

# City University of New York—Hunter College

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## Introduction

**“The city is our campus, and it’s up to you to use it to the fullest.”**

For many New Yorkers seeking a top-notch college degree, Hunter College, located in Manhattan’s Upper East Side, offers the best, most affordable option around. Hunter’s 16,000-plus students choose from more than seventy undergraduate programs, but regardless of their areas of concentration, all Hunter students are encouraged to have broad exposure to the liberal arts: “Hunter is all about bringing people from all different parts of the world together in one place to learn from one another and to be exposed to almost every subject imaginable to help one find their true calling in life,” says one sophomore. Another student says, “I can honestly say I feel that my academic experience is as challenging and enriching as that of my good friends at Ivy League schools.” Of course, being located in the heart of New York City is also a boon for these students. As one political science major boasts, “It’s nearly impossible not to find stuff to do, no matter what your tastes are. The city is our campus, and it’s up to you to use it to the fullest.”

## Muse Scholar Program

Hunter definitely capitalizes on its prime New York City location via the Muse Scholar Program, a four-year honors program for artistically talented students. Dara Meyers-Kingsley, the director of the program, tells us that Muse students have “opportunities all four years to engage in creative practice” including all arts disciplines (visual and performing arts, film/media and creative writing) as well as via “access to internships and to professionals in the arts and culture fields.” A yearlong course called Exploration in the Arts initiates them into the program in which students visit museums and galleries, attend dance, musical, and theatre performances on and off Broadway, as well as at other venues like Lincoln

Center and Carnegie Hall. The course has a writing critique component as well as “time for creative practice and work-shopping” tied to the performances they are seeing. For example, a class period prior to attending a dance performance is devoted to movement and choreography and taught by graduate students in Hunter’s Arnhold Graduate Dance Education Program. Other core requirements are similarly geared toward the particular interests of Muse Scholars. When they take a required English composition course, for example, “the professor knows the Muse students come in with artistic talents and interests and has tweaked their . . . reading and writing assignments accordingly.” An annual Muse Arts Showcase (which includes an art exhibit and evening performance) allows dancers, opera singers, and creative writers alike to show the Hunter campus “what they can do.” Though most Muse students end up majoring in the arts, this is by no means a requirement. Ms. Meyers-Kingsley tells us, “They major in media and music, English literature, psychology, accounting, history, art history, biology, environmental studies, geography, sociology, theatre, and film. Two or three are pre-med.”

## Academic and Career Advising

Muse Scholars have access to an extensive advising network and numerous professional development opportunities. Ms. Meyers-Kingsley is each student’s Faculty Mentor for all four years (“I’m their life coach it feels like!”) and there is a special full-time academic advising team dedicated to Muse students. Many of the college’s cultural partners, who offer students discounted tickets to performances and internships, are also brought into the classroom to talk about career paths. Ms. Meyers-Kingsley explains, “There are so many different ways to participate and work in the arts and cultural world. [Our students] may have been to the Met to see paintings once on a school trip, but they don’t have a sense of the entire world behind the scenes that makes it run—accountants, conservators, marketers, fundraisers, educators, and curators. I make that part of my mission as well: to open their eyes to all the ways to engage with the arts and potentially work in the arts someday.” As the program originated in 2011, Ms. Meyers Kingsley told us that her first graduates (who were ahead of schedule) are now in graduate school, one at Columbia studying art history and the other at St. John’s University studying education. Her third graduate is working for the Decorative Arts group at Christie’s, the international auction house where she had completed an internship while in school.

And Muse is not alone. Other themed communities that, like Muse, offer merit scholarships for incoming freshmen, include: the Roosevelt Scholars Program (public policy and civic affairs), the Yalow Scholars Program (pre-health or scientific research), the Athena Scholars Program (philosophy and literature), and the Nursing Scholars Program.

## Chinese Flagship Program

One of only twelve in the nation, Hunter's Chinese Flagship Center, funded through the U.S. Department of Defense's National Security Educational Program, aims to create global professionals. Graduates of the program will have language and cultural skills miles ahead of those gained by the typical major or minor in Chinese. "It's actually a program requirement that students must live, study and work in China for one year after their language proficiency reaches advanced level," Professor Der-lin Chao told us. Dr. Chao is the director of the Chinese Flagship Center project at Hunter and head of the Chinese literature and language division. She says, "Very few language programs prepare their students up to a level that permits them to take college-level content-based courses with local university students, and to work capably in a Chinese-speaking environment." This highly advanced and accelerated curriculum seeks to get students to the "superior/professional level" of language proficiency by graduation, even if the student enters college with no Chinese learning background. And for employers, the appeal of these students goes beyond their professional language skills. Dr. Chao explains, "They become fluent in Chinese culture and civilization. Through language training, community service, internships in the United States, and internships in China, they find they are capable of working and communicating effectively with global customers and partners. We are truly preparing our students for global professional careers." The program invites a number of global professionals from the legal, medical, business, marketing, and education fields to speak with the students because "they not only need professional language skills but solid professional knowledge to succeed," Dr. Chao tells us. But, like any college students, not everyone has specific career goals right from the start. "For those students who need time to explore," Dr. Chao explains, "professionals from different fields [show] students different career possibilities."

## Real World Experience

Students spend a significant amount of time interacting with Chinese communities during the course of their study. "Hunter is fortunate to be able to take advantage of New York City's rich Chinese cultural resources," Dr. Chao tells us. Flagship students interact with "organizations in the local Chinese community in Chinese," including "community-based non-profit organizations, senior centers, clinics, schools, banks" and other organizations. They also complete summer internships "sponsored by organizations such as Asia Society, Museum of Natural History, or businesses that are relevant to their major and career goals." Students who have reached advanced proficiency in Mandarin spend their final "capstone" year in China, "taking courses with Chinese students in a local university and interning at a Chinese company or organization." And by their final year a lot of doors have opened for Language Flagship students: "Because of

their outstanding language skills, our students find that they are given serious jobs during their internships and make real contributions to their places of work.”

## Undergraduate Research

Students say that they love that Hunter provides them with lots of opportunities for research. According to the school, over 1,000 undergraduates engage in self-directed and faculty led research every year. Many students pursue multiple lines of research, and even find opportunities to research in wildly different fields over multiple years of their undergraduate careers.

STEM majors have fifteen federally and privately funded research initiatives on campus to choose from, which are all bundled together into Hunter’s Science Mathematics Opportunity Network, thanks to a \$1.25 million grant from the National Science Foundation. These programs range from The Quantitative Biology Project, where “students receive training and mentoring by a multidisciplinary team of research scientists and have access to competitive scholarships, national bioinformatics workshops, and internships,” to AstroCom NYC, which pairs students “with long-term mentors to work with peers on real astrophysics research.” There are also a number of programs specifically targeted to women, minority groups, and low income students, which help these populations gain access to cutting edge research and resources that will help them pursue graduate degrees.

But STEM majors don’t get all of the attention when it comes time to dole out funding. Recognizing that funded research opportunities are vital to students in all fields, Hunter has developed the Undergraduate Research Initiative “to provide funded research experiences for Hunter undergraduates outside the STEM disciplines—areas where federal funds to support such activities are scarce,” the school says. These faculty-student research collaborations pursue both academic and creative projects that can take them everywhere from the library stacks to the costume studio. And students say “the accessibility to a wide variety of NYC internships and research” is one of the school’s greatest strengths. Humanities and social sciences students join their peers in the STEM fields every year for Hunter’s Undergraduate Research Conference. In the last three years, student participation in the conference has nearly doubled, which is representative of the growing number of resources Hunter provides and the administration’s efforts to widen the range of disciplines that have access to undergraduate research opportunities.

## Presidential Student Engagement Initiatives

Like many of the CUNY institutions, Hunter College is primarily a commuter school. Fortunately, there's still plenty of camaraderie among these undergrads. Indeed, students say, "Hunter encourages student interaction through Student Government-run parties and other student-run activities." And many undergrads are quick to take advantage of the numerous "great events, visiting authors and scientists, [and] guest lectures" happening around campus." To further support student-faculty interactions outside of class, the President's Student Engagement Initiatives are handcrafted programs that address the particular needs of Hunter students and the opportunities available in New York City. As one student tells us, "Nobody lives on campus at Hunter so it isn't the same as I imagine other schools are. Most people that attend school at Hunter work part- or full-time, have apartments, pay bills, and go to school full time." Because "on-campus" activities are one of the primary ways that schools connect students with their faculty, Hunter had to get a bit more creative (read on!).

### Co-Curricular Initiative

The Co-Curricular Initiative allows Hunter students and faculty to get to know one another through excursions or field trips that the school pays for. Through these ventures students might get a chance to develop their skills in the field, like the geography students who went on an overnight trip to Black Rock Forest to introduce them to field methods in soil science, ecology and water quality sampling and to promote camaraderie among faculty and students. Or, like the German 101 class that went to the Guggenheim Museum to tour works of contemporary German artists, including 20th century painter Wassily Kandinsky, they might get a broader understanding of the cultural and artistic influences within a language they are studying. Students in a theatre production course who were working on a production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* even got to enjoy a Russian restaurant on West 54th Street where they discussed the play while learning about Russian food and culture.

### Student-Faculty Research Initiative

Another part of the Presidential Student Engagement Initiative, the Student-Faculty Research Initiative, provides opportunities for students to collaborate with their professors on important research. Students get to have one-on-one access to their professors, which includes perks like learning to use advanced scientific equipment or developing and implementing research methodology. In the past such efforts have included work designing methodology to sample and measure the heavy metal content of rainwater collected at Hunter College's weather station and address related questions of metal accumulation in soils and

plants on Hunter's green roof. Students have even joined in on important medical research in teaching hospitals, like two chem majors who worked alongside a Hunter College chemistry professor and a professor of biochemistry and chemistry at Weill Cornell Medical College to conduct x-ray crystallography of a protein that is showing promise as a possible target for drug therapy for aggressive breast cancer that doesn't respond to conventional treatment.

These initiatives allow faculty and students to interact in ways that would be impossible to engineer in the classroom. Hunter College tells us that these close interactions mean students benefit from more "mentoring, advising and a collaborative spirit that encourages students to see new possibilities for themselves and their futures." One current student enthuses: "The professors are what have made my experience here so incredible! . . . Perhaps most encouraging, they bring to the table their vast experiences in their field of expertise and have never hesitated to educate on what to expect when we are outside of the classroom, often offering a practical aspect to what in many classrooms are strictly academic discussions."

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## **Hunter Hawks out in the World**

Hunter was once the academic home to luminaries like Gertrude Elion, winner of the National Medal of Science and the Nobel Prize and the first woman named to the National Inventors Hall of Fame, and Antonia Pantoja, the social activist, civil rights leader and founder of Boricua College. Hunter's Career Development Services truly does a tremendous job for its students. Undergrads have the opportunity to attend a variety of career panels throughout the year, featuring guest speakers and assorted alumni from a number of industries. Hunter also presents students with many chances to attend different career expos. There, undergrads are able to network, learn about specific corporations and career fields and discover potential job openings. Naturally, the college also works hard make the most of its New York City location. Each semester, Hunter invites companies to campus to meet with students regarding internships, part-time jobs and entry-level positions. Undergrads can attend recruiting events in a number of areas: social services, public affairs, film and media, financial services, scientific research, and more. The College also provides career mentoring for students connecting them to the impressive range of successful Hunter alumni.