keeping students, faculty and staff healthy and safe. We never lowered our rigorous academic
standards. And through it all, students and faculty kept up their great tradition of winning awards and
honors, including six Fulbrights and the second Rhodes Scholarship in the College’s history, which was won by Dave Basnet, a DACA student from Nepal.

When COVID-19 first became a threat, the College acted quickly to make the transition to
online learning and teaching. We not only purchased the hardware and bandwidth that
students needed to function in new virtual classrooms, we also provided the training the
faculty needed to pivot successfully to the complex demands of online teaching.

Not every class went to remote learning, however. In some areas, such as the 47 research
spaces were all open and flourishing.

In the spring of 2020, we kept

students and professors

were allowed to return to campus to continue their work under strict safety procedures.

Science lab work perseveres.

Still other subjects where in-person participation is essential — including dance, music and
laboratories where vital science experiments were underway, students and professors
faculty needed to pivot successfully to the complex demands of online teaching.

Not every class went to remote learning, however. In some areas, such as the 47 research

laboratories where vital science experiments were underway, students and professors

were allowed to return to campus to continue their work under strict safety procedures.

Meeting the academic needs of the students was crucial, of course, but far more than
that was required — and far more was done. We recognized as soon as the lockdown be-
gan that many working Hunter students were going to lose their jobs, or at least see their
incomes sharply reduced. Thanks to the generosity of the Hunter community, $1.1 million
in scholarship aid was raised by the fall of 2020. An Emergency Assistance Fund created
by a dedicated Hunter College Foundation Board continued to raise private funds to help
students throughout the tough times.

The on-campus Food Pantry for students was not only kept open for the duration, it also
was put on wheels. We used the College’s Geographic Information System to identify neigh-
borhoods in all five boroughs with high concentrations of Hunter students. Two vans were
then dispatched to make 10 stops a week in these communities, delivering food, technology
(think loaner laptops) and less-obvious-but-still-essential supplies such as feminine hygiene
products. For the first Thanksgiving of the lockdown, the vans even delivered 60 turkeys!

By the fall of 2021, Hunter had begun, carefully but steadily, to reopen. The new se-
mester began with 30 percent of classes in person, 39 percent hybrid (a balance of online
and on-campus) and 31 percent entirely online. Again, the health and safety of students,
faculty and staff were the top priorities. And it worked. At semester’s end, Hunter
graduated — remotely but proudly — 1,900 undergraduate and graduate students, a
testament to devoted faculty and staff efforts to provide students with a world-class
education during an incredibly challenging time.

By February of this year, I was able to begin my Open Line newsletter to the Hunter
community with these words: “It is so gratifying to see our campus returning to its usual
hum of activity.” Approximately 70 percent of the spring term classes were in-person
that month, and more classes made the transition in the weeks that followed. By the end of
the semester, the Student Union — which was already operating and a big hit before
the pandemic began — along with our libraries, athletic facilities and other student
spaces were all open and flourishing.

It was incredibly exciting for all of us to see our campus filled with students again and
a good reminder that we are, at our core, an on-site institution. And words cannot fully
express how thrilling it was to hold our June 10 in-person graduation ceremony. In
person. Whoever imagined those two simple words would mean so much to so many?

The future path of COVID-19 and its potentially dangerous variants remains to be seen.
But whatever the history books say about the era, this much will be certain: The Hunter
community went all-out to ensure that the campus stayed safe and functioning. Teaching
and learning went on. Hunter found a way through a perilous time to fulfill—without
interrupting—its mission of educating students and supporting faculty. And Hunter’s
motto — Mihi Cura Futuri, The Care of the Future Is Mine — still inspires and guides the
College.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at

president@hunter.cuny.edu

You also can follow us on our Twitter
@HunterPresident and Hunter’s Facebook page.

www.hunter.cuny.edu
Hunt College commencement are always joyful. But the June ceremony was online, however. They looked like Darth Vader.” gently pointing out that with the loss. You are a remarkable class of Hunter. of hybrid studies — some of them

Toughest of Times

continued, “but you persevered, things were harder,” the President greater” because of Covid. “Every- challenge became exponentially unique, unstoppable,” and say-ing and studying through more than to the unprecedented experience, Hunter students who had won their degrees despite living, work-ing and studying through more than two years of the Covid-19 pandemic.

President Raab spoke directly to the unprecedented experience, calling the class “truly amazing, unique, unstoppable,” and say-ing, “As challenging as a Hunter education is in any other era, the challenge became exponentially greater” because of Covid. “Every- thing was harder,” the President continued, “but you persevered, facing everything from job loss to sometimes, tragically, human loss. You are a remarkable class of graduates, graduating in remark-able times.” The graduates chuckled as President Raab described some of the jolting experiences they had endured as they adapted to remote learning. “When you entered Hunter, the word ’zoom’ only meant to go really fast, and the idea that you would ever see your professors’ kitchens — or their kids, or their cats, or what brand of cereals they buy — that was something out of science fiction. The world was turned upside down and there you were, teaching your professors how to unmute themselves, and gently pointing out that with the sun streaming in from behind them, they were completely in shadow — they looked like Darth Vader.” Not all of the Class of ’22’s learn-ing experience was online, however, distance record-holder, Myanmar. As it has been for decades, Hunter graduated a number of Fullbright scholars this year — among them Luisia Taveras, who entered Hunter through the SEEK Program, joined the Thomas Hunter Honors Program and became an East Kentan Grove Fellow. Born in the Dominican Republic, Taveras overcame a long series of hardships to make it to Hunter, and is now off to Mexico as a teacher and cultural ambassador.

The commencement speaker was someone special, too; Jeannette Ba-yardelle ’92, who is currently star-ring on Broadway in Girl from the North County, the musical based on Bob Dylan songs, in a terrific performance that earned her a Tony nomination. After explaining that she was “so proud to be a Hunter graduate,” she told the students the discipline she learned while earn-ing a degree — not in Theater, but Medical Lab Science — has been a key to her success. Drawing on her roller-coaster early years in show business, she urged the students, “Don’t let people put you in a box. Don’t be afraid to try something new, and do a lifelong-learner.” She finished with a rousing rendition of a song she wrote, “I Believe,” that had the audience singing along, performing the lyrics and shaking their purple and gold pom-poms. In her parting message to the audience singing along, performing the lyrics and shaking their purple and gold pom-poms. In her parting message to the students, President Raab said: “As we celebrate you and say goodbye, I ask all of you to remember what Hunter has given you and to commit yourself in some way to our motto . . . Mihi Curae Futurae, the Care of the Future is Mine. Today, I ask you to take those words into your hearts as you leave.”

Heading for Top Grad Schools With PhDs on Their Minds

For some Hunter students, faculty members are not just mentors but role models who inspire young men and women to follow their footsteps and become professors. The Class of 2022, those survivors of two pandemic years of mixed learning experiences, produced a bumper crop of potential profs. Among them was Hannah Lynch, who got a second chance for a degree at Hunter. After leaving her first college, she began working at Shakespeare & Co., a bookstore near Hunter where she designed and sold Hunter gear. That led her to enroll in classics classes. Quickly became an honors scholar, graduated at age 28 with a 4.0 GPA and is now headed to Harvard in the fall, where she will try to earn a PhD in classics.

An Eye for Diversity in Awarding Honors

Like most American universi-ties, Hunter gives honorary degrees to notable figures. What distinguishes Hunter, however, is the diversity of its choices. Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigo B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconven-tional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland GAT, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Movie star Vin Diesel got an honorary degree.

Hannah Lynch, bound for a Harvard PhD program lab researcher, she graduated with a 3.9 GPA and is off to Cornell to earn her PhD in biology. Joselyn Garcia, an art major with a 3.86 GPA and departmental commendations other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.

Yes, there are major public figures (e.g., Bella Abzug, Bishop Desmond Tutu), distinguished authors (Walter Isaacson) and leading philanthropists (Leon Corperman) but Hunter also honors achiev-ers other universities might not consider such as Arthur Bigi B, a fashion photographer who reinvented his profession with the free and easy way he captured models on film. Or Twyla Tharp, whose innovative but unconventional choreography has upended the ballet. Or Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney and Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times art critic Holland Gaston, ’88. Two recent honorees: Arthur Hunt, the breadth of Hunter’s choices: Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who was made an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 2018, and action movie star Vin Diesel, who sported sunglasses as he accepted the same degree at the Hunter commencement this year. Justice Kagan’s ceremony was something of a homecoming, as she is a graduate of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of Hunter Elementary School and Hunter High School (where her brother Louis was a star tennis player). She is now a judge of the New York County Family Court.
While the coronavirus pandemic has exacted widespread hardship, it has also created an environment in which real heroes have risen to the moment, and many in the Hunter community — students, alumni, faculty and staff — are among those shining most brightly. While they are serving in different ways, each is demonstrating that the Hunter motto — Mihi Cura Futuri (The Care of the Future is Mine) — is more than just empty words; our amazing community is embodying it!

Here is a small sample of our many heroes:

**Hunter Heroes: Getting Us Past Covid**

**For the Yasnaya, caring is the family business**

Featuring an HIV+ family — Michael Yasnaya (’07) and Jennifer Yasnaya — this family has been caring for their HIV+ son, Yasnaya, since his diagnosis in 2012. Their mission is to empower other families and children living with HIV through education, awareness and support. They have started an online community platform, Yasnaya.org, to help families navigate the world of HIV care.

**Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez ’75**

The commissioner of the New York Department for the Aging is restructuring home-delivered food and critical resources for New York City’s most vulnerable.

**Matthew Caron ’20, Spends Weekends Saving Lives**

A part-time EMT since 2018, Silberman School of Social Work graduate manager Matthew Caron has been doing weekend double-shifts as a paramedic at Mount Sinai Medical Center.

**Diana Cruz ’21, Working on (and Reporting from) the Front Lines**

A student in Hunter’s communications program, Diana Cruz interned with CNN on 9/11. She interviewed Bush’s press secretary, Representative Joe Crowther, and a post-9/11 first responder in New York City. She also covered a protest for immigrants in Philadelphia. “This was empowering — seeing how people stood up for their rights — that’s why I want to be a journalist and be able to tell the story of what’s happening in NYC, both here and afar.”

**Tiffany Vuong Takes in Displaced Senior’s Dog**

Hunter College student Tiffany Vuong has opened her home to Patches, the 14-year-old poodle, who was abandoned by his owner because of his incontinence. Tiffany cares for Patches and shares him with other students at Hunter College, ensuring he gets the attention and exercise he needs.

**Our Second Rhodes Scholar: From Kathmandu to Oxford via Hunter**

Dave Basnet, Hunter’s second Rhodes Scholar.

Our Second Rhodes Scholar:

From Kathmandu to Oxford via Hunter

Devashish “Dave” Basnet was 6 when his family had to flee a violent uprising in Nepal. They arrived in New York with little money, the ability to speak English, or even an understanding of what a Big Mac was. After the family were some of their first meals, they learned they were made of beef — something that, for religious reasons they are not supposed to eat.

Dave’s dad found work as a taxi driver and his mom became a babysitter. Dave thrived in school, but when it came time to apply for college, he hit a wall. He discovered that because of his DACA status, he was ineligible for federal student aid.

That meant he couldn’t afford to attend any of the elite private schools that wanted him. He was thrilled to learn Hunter grants scholarships regardless of immigration status, so he enrolled as a political science major.

When a public policy class professor men tioned “immigration studies,” Dave’s world changed — this meant there was an entire academic field dedicated to his life experience. Immediately, he knew what he had to study.

This summer Dave interned at the U.S.-Mexican border. At one point he found himself sitting across the table from a 17-year-old who had just crossed with his family and was translating for his parents. It was like seeing his own reflection — he, too, had been the family translator. That’s when Dave decided to dedicate his life to this work.

He spent the next three summers interning in the field of migration in the U.S. and abroad. He started an outreach project for the children of Nepal, was elected Student Government president, and decided, against the odds, to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship. That is how Dave Basnet became the second student in Hunter history to win this prestigious award — the only New York winner this year from a public university. Now this Sherpa from Nepal is on his way to study immigration at Oxford University.

Dave Meets Obama, DACA is the Issue

Devashish “Dave” Basnet is on a roll. Having just become the second Hunter student in three years to win a Rhodes Scholarship, he was one of five Dreamers who sat down in June with Barack Obama to discuss the status of undocumented immigrants.

The occasion was the 10th anniversary of then-President Obama’s signing the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order, which provides temporary protection from deportation for people like Dave who were brought to America as children. Dave arrived at age 6 after his family fled deadly violence in their native Nepal.

Obama encouraged the Dreamers to tell their stories and be advocates in their communities, a role Dave has vigorously played in keeping with Hunter’s history of supporting its DACA students.

Stories like that of Montserrat Lopez, who came to the U.S. at the age of 5 to join parents who were already here. Her grandmother put her in the care of a “coyote” to cross the border. Fortunately, she made it safely and adjusted to American life. Now Monti plans to become an employment lawyer to bring justice to the workplace.

Itzel Jauregui’s parents brought her to the U.S. from Mexico as a toddler, but her father was deported while Itzel was in high school. Itzel began working to help support the family. A Dreamer Scholarship helped with her Hunter tuition, but she still had to work very early or very late shifts to fit in classes. She graduated with an accounting degree and a job with Deloitte, a major international financial firm.

President Obama said of Dave and his four counterparts, “Having seen the remarkable things these DACA kids have done with their lives . . . I hope it inspires us to redouble our efforts to permanently resolve their status.”

Hearing from President Obama.

Posing with the former President and Jessica Astudillo ’15.
The Hunter Theatre Department is playing a starring role in career training for its students. The innovative new effort is called the Hunter Theater Project, and it engages students in professional productions alongside some of the top acting, directing and technical professionals of the New York stage. The fresh approach offers the students what is now a keystone of Hunter’s educational philosophy: experiential learning.

The Project was introduced four years ago by Department Chair Gregory Mosher, who was previously the Black female in the title role was Macbeth (a variant spelling to reflect the changes from Shakespeare’s original) in which seven contemporary schoolgirls set out to stage a show, only to find themselves entangled with witches, ghosts, kings and cascades of onstage rainfall.

Macbeth (b. 1978), who was previously the Professor Mosher — who was previously the Professor of Theatre. For instance, a show every night. Each of these positions — production assistants and ushers — roles, Professor Mosher points out, that allows them to study a show every night. Each of these positions provides moments to ask questions, share hopes and make professional connections. One student ended up with a well-paying job in a Broadway office after just one week as a Theater Project production assistant. Of course, mounting professional productions requires substantial funding. The Hunter Theater Project has been blessed with several donors, most significantly Dame Susan Sontag, a widely admired supporter of the arts in general, British theater in particular, and now theater at Hunter.

Since its creation, the Hunter Theater Project has mounted a series of hit shows. The first in 2018 was Uncle Vanya, which New York Times drama critic Ben Brantley called an experience that “happens seldom to even the most devoted theatergoers.”

Next was Link Link Circus in which Isabella Rossellini, MB ’19 used short comic films, animation and some of her own pets to explore the latest scientific discoveries about animal intelligence and emotions. That was followed by Isabella Rossellini in “Link Link Circus.”

“Wishing to call something like ‘a willing audience,’ one that’s very much for students of English or theater. And of course, a black female in the title role was deeply resonant in our community.”

Professor Mosher — who was previously the leader of three theatrical companies including Lincoln Center Theater and Circle in the Square — continued: “Hunter students were able to attend rehearsals as well as performances and listened as the director gave notes to the cast — an incredible learning experience. They’ve been in production meetings and listened as directors, designers and tech teams tried to solve problems that inevitably arise once performances begin. In other words, they’ve had an opportunity to connect.

Equally important, students are involved in professional productions as technicians, production assistants and ushers — roles, Professor Mosher points out, that allows them to study a show every night. Each of these positions provides moments to ask questions, share hopes and make professional connections. One student ended up with a well-paying job in a Broadway office after just one week as a Theater Project production assistant. Of course, mounting professional productions requires substantial funding. The Hunter Theater Project has been blessed with several donors, most significantly Dame Susan Sontag, a widely admired supporter of the arts in general, British theater in particular, and now theater at Hunter.

Since its creation, the Hunter Theater Project has mounted a series of hit shows. The first in 2018 was Uncle Vanya, which New York Times drama critic Ben Brantley called an experience that “happens seldom to even the most devoted theatergoers.”

Next was Link Link Circus in which Isabella Rossellini, MB ’19 used short comic films, animation and some of her own pets to explore the latest scientific discoveries about animal intelligence and emotions. That was followed by Isabella Rossellini in “Link Link Circus.”

It has a long tradition of excellence in the arts, and is on an incredibly exciting trajectory in arts education and programming.”
HUNTER’S 150TH ANNIVERSARY

President Raab to three alums: Former City Parks Station. City Council member Ben Kallos games, prizes and the Hunter Birthday Selfe and bearded to resemble him. Students and members of the Hunter community were still able to

Yet despite the unprecedented difficulties, members of the Hunter community including alumni and professors, delivered a proclamation recognizing Hunter s historic event of a very different kind: The arrival of Covid-19 and the start of a nationwide lockdown. This book is a fascinating exploration of the people and achievements that have made Hunter the kind of the CUNY system and that have made its alumni a force for social change and individual action. Artful "It is without celebration of our wonderful diversity, artistic excellence, academic rigor, philanthropic and innovative good Day Good Day

A Founder’s Day Birthday Party in February featured the College’s time-traveling founder Thomas Hunter — or at least someone dressed and bearded to resemble him. Students and alumni gathered in the West Lobby to enjoy games, prizes and the Hunter Birthday Selfie Station. City Council member Ben Kallos delivered a proclamation recognizing Hunter’s indelible impact on New York.

Anniversary Alumni Awards were presented by President Raab to three alumni: Former City Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver, MUP ’93, NYC Commissioner for the Department of the Aging and CUNY Hunter’s Lorraine A. Cortes-Vazquez ’71, and the celebrity baker and “Queen of Cakes” Sylvia Weinstock ’51 (now deceased), who brought a pastry masterpiece she created in honor of Hunter’s 150th anniversary. The celebration continued when the Hunter women’s basketball team faced off against Lehman College, the significance being that Lehman is located on Hunter’s former Bronx campus. And at the Lang Theater, the “Hunter 150” competition wrapped up the day with memorable student performances.

In the virtual world, a new online platform, Hunter Connect, was launched to allow students to network with more than 100,000 alumni who have signed up to act as counselors, advisors and mentors. (To learn how to get involved, see p. 21).

Elements of Plane Geometry.

A 150th Gift Drive Beats the Pandemic

In honor of Hunter’s 150th anniversary, Leon and Toby Cooperman ’64, arguably the College’s best-known alumni couple — and definitely among its most generous donors — offered a $1.5 million challenge grant. The drive to raise the matching funds was planned as part of the events celebrating the anniversary. The pandemic made in-person gatherings impossible, but, as usual, Hunter alumni rose to the challenge.

Friends and supporters of the College also opened their hearts and checkbooks. When it was all over, the match had been made and Hunter realized the full $3 million donation.

Hunnets and major gifts — including a $3 million gift from the Coopermans, and not for the first time. They were also the chief supporters of the modernization of the Library that now bears their names. Their gifts have created hundreds of scholarships, and Cooperman Fellowships help support students who, like Leon, plan on business careers.

In the beginning: 19th-century students gather on original campus.
Even in Covid times we still celebrate!

HAPPENINGS at HUNTER

Celebrating at the Holiday party (from left): Matthew Lee, Global CTO of BFS Cognizant; Angie Tang, Asia Value Advisors; Hunter professor Vivian Louie, director of the Asian American Studies Center; sociology professor Margaret Chin, and Basil Smikle, director of the Roosevelt House Public Policy Program.

Feminist icon and Hunter honorary degree recipient Gloria Steinem (left) and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (right) salute Human Rights Program Director Jessica Neuwirth as she earns (and wears) France’s Legion d’Honneur.

Visiting CENTRO, the source of research material for the recent film West Side Story, are (from left) screenwriter Tony Kushner; CENTRO acting director Dr. Yarimar Bonilla; Oscar winner Rita Moreno; and CUNY chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez.

(From left) Kevin Law, MS’84, chair of the Empire State Development Board, President Raab, Eric Gertler, executive chairman and CEO of U.S. News & World Report and Tonio Burgos, CEO of Tonio Burgos and Associates, at the Summer Cocktail Party.

Feminist icon and Hunter honorary degree recipient Gloria Steinem (left) and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (right) salute Human Rights Program Director Jessica Neuwirth as she earns (and wears) France’s Legion d’Honneur.

Celebrating at the Holiday party (from left): Matthew Lee, Global CTO of BFS Cognizant; Angie Tang, Asia Value Advisors; Hunter professor Vivian Louie, director of the Asian American Studies Center; sociology professor Margaret Chin, and Basil Smikle, director of the Roosevelt House Public Policy Program.

Alumna and Trustee Patty Baker ’82 (center) and husband, Jay (right), join Baker Fellow Yasmine Sawadogo ’22 to break through the “brick wall” leading to Baker Sky Bridge that will connect the Baker Theatre building with the main campus.

President Raab welcomes Governor Kathy Hochul at Silberman School of Social Work during recent East 116th Street Festival.

NYC Council Member Eric Dinowitz, MSED ’95 (left) and NY State Senator Andrew Gounardes ’06 celebrate their alumni awards with a selfie.

Hunter’s first Eleanor Roosevelt Award goes to Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Carol Goldberg ’56 (right), Arthur Goldberg (center) and art critic Jerry Saltz at the film screening of The Art of Making It at The Kaye Playhouse.

The Art of Making It

President Raab welcomes Governor Kathy Hochul at Silberman School of Social Work during recent East 116th Street Festival.

NYC Council Member Eric Dinowitz, MSED ’95 (left) and NY State Senator Andrew Gounardes ’06 celebrate their alumni awards with a selfie.
A Hunter Team Leads In the Fight for Equity In Cancer Care

It’s shocking but true: Black men with prostate cancer are 2.3 times more likely than white men to die from the disease. That fact alone would be alarming, yet it’s just one example from a long list of cancer health disparities that affect minorities. To begin tackling this problem, the Hunter-Temple partnership is the first of a long list of cancer health disparities research. “We need to principal investigator at Hunter as well as associate professor of biology and director of the Hunter Cancer Health Disparities Research. “We are grateful that NSC/NHSG has recognized Hunter and Temple’s dedication to improving health outcomes, and we are cooperating to leverage our strong community relationships.”

More than 70 investigators from various academic fields and both institutions are participating in the multidisciplinary partnership, some of whom are first-generation college students or students who come from immigrant families.

“You need researchers who have lived in these under-served communities, who understand the population and who may not have had a high socioeconomic background,” said Dr. Grace Ma, principal investigator at Temple’s Fox Chase Cancer Center, Michelle Naidoo, who has just become a postdoctoral fellow at Weill Cornell Medicine and received her doctoral training in molecular, cellular and developmental biology in Dr. Ogumwobi’s laboratory, is an expert on prostate cancer risks among African American men. “There is increasing evidence that racial disparities in cancer can be caused by biological events among minority populations,” she said. A significant portion of the NSC/NHSG grant is designated for community outreach, including cancer screenings and symposia, with the goal of improving prevention, early detection and intervention as well as increasing access to treatment.

Warm Reception for a New Look at Anxiety

The timing couldn’t be better. At a moment when a continuing pandemic, mass shootings and political turmoil are making millions of people anxious, Hunter Professor Tracy Dennis-Tiwary’s new book sets us straight about the real nature of anxiety. The title indicates the riveting case for Future Tense: Why Anxiety Is Good For You (Even If It Feels Bad).

Every time we sense a threat, we write, a warning signal goes off, triggering fear and stress. Anxiety is related to those two feelings, but it’s also something different. It can actually be turned to our advantage because anxiety is anchored in our ability to project ourselves into the future and take actions to make it better.

This ability, which she calls “the future tense” (pun intended), helps us plan and envision possibilities, hopes and dreams. True, thinking about what may be about to come can cause worry, but Professor Dennis-Tiwary—who is a Hunter professor of psychology and neuroscience and director of the College’s Emotion Regulation Lab—advises her readers to interpret these feelings as a sign that our future dreams and present realities may be out of sync. By acknowledging our anxiety and seeing it as a tool, we can use it to energize ourselves—to motivate change, growth and success. Anxiety, Dennis-Tiwary says, can become a superpower that improves our lives.

Future Tense has received a strong, positive reception. The Wall Street Journal published a long essay by Dennis-Tiwary laying out her analysis and citing real-world applications. She has been widely interviewed in the media, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, CBS, ABC, CNN and NPR. And she has spoken in front of sold-out audiences.

A Top Art World Honor for Gifted Professor

Peter Carey Honored for His Contributions to American Society

Peter Carey has added a new title to his long list of honors. The distinguished lecturer and executive director of Hunter’s Creative Writing MFA Program was named a “2021 Great Immigrant” by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Every July Fourth, the Carnegie Corporation recognizes a group of immigrants who have made major contributions to American society. He is the second Hunter faculty member to be so honored, following Distinguished Professor Nari Ward’89, who received the honor in 2019.

One of the world’s leading novelists, Carey is among only five authors who have won the Booker Prize twice, (first for Oscar and Lucinda, then for True History of the Kelly Gang). He has received numerous honors, including election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

His home country of Australia issued a postage stamp in his honor, and he was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artist Fellowship, three artist fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts and a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. He is a dual Australian-American citizen and longtime resident of New York and says he straddles both cultures: “No matter how familiar America—or at least New York—becomes to me, there is a huge part of that appearing alien and mad. Both these things increase side by side, a huge hedonism and a kind of terror.”

Teaching at Hunter has exerted a strong influence on him: “I think, when you begin to read,” he recently said in an interview. “There were so many first- and second-generation immigration stories in those novels and I could engage with these issues in ways that probably surprised my students. As an Australian, I have tended to be obsessed by issues of colonialism, imperialism, the center and the periphery, and these were

Dr. Olorunseun Ogumwobi (left) and his colleague Dr. Michelle Naidoo in the lab

Peter Carey, often the concerns of my students.” He initially wanted to be a scientist, then worked at an ad agency, but everything changed when he started reading books. “Literature arrived in this weird and very exciting way all at once, and it was like every book that I read at that time changed my life, as it does, I think, when you begin to read.”

Professor Lisa Corinne Davis, MFA ’83

Peter Olorunseun Ogumwobi

Hunter College's Hunter-Temple partnership is the first of a long list of cancer health disparities research. “We need to acknowledge our anxiety and see it as a tool, we can use it to energize ourselves—to motivate change, growth and success. Anxiety, Dennis-Tiwary says, can become a superpower that improves our lives.”

Professor Dennis-Tiwary sets us straight about the real nature of anxiety. The title indicates the riveting case for Future Tense: Why Anxiety Is Good For You (Even If It Feels Bad).

Every time we sense a threat, we write, a warning signal goes off, triggering fear and stress. Anxiety is related to those two feelings, but it’s also something different. It can actually be turned to our advantage because anxiety is anchored in our ability to project ourselves into the future and take actions to make it better.

Future Tense has received a strong, positive reception. The Wall Street Journal published a long essay by Dennis-Tiwary laying out her analysis and citing real-world applications. She has been widely interviewed in the media, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, CBS, ABC, CNN and NPR. And she has spoken in front of sold-out audiences.

A Hunter Team Leads In the Fight for Equity In Cancer Care

It’s shocking but true: Black men with prostate cancer are 2.3 times more likely than white men to die from the disease. That fact alone would be alarming, yet it’s just one example from a long list of cancer health disparities that affect minorities. To begin tackling this problem, the Hunter-Temple partnership is the first of a long list of cancer health disparities research to help reduce such disparities. The National Institutes of Health has awarded Hunter a joint five-year, $13.5 million grant to conduct research to help reduce such disparities. The National Institutes of Health has awarded Hunter a joint five-year, $13.5 million grant to conduct research to help reduce such disparities. The grant comes through the National Cancer Institute. The Hunter-Temple partnership is the first of its kind to serve the New York City-Philadelphia region, where minorities represent a large part of the population. The focus is on working with African American, Asian-Pacific and Hispanic communities in this New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania corridor. The collaboration has three components: First, conducting multidisciplinary research. Second, educating affected communities. Third, training minority junior faculty, postdoctoral researchers and undergraduates and graduate students to help diversify the research and medical fields.
The President’s Task Force On Racial Equity

In a swift and meaningful response to the tragic 2020 murder of George Floyd — and renewed focus on the Black Lives Matter movement — Hunter stepped forward with an expanded commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, initiating a college-wide program of reflection and reform that continues to this day. The Presidential Task Force on Advancing Racial Equity was created by President Raab in September of that year to develop strategies to overcome persistent barriers and ensure equitable community. The task force included over 100 faculty, staff and student leaders who were appointed to committees to examine the institution’s policies and practices, President Raab pledged to “ensure that they reflect our values of diversity, inclusion and racial equality.” The task force included more than 100 faculty, students and staff who developed recommendations to promote a more inclusive and equitable community.

I. Speaking of Justice speakers from “Race, Racism, and Reform” and “Policing: Reform, Defund, or Abolish?”

In the campus crossroads at Lexington Avenue and 68th Street has a brand-new look, it’s because it has been officially renamed “Audre Lorde Way” — in tribute to one of Hunter’s most extraordinary graduates. On May 10, President Raab, Council Member Keith Powers (who sponsored the required bill) and hundreds of students, faculty, staff, friends, admirers and neighbors gathered in the West Building lobby — and again outside for a ceremony on the northwest corner — to unveil the new street sign dedicated to the great poet-activist Audre Lorde (1934–1992), HCHS ’54, HC ’59, and Thomas Hunter Distinguished Professor and faculty member from 1982 to 1996. Widely known as “Sister Outsider,” Lorde was a towering human rights and civil rights champion, giving eloquent voice to the struggles of the dispossessed and underrepresented: people of color, women and the LGBTQ community. A librarian, poet, essayist, teacher, mother, lesbian, survivor — that’s how she was to be known — she remained uncompromising and eager to risk danger to advance unpopular causes. As the New York State Poet Laureate (1990–1992) famously declared, “I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.” As the poet’s daughter, Dr. Kasten Grove Scholars’ program — and again outside for a ceremony on the campus crossroads at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue — to unveil the new street sign dedicated to the alumna who “heroically battled racism, sexism and homophobia with her breath-taking original writing and her unrelenting advocacy.”

As the poet’s daughter, Dr. Elizabeth Lorde-Rollins, said of her mother in a message to assembled guests: “I know how extremely proud she would be, and grateful, to have 68th Street and Lexington Avenue named in her honor — how proud, indeed, our entire family is. As a distinguished alumna, she wielded the tools she learned at Hunter tirelessly, until her early death. My mother dated the beginning of her scholarship to those early days at Hunter High, and she prized highly the education she got at both Hunter High and Hunter College.”

A new street sign was unveiled on May 10, 2021, in tribute to Audre Lorde, a Hunter College alumna, poet, essayist, teacher, mother, lesbian, survivor — who was known as “Sister Outsider.”

I. Speaking of Justice speakers from “Race, Racism, and Reform” and “Policing: Reform, Defund, or Abolish?”

The resulting outpouring of ideas, made all the more remarkable because they were discussed and developed during the COVID lockdown, set Hunter on a course toward fully overcoming inequality. “For generations,” President Raab noted, “the motto of Hunter College has been ‘Mami Cara Didi’ — ‘The Care of the Future is Mine.’ Together and individually, as deeply as we lament the dislocation and discrimination, we dedicate ourselves anew to caring for the future as a Hunter community.” The work of task-force committees is ongoing, and President Raab has established two standing committees — one at main campus and one at the high school — that is already making significant contributions to enhancing the campus. Throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022, students, faculty and the public also enjoyed access to an initial round of virtual Zoom presentations entitled “Speaking of Justice: Race, Racism, and Reform,” developed and hosted by members of the programming committee.

These included a session on Hunter alumni and legal legend Pauli Murray ’23; one on the issue of public monuments featuring Brent Leggs, director of the American African Cultural Heritage Action Fund; and another on “Code Switching: Style, Experience, Survival” featuring journalist Harrietete Cole. The programming committee was co-chaired by Karen Hunter, distinguished lecturer in the Film and Media Department; and Melissa Smith, vice president for Student Affairs. And of course, this initial round of activity culminated in the widely reported effort to rename Hunter’s crossroads in honor of ground-breaking African American alumna Audre Lorde — as reported in full on the opposite page.

I. Speaking of Justice speakers from “Race, Racism, and Reform” and “Policing: Reform, Defund, or Abolish?”

Campus Crossroads Renamed ‘Audre Lorde Way’

The resulting outpouring of ideas, made all the more remarkable because they were discussed and developed during the COVID lockdown, set Hunter on a course toward fully overcoming inequality. “For generations,” President Raab noted, “the motto of Hunter College has been ‘Mami Cara Didi’ — ‘The Care of the Future is Mine.’ Together and individually, as deeply as we lament the dislocation and discrimination, we dedicate ourselves anew to caring for the future as a Hunter community.”

The work of task-force committees is ongoing, and President Raab has established two standing committees — one at main campus and one at the high school — that is already making significant contributions to enhancing the campus. Throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022, students, faculty and the public also enjoyed access to an initial round of virtual Zoom presentations entitled “Speaking of Justice: Race, Racism, and Reform,” developed and hosted by members of the programming committee.

These included a session on Hunter alumni and legal legend Pauli Murray ’23; one on the issue of public monuments featuring Brent Leggs, director of the American African Cultural Heritage Action Fund; and another on “Code Switching: Style, Experience, Survival” featuring journalist Harrietete Cole. The programming committee was co-chaired by Karen Hunter, distinguished lecturer in the Film and Media Department; and Melissa Smith, vice president for Student Affairs. And of course, this initial round of activity culminated in the widely reported effort to rename Hunter’s crossroads in honor of ground-breaking African American alumna Audre Lorde — as reported in full on the opposite page.

I. Speaking of Justice speakers from “Race, Racism, and Reform” and “Policing: Reform, Defund, or Abolish?”

Campus Crossroads Renamed ‘Audre Lorde Way’

The resulting outpouring of ideas, made all the more remarkable because they were discussed and developed during the COVID lockdown, set Hunter on a course toward fully overcoming inequality. “For generations,” President Raab noted, “the motto of Hunter College has been ‘Mami Cara Didi’ — ‘The Care of the Future is Mine.’ Together and individually, as deeply as we lament the dislocation and discrimination, we dedicate ourselves anew to caring for the future as a Hunter community.”

The work of task-force committees is ongoing, and President Raab has established two standing committees — one at main campus and one at the high school — that is already making significant contributions to enhancing the campus. Throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022, students, faculty and the public also enjoyed access to an initial round of virtual Zoom presentations entitled “Speaking of Justice: Race, Racism, and Reform,” developed and hosted by members of the programming committee.

These included a session on Hunter alumni and legal legend Pauli Murray ’23; one on the issue of public monuments featuring Brent Leggs, director of the American African Cultural Heritage Action Fund; and another on “Code Switching: Style, Experience, Survival” featuring journalist Harrietete Cole. The programming committee was co-chaired by Karen Hunter, distinguished lecturer in the Film and Media Department; and Melissa Smith, vice president for Student Affairs. And of course, this initial round of activity culminated in the widely reported effort to rename Hunter’s crossroads in honor of ground-breaking African American alumna Audre Lorde — as reported in full on the opposite page.
The New Student Union Flourishes

The Student Union was a hit before the pandemic lockdown, and it’s an even bigger success now that Hunter is back in full swing. The idea from the beginning was to give students a place of their own to relax and have fun after classes, a request that President Raab welcomed as meaning “students wanted to commit more of their time to campus life, leading to a stronger Hunter community.” And so when classes returned, the $4 million project on the second floor of Thomas Hunter Hall—built with $500,000 from the Undergraduate Student Government and $3.5 million from the Hunter College Foundation, the City Council and CUNY—was once again an immensely popular home-away-from-home for students.

But it’s much more than a place for them to hang out, watch a large-screen TV and play ping-pong, football and board games. Student clubs, the Office of Student Activities, the Undergraduate Student Government and the College Association have spaces there, and so do student publications such as the Olive-tree Review and Hunter Hero Comics. Placing club rooms within the Student Union has been especially beneficial because it gives students a chance they might otherwise miss to meet others who share their interests. And just to make sure schoolwork doesn’t get overlooked, there’s a computer lab with 18 work-stations and desktops to provide students with free computer time and printing capacity.

As Eija Ayyravanian, vice president for student services, observed, “We know that opportunities for social interaction outside the classroom improve student success. This new space not only makes sure they have fun, but increases their academic achievements.”

**Q&A with Bill Solecki**

**Q:** You recently appeared before the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis to testify on global warming. That coincided with the release of a four-year study commissioned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a report on which you served as a lead author. What did you tell the committee?

**A:** The core of my testimony, based on the study, was that the cumulative scientific evidence on climate change shows it is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet and that any further delay will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure our future. Further, the committee that climate change has already impacted human health and well-being and that it is adversely affecting economic activities across the U.S., including increasingly severe and frequent climate events. But I emphasised that we still have an opportunity to implement climate solutions if we begin acting now.

**Q:** Are you an optimist when it comes to climate change?

**A:** I am an optimist, but a cautious one. There are a lot of reasons to be pessimistic regarding how we are addressing climate change. We are on track to make potentially irreversible changes to the world’s environment but we haven’t locked that in yet, so there’s room for optimism.

**Q:** What role do heatwaves play in climate change in New York?

**A:** In your in, and your out. New York sees extreme heat as one of the most significant perils to the city. And future climate change could cause longer heatwaves than we have today. There’s also a danger of maladaptation. For example, turning up our air conditioning makes our rooms cooler, but we’re burning fossil fuels to do so.

**Q:** What can one New Yorker do to prevent climate change?

**A:** Actions can take a variety of forms. Some of them are small, like reducing your electricity use. But there are other ways, too. You can engage with the political process and become a voice for change. You can talk to your political leaders or even join a climate march.

**Q:** You got a grant to study brownstones on the Upper West Side. Why?

**A:** While we think about Manhattan as completely paved over, save for Central Park and other parks, there is a lot of privately owned vegetation space in backyards of brownstones that we don’t see. But the trend is that this vegetation is shrinking. Brownstone residents tend to expand their buildings, and a loss of ecological space follows. A map from that project was published in Newsew.

**Q:** Are you interested in climate change and injustice? What’s the issue?

**A:** One significant question concerning any decision we make about climate change is who will be the winners and the losers. Not only who is going to be most impacted, but who is most vulnerable to those impacts. If you have a storm hitting a coastline where the people are relatively wealthy, that’s going to be different from one where the residents are poor.

**Q:** What are you currently working on?

**A:** I’m interested in how homeowners and property owners in coastal zones perceive the risk of sea-level rise and whether or not they’re making decisions to change their investment patterns. Are they elevating their structures, fortifying them or deciding to relocate and eliminate the threat?

**Q:** You’re part of a Hunter alumni family. Tell us about it.

**A:** My mother, Rose, graduated from Hunter in the Class of 1945. She became an archaelogist. My son Daniel is a Hunter alumni, Class of ’74, who majored in philosophy and went on to law school. It was fun that he was on campus, although I ran into him rarely. But nevertheless, as a parent, any day showing up to work and having a chance to see your child is always good.

**Q:** You’re interested in climate change and injustice. What’s the issue?

**A:** One significant question concerning any decision we make about climate change is who will be the winners and the losers. Not only who is going to be most impacted, but who is most vulnerable to those impacts. If you have a storm hitting a coastline where the people are relatively wealthy, that’s going to be different from one where the residents are poor.

**Q:** What are you currently working on?

**A:** I’m interested in how homeowners and property owners in coastal zones perceive the risk of sea-level rise and whether or not they’re making decisions to change their investment patterns. Are they elevating their structures, fortifying them or deciding to relocate and eliminate the threat?

**Q:** You’re part of a Hunter alumni family. Tell us about it.

**A:** My mother, Rose, graduated from Hunter in the Class of 1945. She became an archaelogist. My son Daniel is a Hunter alumni, Class of ’74, who majored in philosophy and went on to law school. It was fun that he was on campus, although I ran into him rarely. But nevertheless, as a parent, any day showing up to work and having a chance to see your child is always good.
Hunter graduates continue to do their alma mater proud with awards, prizes and prestigious government appointments. Here are three outstanding examples.

New York City’s new commissioner of housing preservation and development is Adolfo Carrón Jr., MUP ’90. His appointment was announced by Mayor Eric Adams, who called Carrón “the LeBron James of affordable housing.” The point was well taken. Former Bronx Borough President (and Council Member) Carrón was previously the CEO of Metro Futures, a real estate development firm he founded in 2012 to focus on affordable housing and economic development in the New York metropolitan area.

The LeBron James of affordable housing
—— Mayor Adams on Adolfo Carrón Jr. (MUP ’90)

The Seniors Leave a Legacy

Each graduating class conducts a Senior Legacy Gift Campaign. The contributions support scholarships, academic excellence and student life. Equally important, the campaign raises the seniors’ awareness of their obligation to help future students. The Class of 2022 was up to the challenge. When Student Government President Dave Basnet gave the newly minted alumni a text number to seed contributions, an outgoing text. The graduates were clearly listening when Basnet pointed out that “the number of individual donors is a determining factor in our college ranking, so every gift increases the value of our degree.” And there’s still time and opportunity to give. https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/seniorlegacygift

In the lab

Hunter’s STEM ‘Genius’ Pirouetted from Ballet to Science

A great many Hunter alums have won MacArthur ‘genius’ grants, but none has taken as unusual a path to the award as Vanessa Ruta ’00. That path has taken her from ballerina to Hunter and pioneering researcher in neuroscience.

Vanessa spent four years after high school pursuing a career in ballet, but she closed her performance career in the dance world and the iron rule that requires strict obedience to directors and choreographers. Among the chemistry class at Hunter changed her life.

“Studying chemistry was quite a revelation to me,” she said. “The logic of the physical principles that govern chemical reactions seemed an extreme contrast to the highly subjective ballet world. She enrolled at Hunter full time and became a star student, graduating summa cum laude. Ruta found the creativity of chemistry far more enjoyable than the work of choreographers in dance, and she credits her early exposure to the arts as formative in her scientific process.

She went on to get her doctorate in biology from Rockefeller University. As a postdoctoral fellow with Richard Axel at Columbia University, she found her ultimate passion — neuroscience, the intricacies of the brain, and how it is changed by experience. She added, “Ruta’s work there — which she continued after her post doctoral appointment at Rockefeller University — explored the neural circuitry of how past experiences control current behavior, even ones that seem hard-wired, like mating.

At Rockefeller University, her lab’s discoveries have uncovered principles that are startlingly pertinent to human brains and behaviors — the ways in which we are affected by our environments and experiences. A MacArthur Fellowship, awarded annually to extraordinary thinkers and creators across many disciplines, recognized the unique brilliance of Ruta’s work and provided her with $625,000 of no-strings-attached funding over five years.

After receiving the award, Ruta said she was determined to use it to carry forward the principles she first developed at Hunter — including a commitment to diversity and gender equity. She recognizes that she is a model of what a scientist can look like for young women and people of color.

“If I am living proof that you don’t have to fit the stereotypical model to be a scientist,” she said. “I like me, they can start off as a ballet dancer.”
In Memoriam

Hester Diamond, HCHS ’46, HC ’49

Hunter College Hall of Fame member Hester Diamond, a one-time social worker whose support of the arts through scholarship, philanthropy and collecting created a legacy for generations to come, died on Jan. 23, 2020 at the age of 91.

During an interview as part of the Hunter College Oral History Project, Hester said she developed her love for art as a student at Hunter College High School, from which she graduated in 1946. During World War II, when classes let out at 1 pm, she would spend almost every afternoon at the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Non-Objective Art (now the Guggenheim).

As a tribute to Hester, who was inducted into the Hunter Hall of Fame in 2007, Joachim Pissarro, Bershad Professor of Art History and director of the Hunter College Galleries, joined with her son David Diamond to discuss her fearless, independent spirit, featuring clips filmed for the Oral History Project. Those clips, David Diamond said, were treasured by his family (which includes his brother, Michael Diamond — Mike D. of the rap group the Beastie Boys) because “it’s great fun, and it really captures her.”

Patricia E. Bath MD, ’64

Dr. Patricia E. Bath, an eye surgery pioneer and the first black female doctor to receive a medical patent, died on May 30, 2019 at age 76.

The Class of ’64 graduate invented the Laserphaco Probe, a laser device used to remove cataracts from eyes, in 1986. It was patented in 1988, and Bath subsequently earned four other patents for different methods to remove cataracts, including one using ultrasound. Thirty years after its invention, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office said the Laserphaco Probe “helped restore or improve vision to millions of patients worldwide.”

Bath also created UCLA’s keratoprosthesis corneal treatment program — making her one of the first ophthalmologists to use artificial devices to replace diseased corneas.

When she was inducted into the Hunter Hall of Fame in 2012, Dr. Bath said her time at the school provided the foundation for all she accomplished. At Hunter, she majored in chemistry with minors in math and physics, and was a student leader in the civil rights movement.

Bath created UCLA’s keratoprosthesis corneal treatment program — making her one of the first ophthalmologists to use artificial devices to replace diseased corneas.

Throughout her life, Dr. Bath was a strong advocate for accessible, quality health care in under-served communities. She co-founded the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness and reached across continents to uplift its motto, “Eyesight is a basic human right.”

Blanche Cirker ’39

Blanche Cirker, and Hunter College Hall of Fame member and the co-founder of Dover Publishing, which turned long-forgotten out-of-print works by famous authors into a multimillion dollar business, died on May 22, 2002, at the age of 103.

After earning a degree in pre-social work in 1939, Blanche worked as a family social worker at the Jewish Child Care Association and a medical social worker at the Joint Disease Hospital in New York City before she and her husband, Hayward, saw an opportunity producing high-quality books using works sitting in the public domain.

Dover Publishing, named for the Queens apartment complex the couple lived in, went on to print more than 7,000 books by authors including Albert Einstein and Henry David Thoreau, with nearly 60 Nobel Prize winners in its catalog. By the 1980s, what started as a mail-order business in the couple’s living room had grown to a $15 million-a-year publishing house that employed more than 200 workers in offices in Long Island and in Manhattan.

Blanche was an editor of several of Dover’s publications and the author of eight Dover books, beginning with Monograms and Alphabetic Devices in 1970, and ending with Victorian House Designs in 1996. A supporter of Hunter’s Creative Writing Program whose many appearances at readings helped inspire students, she was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2006.

Rosalind Jacobs, HCHS ’42, HC ’46

Rosalind Gersten Jacobs, who broke a glass ceiling at Macy’s in the 1960s when she became one of the company’s — and the retail business’s — first female senior executives, died in December of 2019 at the age of 96.

A Hunter College High School graduate who earned a BA from Hunter College in 1946, Jacobs was a vice-president and fashion director for Macy’s, where she worked for 24 years at a time when those roles were usually reserved for men.

And it was her time at Hunter that put her in the position to take on the big boys: She always considered her stint as editor of the weekly Hunter Bulletin newspaper — known as “The Bully” — as her first job — and one that taught her how to lead staff in pressure situations.

She was also a respected suspender art collector who had friendships with some of the movement’s most well-known craftspeople including Man Ra, whom she met while on a buying trip for Macy’s in 1954. Together with her husband, former vice-chairman of Federated Department Stores and chairman of Saks Fifth Avenue Melvin Jacobs, she put together a museum-worth collection of the art. Melvin died in 1993.

Roz was the consummate New Yorker, serving on boards or otherwise involved in organizations supporting the arts and arts education, including Learning Through Art at the Guggenheim, Merce Cunningham Dance, and MoMA, among others. She was a member of the board of governors of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Philips Collection in Washington D.C.

“My mother was a driven and young woman, and Hunter gave her the tools and confidence to go forth into the world and achieve her goals,” said her daughter, Peggy Jacobs Bader. “She was rare amongst women of her era but not rare amongst ‘Hunter Girls,’ as she called them.”

Paul Kagan ’58

Pay-television pioneer Paul Kagan, who beginning in 1969 parlayed his expertise in the then-budding cable television industry to launch a venerated media consulting business, died on Aug. 23, 2020 at the age of 82.

The 2004 Hunter College Hall of Fame inductee — born and raised in the Bronx — founded Paul Kagan Associates in 1969, whose newsletter on the cable industry was the first to publish public company valuations.

During the next 50 years, he produced additional newsletters and databooks on cable, radio, television, movies, internet and broadband media and sports while holding hundreds of seminars around the globe that earned him the nickname “the cable guru.”

In 2013, in honor of his family’s connection to Hunter — his sister, Bea, and brother, Sheldon, are both Hunter College graduates — Kagan and his wife, Hrorie, helped improve Hunter’s library space when their donation funded the Horie and Paul Kagan Study Center, where students gather individually to study or in groups to collaborate and socialize.

“It’s an honor to help raise awareness of Hunter’s exceptional library facilities,” he said at the time.

Elaine Geduld Rosenberg, HCHS ’39, HC ’42

Elaine Geduld Rosenberg, a mainstay at on- and off-campus events at Hunter whose relationship with the college dates back to her days in the 1930s as a student at Hunter College High School, died on March 3, 2019 at age 97.

Rosenberg majored in journalism at Hunter and joined Phi Sigma Sigma, the country’s first nonfraternal sorority, before earning her MS from Hofstra University and becoming a teacher at Yeshivah High School in New York.

But she and her family’s ties to Hunter run deep — so deep, in fact, that she even met her future son-in-law at a Hunter event.

Rosenberg was enjoying her 25-year college reunion when then-Junior Class President Lew Frankfort ’67 got an impressing speech. Frankfort, who later impressed entrepreneurial circles as the legendary CEO of Coach Handbags, ended up meeting Rosenberg’s daughter Bobbie — and the two married in 1975.

The three became a force for giving at Hunter, helping create the annual Mother’s Day Campaign and establishing the Elaine Geduld Rosenberg ’42 Mother’s Day Scholarship. Their powerful example of devotion to Rosenberg’s and Frankfort’s alma mater played a huge role in encouraging others to support Hunter.
Dr. Michael Dean ’73 has always, in his own words, “loved giving back” — which explains why this Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude biology graduate is a longtime donor, proud Hunter booster and admired member of the Foundation Board of Trustees.

Asked what inspires his loyalty to his alma mater, he said, “My four years as a pre-med student at Hunter in the early ’70s were my favorite academic experience. I have always been grateful for the dedication and enthusiasm of its faculty.” He would go on to receive his MD from SUNY Downstate Medical College in 1977, spend some time in private practice, then become medical officer for several large health care organizations, including John Hancock and Prudential. Next, he helped establish ChubbHealth, an HMO based in New York City, serving as its chief medical officer. He then formed Benchmark, an independent physician’s association, serving as its president until he retired in 2004. Since his retirement, Dr. Dean has served on the boards of various charitable organizations.

His consistent history of contributing to Hunter caught the Administration’s eye, and he was encouraged to become a trustee. After a series of conversations with the Search Committee and President Raab, he agreed and joined the Board in 2018, an experience he calls “an honor.”

Asked to discuss his work as a trustee, he said, “I served on an ad hoc search committee for the Dean of Library Services, an enlightening experience. The field has certainly evolved since my college days. The analytical approach of the Macaulay Scholarship Committee on which I serve is impressive. Most recently, I joined the Library Committee, helping to meet the research needs of today’s students.”

He added: “I have had the honor and pleasure of evaluating high-school seniors for admittance to the Dean of Library Services, an enlightening experience. The field has certainly evolved since my college days. The analytical approach of the Macaulay Scholarship Committee on which I serve is impressive. Most recently, I joined the Library Committee, helping to meet the research needs of today’s students.”

Dr. Dean’s “giving back” goes well beyond Hunter. He and his wife, Dr. Maykin Ho, whom he met in medical school, have served on several boards, including at the Covenant House NY. Still, he says, the Hunter experience is unique. “This past year, I had some medical issues,” he said. “I will never forget the chicken soup President Raab sent during my recovery.”