



The Athena Scholar

ISSUE II - FALL 2024

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Scholarship/Internship/Fellowship Recipients!

Isayah Charcopa ('25) – Classroom Intern at Northside Center for Child Development (2024-2025)

Katrin Birgisson ('25) - Helen Chaplin Award for History Scholarship

Zach Krska ('26)– Peter Vallone Scholarship

Ana Rendon ('26)– Social Work Intern at Edward C. Blum Elementary (PS 46) 2024-2025

Ashley Ngo ('25) - APIA/Coca Cola Foundation First AANAPISI Scholarship & Summer 2024 Government & Community Relations Intern at New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC)

Isabella Shalumov ('25) - Intern at the New York City Law Department and Cohort Member at the New York Law School Pre-Law Pipeline Program

Seonin (Sunny) Lee ('26) – Bluhm Scholar

Jemima Desir ('27) – CUNY Spring Forward 2025 Internship

Evelyn Gallegos ('27) - Thomas Hunter Honors Program

Otho Valentino Sella ('27) - Thomas Hunter Honors Program

Alif Kazi ('26) - Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship

Write to Dr. Stephen Lassonde for description at sl3122@hunter.cuny.edu, or click [here](#)

Athena Program Reinstatement

Last year, the Hunter college administration indefinitely paused the Athena Scholar Program, but the program has officially been resumed for the 2025 fall semester. The reinstatement coincides with the arrival of Hunter's new president Nancy Cantor, but it follows a year of relentless advocacy from students and faculty throughout the Hunter community.

Students were not immediately notified when the program was paused, but some noticed that Athena had been marked as 'not accepting applications' on the Honors Program website.

"I found out because of a group chat," said Alif Kazi, a third year Athena and Thomas Hunter Scholar. "We asked around and eventually figured out that they were planning on pausing the program."

When the "pause" occurred, many students were confused about what it meant. Some believed they would be cut from funding the Hunter Honors Scholar Program, while others were unsure of what the "pause" meant for the future of the Humanities. Regardless of their anxiety, the Athenas knew they had to band together to prevent the pause from becoming a termination.

Kazi and a group of other Athena Scholars created a petition to advocate for the preservation of the program, which they see as an important sign of Hunter's commitment to the humanities. The petition received 500 signatures from students across Hunter.

For Athena Scholars, this wasn't just a fight about protecting one program, it was one front in a larger effort to defend the humanities from increasing marginalization in higher education. With enrollment in the humanities declining nationwide, the pause seemed to be the extension of a troubling trend.

"The reason I am at Hunter is for the Athena program," said Ciara Collins, a first year scholar. "Closing a program for incoming Freshman students lowers the incentives for them to come to Hunter."

Students in the Athena Program emphasize the usefulness of the humanities, even for people interested in other fields.

"You're learning to talk to people, and you're learning how to communicate," said Kazi. "And if you're cutting programs that focus on communication and on analysis of the past, that takes away a lot from students now."

While Hunter students fought for the Athena program—and with it, the future of the humanities—they were not alone. Their voices were joined by faculty members and alumni, who expressed the multivalent career impacts that an education in the humanities can have on undergraduate students. Philosophers, lawyers, members of the Peace Corps, psychologists, social workers, and historians—all former Athena scholars who work inside and outside the humanities—advocated through testimony. Nothing, however, would have reinstated the program without the approval of President Cantor.

Dr. Cantor believes in the impact of the Humanities and the influence it can have on all professions, and all members of the human species. We urge you to consider the reinstatement as not just a reinstatement of an Honors program, but also an acknowledgment of what the Humanities can provide to our everyday lives. - Alif Kazi and Valentino Sella

Athena Environmental Project

Athena sophomore Marinella Ferrari-Bridgers took advantage of the Hunter Green Initiative Fund (TGIF), which provides funding for students to pursue sustainability-focused projects on campus. We sat down with her for a conversation about how she put this project together, and what it meant for her and the Hunter community.

Q: What was your TGIF project?

The project I worked on was the Hunter College Green Space Beautification Project. The overall aim of this project was to set up the first stages of a long term green space improvement plan at Hunter College. This project was picked up in collaboration with the Greenbelt Society and SEEDS Clubs at Hunter, which ensured that the members of these clubs oversaw the continued care for the greenery around the school. With the funds from TGIF and the College Association, last May we hosted a tree and planter care event where Hunter College students volunteered to spend a day taking care of the street trees around Hunter college and improving the planters within school grounds by adding new flowers and signage. For this event I became a Super Steward under the NYC Parks Department to help supervise the care of Street Trees, which is a pretty simple process I hope to inspire Hunter students and student organizations to go through. I wanted to start to foster a Hunter community that is aware of the green in our urban environment and is dedicated to taking care of it in the long future. After the success of this event, our goal is to continue creating projects that can help revitalize our campus.



Marinella Ferrari-Bridgers (top left) working with other students to beautify the area around Hunter

Athena Environmental Project

Q: Why did you join TGIF?

I decided to work on a proposal with TGIF because as a freshman I couldn't see many ways to become Hunter Student leadership that aligned with my interests in the environment. Once I heard about TGIF, I immediately applied because it provides students the opportunity to prove themselves as leaders while actively moving forward on a fully funded project to improve the campus.

Q: What do you see as the main impact of your project and TGIF in general?

For my project specifically, I hope to bring awareness to the trees and plants around Hunter College by cleaning them up and helping them live better. I also hope our beautification efforts can provide the peace of mind to Hunter Students and other onlookers that a quick walk around Central Park might. Hopefully the signage around the trees will encourage students to look into creating TGIF projects of their own or joining the many other Green organizations at Hunter College such as the Sustainability Council and the Institute for Sustainable Cities. If people become more aware of TGIF, I think we will see many more student voices involved in the campus at Hunter. In addition, a greater community of people interested in sustainability from all disciplines would be found and would help to contribute to bigger and better projects year after year.



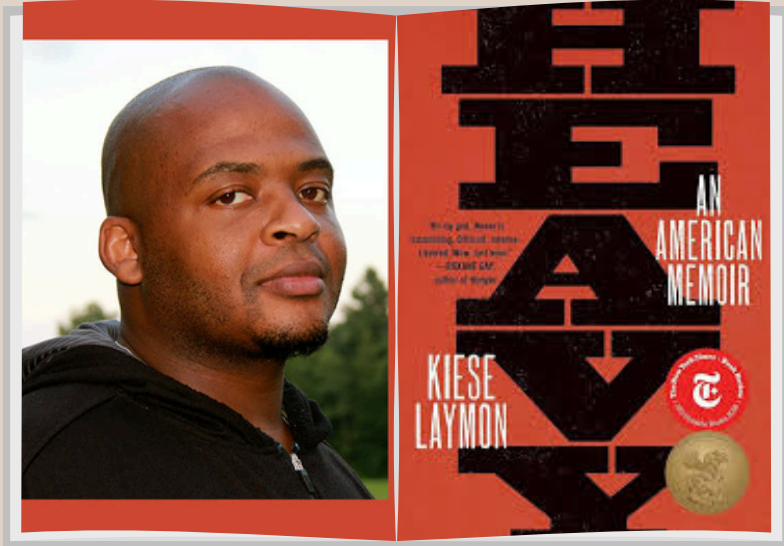
Scholar Service Panel

This fall, a group of Hunter scholars notable for their achievements in community service spoke at a panel organized by Professor Daniel Hurewitz, a Hunter college history professor and Senior Advisor to the President on Student Success. The speakers, which included representatives from all five scholar cohorts, discussed the ways that their service projects impacted their college experiences, the broader Hunter community, and the world.



Athena Scholar Otho Valentino Sella spoke about his work with Hunter Has Heart, Muse Scholars Sam Alexander and Kai Barbee-Franco talked about being Scholar Peer Leaders, and Yalow Scholar Anaya Huggins discussed being an Admissions Leader. Haeun Christine Kim, also from Yalow, represented the Hunter chapter of the Red Cross. The undergraduate student government president and Roosevelt Scholar Adriana Pavlidis-Sanchez spoke about the benefits of engaging in student government. Dedalus Scholar Sudiptto Biswas presented his website CivicConnect, which makes it easier for people to contact their congressional representatives, and Nursing Scholar Marilyn Mahoney shared her experiences studying abroad in South Africa.

Athenas Review *Heavy* by Kiese Laymon



Athenas Billye Albro, Alif Kazi, and Isabella Shalumov read Kiese Laymon's memoir *Heavy* for their Sociology and Memoir class. Here are their reviews of the book.

"I wanted to tell you that I am afraid to bring a child into the world because I do not know how to protect my child from life, from you, from our nation, and from me." – Kiese Laymon, author of *Heavy* (2018)

Billye:



Kiese Laymon's *Heavy* is a memoir that is a direct address to his mother as he tells the story of his life and all that he has never been able to say to her. The title refers not just to his struggles with his weight throughout his life, but also to the immensity of all of the trauma and abuse he has faced. But the title also refers to the weight of secrets and lies he webbed through his life and kept hidden from his mom. Laymon uses his beautiful memoir as an outlet to discuss his life with his mother because he was afraid of speaking any of it to her face.

Alif:



Kiese Laymon's memoir, *Heavy*, is written to his mother and intertwines motifs of gender, geography, body weight, and freedom throughout his life as a black boy in the U.S.. Beginning with his childhood, the story spans through much of Laymon's adolescence and adulthood. The audience he tries to reach through the racism, sexual abuse, and hate is an audience of one—his mother. To create his successful memoir, Laymon introduces the geopolitics of the U.S. and leaves the reader thinking about "black abundance."

Isabella:



Heavy is a beautiful retelling of Laymon's life thus far, as he touches upon the racism he encountered, his body dysmorphia and disordered eating, and the trauma and abuse he faced, whether it be at the hands of White America or his mother. *Heavy* is indicative of his body weight but also the emotional weight he carried, as his mother saddled him with so much emotional heaviness due to her misplaced concern and fear. She explains how as a big black man in the South, he cannot just thrive and survive in a society that deems him criminal due to his skin, weight, and height, especially when all combined together. Laymon's prose and writing style is powerful, unflinching, and almost too honest. There is a dramatic juxtaposition in how he states that he wanted to write a lie, but by writing this memoir and exposing himself, he is telling the irrevocable truth.

Greece Study Abroad



Hunter offers a multitude of study abroad programs for students to participate in and some Athena Scholars participated in some this summer! Learn more about their experiences. Hear from a fellow Athena Scholar, Ginger Beyda about her experience in Greece this summer!

Q: Why did you choose Greece for a study abroad program this summer?

When I read about the program on the Hunter website, I was immediately interested and intrigued. The opportunity to take a poetry class was compelling, as it was unlike any of the other classes I've taken. Also, the idea of studying on an island seemed like an incredible experience.

Q: What exactly did the Greece study abroad encompass?

It was a faculty-led trip where we met in Athens, stayed there for two days, then took an overnight ferry to the island of Lesbos and back before leaving from Athens. The program included many trips, such as the Acropolis, guided tours, museums, and day trips to different parts of the island. Aside from the trips, I took the poetry class where we wrote different poems based on Sappho's literature and compiled a chapbook at the end.

Q: Besides the academic aspect, what else did you do in Greece?

Most nights, my friends and I would meet in the front of the dorms and walk to the center of town. We would explore the different local shops and then find a dinner spot. We spent a lot of time at the beach, which was always a great way to relax and unwind. At night, we would often gather outside and hang out together.

Study Abroad

Continued

Q: What does a typical day during the study abroad program look like?

We had class three times a week. On class days, I would start my morning with breakfast before taking a 15-minute walk to class. Class ran from 12 to 3 pm or 1 to 4 pm. After class, I'd rest for a bit, then head out with friends to the center of town and grab something to eat. On days without class, I often went to the beach, which was just a quick drive away.

Q: What was your biggest takeaway from this experience?

My biggest takeaway from this experience was the importance of stepping outside my comfort zone. I discovered how fulfilling it can be to connect with new people and immerse myself in a different culture. This study abroad has deepened my appreciation for both poetry and the impact of travel on personal growth.

Q: Would you recommend students go to Greece? Do you have any tips and tricks for navigating the study abroad process?

Yes, I definitely would recommend students go to Greece! Don't be nervous about making friends because everyone is very friendly and also looking to connect. I encourage you to say yes to things you wouldn't normally do and to take advantage of all the opportunities available. Also, the optional tours are worth it:)



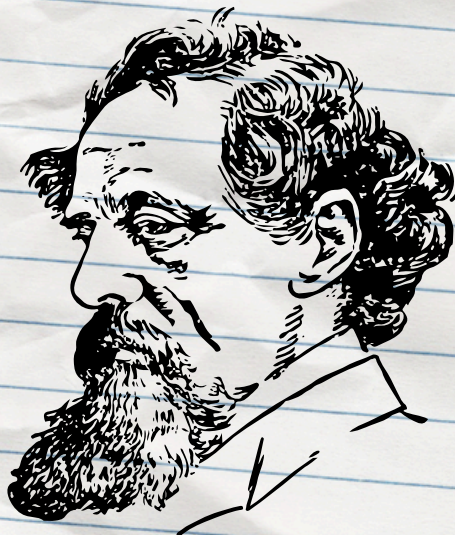
Dear Athena Scholars...

Dear Athena Scholars,
I'm a Hunter student, and lately I've been really struggling with procrastination. Every time I try to sit down and get my work done I get distracted and end up stressing myself out and turning in subpar work at the last minute! What should I do?

Sincerely,
Procrastinating on Park Avenue

P.S. Please be more specific than Charles Dickens

My advice is, never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time.



Dear Procrastinating,

My biggest challenge with procrastination is the difficulty in focusing on a task when it feels daunting or overwhelming. It often seems easier to put it off and do something that gives me an instant boost of serotonin instead. The way I attack these struggles is by breaking my tasks down into more manageable steps and making sure to reward myself for getting my work done efficiently and on time. I also make sure to keep my phone and other distractions out of reach to maintain focus.

Sincerely,

The Start-Small Scholar

Dear Procrastinating,

I always felt that if a new assignment comes along it overlaps the current one. Therefore, a planner is always nifty in keeping track of things. When it comes to it, I break down the assignment into small tasks. Therefore, each day leading up to the deadline, I easily complete the assignment as I avoid doing everything last minute.

Sincerely,

The Planning Scholar

Dear Procrastinating,

To combat procrastination, I try to adopt a mindset of doing it now to avoid it later. If I do it now, I won't have to worry about it later. By doing it now, I eliminate potential stress later down the line. If a task seems daunting and overwhelming, I try to break it up into parts and not do it all at once. For example, one day I'll work on finding the articles, and another day I'll start writing the essay. Once you finish your task, you should be proud of yourself for accomplishing something – so feel free to treat yourself!

Sincerely,

The Future Self Care Scholar

Dear Procrastinating,

I find that the hardest part is getting started, so I like to trick myself into starting big assignments in a non-committal way. I tell myself that I'm just brainstorming, or laying the groundwork to do it later, and soon enough I usually find myself motivated to keep going once I've been halfway working for a while. This strategy only works if I'm actually interested in the assignment, which isn't always the case. When it isn't interesting I have a suite of strategies and tools I use to help me stay focused. I like putting on white noise or bird sounds (my favorite is the sounds of the Irish coast), setting small incremental goals, and turning off my phone and/or putting it in another room.

Sincerely,

The Scholar by the Sea

Dear Procrastinating,

When it comes to procrastination, I find that my biggest distraction is my phone. To eliminate my phone as a device capable of getting in the way of what needs to get done, I have found that deleting all social media and putting my phone on silent works best. When it comes to what I do when I sit at my desk, I begin by making a To-Do list on paper. Visualizing my work helps me concentrate on what I need to do for the day. Lately, I've been getting overwhelmed with a lot of assignments, causing me to procrastinate heavily. To counter that, I've found that exercising more frequently (for instance, I cycle), breaking projects up into smaller increments and throughout more days, and trying different ways to take notes, research, or study for exams help me be more productive.

Sincerely,

The Don't-Call-Me Scholar

Dear Procrastinating,

Breaking a task down into more manageable parts tends to work best for me, even if it means making a big deal out of the smallest progression. I like to visualize the entire process with a rough outline of what needs to be done (digital notes with bullet points or actual pen/paper diagrams with arrows between each step). Whether it's reading two pages out of a fifty-page chapter or writing a single paragraph out of a ten page paper, any progress you make is just that—progress. Rather than focusing on the goal post that's so far out, create reasonable checkpoints that eventually lead up to it. If your work is time-consuming or keeps you glued to your desk, it can be easy to lose focus and inevitably put it off. I make a habit of staying physically active in such a situation. If heavy exercise isn't your thing, simple stretches help keep me feeling refreshed and alert. A change of scenery can also help...even if it means standing up and staring out your window.

Sincerely,

The Stretching Scholar

Athena Poetry + Art

“Walking on a Tight Rope”

by Sophia Green

Built around the trees way above the ground
my nails denting the inside of my palm, I stare at the ropes course.
The washed out brown harness suffocates
my body while feeling completely
loose.

My hands shake as I attempt to hold onto the unwoven rope and look
up at the wire. This piece of string strain-
-ing to keep my body up. To me it is weak, but the wire thinks
it is doing enough.

Winds start picking up my hair starts sticking to
the gloss on my lips I try to peel it off but
the rattling of the broken bridge ahead makes me
halt.

I forcefully speed through the rest and close my eyes.

The wire will hold me I just can't watch.

Athena Poetry + Art

“Weight of Wires”

by Zachary Kraska

The hissing
Of the drill, hooked
To the table
Wires running

Crossing, twisting, tangled
An awful, bright
Flash refuses to turn
Off

Picking, scraping, cutting
Capriciously
My head is too far back I see your hands.
What is their intent?

Athena Poetry + Art



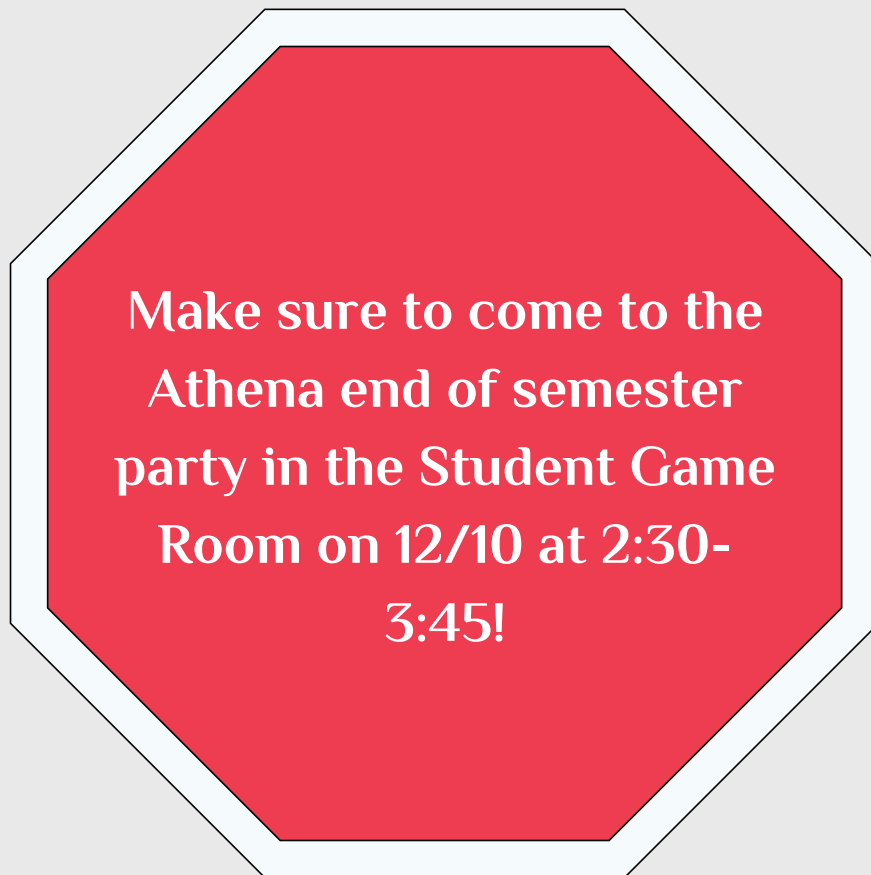
By Isabella Shalumov

Athena Poetry + Art



By Huda Mahmood

Come to the Athena End of Semester Party!



There will be art, games, and a raffle with FANTASTIC prizes! There will also be a jewelry and book swap. Donations for the swaps will be accepted December 3 - 4 from 10 AM - 3:30 PM in 1207 Hunter East

Authors

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Isabella Shalumov

If you want to work on the Athena Scholar
Newsletter, contact Dr. Barile at
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