

SPRING / SUMMER 2025

BARUCH

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

THE BUSINESS OF INFLUENCE

BARUCH ALUMNI MAKE THEIR
MARK ON SOCIAL MEDIA





MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As we close another remarkable academic year at Baruch College, I want to take a moment to celebrate the achievements of our 5,639 graduates honored at Commencement on May 28. With a symbolic move of the tassel, they joined the ranks of our powerful alumni network—bringing fresh energy, talent, and promise to a community that grows stronger with every new member.

In this issue, you'll meet some extraordinary alumni who have embraced technology to build influence and community in the digital age. Among them is Hailey Ra, a fourth-degree black belt in Taekwondo who shares her passion for martial arts, family, and Korean heritage with nearly a million followers on TikTok. Stories like Hailey's remind us that at Baruch, we're not just preparing students for the future—we're building it together, with them and with you, our alumni.

This collaborative spirit is at the heart of our next chapter. We've embarked on the Campus Master Plan, an ambitious initiative to reimagine Baruch's physical environment for the decades ahead. Now in the information-gathering stage, the plan aspires to create a campus that's more vibrant, welcoming, and inspiring—one that sparks creativity, supports learning, and deepens our sense of community. I invite you to explore the project and share your ideas on our dedicated website, which will provide regular updates as the plan takes shape.

We're also extending our footprint beyond our historic campus, with new facilities at 63 Madison Avenue that will expand instructional and office space. Alongside these plans, I've been thinking deeply about how Baruch must position itself at the leading edge of the technological transformations reshaping our world.

One idea I'm especially excited about is a Baruch AI Hub—a vision for a center that will help equip mid-career professionals, including our 175,000 alumni, with the skills, fluency, and adaptability needed to thrive in an AI-powered economy. By partnering with employers, we can imagine customized pathways for learning and upskilling, designed to meet the evolving demands of the workplace. While still in its conceptual stages, the AI Hub reflects a broader ambition: for Baruch to be a place where innovation, education, and lifelong learning converge—a platform not just for preparing students, but for propelling professionals forward at every stage of their careers.

In many ways, this vision mirrors Baruch's own story: an institution grounded in access and opportunity, yet unafraid to look ahead and redefine what's possible. That's why it feels especially meaningful that Baruch will soon appear on one of New York City's most iconic platforms: the subway map. This summer, the 23rd Street stop on the 6 train will be officially renamed **"23rd Street–Baruch College."**

With this new name, Baruch takes its rightful place on the map—not just of the city, but in the minds of millions who pass through every day. It's a powerful symbol of our role in the life of New York: a college in the heart of the city, opening doors to students from every walk of life, providing an education that transforms futures and strengthens communities.

As we look toward the summer ahead, I hope you will stay connected—whether by attending an event, hosting a gathering, mentoring a student, or simply sharing your Baruch story. Your engagement, generosity, and pride keep Baruch's mission alive, and ensure its impact continues to grow.

Thank you for everything you do to support Baruch.

Sincerely,

S. DAVID WU
President, Baruch College



The 23rd Street stop on the 6 train will be officially renamed **"23rd Street–Baruch College."** President Wu celebrated the news with State Senator Kristen Gonzalez (left) and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein (right).



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From developing visual and performance arts centers to founding a comic book publishing company to empowering diverse talent in real estate, Taneshia Nash Laird ('95) has done it all.



ON THE COVER: Self-described foodie Gavriella Grossman ('22) has found success on social media, amassing hundreds of thousands of followers across Instagram and TikTok thanks to her food content. She's even met celebrities, including Food Network chef Christian Petroni, whom she met at a pizza-based event at a Connecticut location of Italian restaurant chain Bertucci's.

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STUDENT CREATES PRIZE-WINNING APP

For Baruch senior Carlos Vazquez, entrepreneurship and serving others go hand in hand.

Like many first-generation college students, Vazquez entered the world of higher education without much guidance from family or friends. As a result, Vazquez decided to create an app to help fellow students in the same situation.

His idea pivoted a few times, evolving from a virtual guidance counselor to an SAT test-prep app. Eventually, Vazquez landed on a winning idea: Acadu, which gamifies the learning process to make studying easier and more engaging for Baruch students. Users simply search for a concept or upload class notes to generate quizzes that help them study and learn. Additional features allow students to quiz themselves at various difficulty levels and study with other users through multiplayer games and leaderboards.

The app even won Vazquez some notable recognition—and money. At the May 2024 CUNY Clash, Vazquez took first place for Acadu and earned a \$10,000 cash prize from Amazon. Launched in 2022, CUNY Clash is an annual entrepreneurial competition open to all CUNY students to promote problem-solving ideation and innovation.

In the months after winning CUNY Clash, Acadu more than doubled its user base. As for what's next, Vazquez plans to use the prize money to grow and scale Acadu potentially for use across all of CUNY, beginning with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

"We're taking a bottom-up approach, trying to get as many users as possible to tinker with the product before we think about monetizing," Vazquez says. "After that, who knows? If we can replicate it across all of CUNY, maybe that'll be next."

—MOLLY TURNER



NEW BOOK BY A FAMILIAR FACE

Last semester, Baruch College President Emeritus and University Professor Mitchel B. Wallerstein (left) released the book *Public Higher Education That Works: One College's Path to Academic Success and Financial Stability*. In the book, Wallerstein reflects on his 10 years as president of Baruch, examining how and why the College became a "positive outlier" in the world of higher education, succeeding academically and financially when many other public universities have struggled with financial constraints, severe space limitations, and other common difficulties.

At a book launch reception shortly after its release, Wallerstein chatted about his research with University Professor Scott Evenbeck (right) of the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs.

—GREGORY M. LEPORATI



PROFESSOR'S TALE-SPINNING STORIES



Assistant Professor Sally Wen Mao follows threads to put pen to paper.

Though she joined Baruch as an English professor in Fall 2024, the acclaimed poet and author already exemplifies faculty excellence in the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences. Not only has her poetry been consistently ranked the best of the best, but her debut fantasy fiction collection, *Ninetails*, landed on *The Washington Post*'s "11 Best Science Fiction and Fantasy Books of 2024" list.

Ninetails, rooted in East Asian mythology, weaves together women's issues, identity, and transformation through stories about the ancient fox spirit.

"I've always been attracted to fiction that spoke to the imaginative human brain, like folklore," says Professor Wen Mao. "I wanted to write a story about a nine-tailed fox living in contemporary New York City. This mythological creature's always been in the periphery of my consciousness because it's an ancient part of Chinese culture."

Her curiosity about East Asian mythology began in childhood from watching folklore-inspired palace dramas with her family. The nine-tailed fox spirit ultimately inspired her debut collection.

"I realized that *Ninetails* couldn't just be one story, so I wrote nine," she explains. "Because it's a very obvious pun, right? Nine tails—nine tales. And I thought: I better

write this book before someone else takes the pun."

Although it took years of research, writing, and editing to get *Ninetails* from its first sentence to the bookstore shelves, Wen

Mao was surprised by the accolades.

"I was feeling self-conscious about the book one night," she admits. "The next morning, I found out about the list. I was shocked. You have to stick with the reader that you envision experiencing your work."

Through the folklore lens, she appeals to a specific audience.

"My audience is women who are tired," she says. "*Ninetails* was inspired by the collective anger of the horrendous things that women deal with, particularly Asian women. Throughout Chinese literature and lore, the fox spirit has always been a shapeshifter, border crosser, and creature associated with marginalized people in society."

Her advice to writers in the Baruch College community?

"Foster your sense of curiosity, lean into your obsessions, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Follow the threads you find."

—ERIN MCLAUGHLIN-DAVIS

CASHING IN ON SUCCESS

In February, student members and alumni of the Baruch Investment Management Group (IMG) celebrated the group's success at a special on-campus reception. Baruch College President S. David Wu, Zicklin School of Business Dean Bruce Weber, and members of the Baruch College Fund investment committee were in attendance.

Since its founding 15 years ago, IMG has prepared Baruch students for careers in finance. With assistance from the Baruch College Fund, the group's students manage a real-money fund that is currently worth approximately \$1.4 million, providing them with a unique, hands-on experience. —MOLLY TURNER



FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE COMMUNITY

Zicklin Students Drive Entrepreneurship in Panama

Undergraduates in the Zicklin School of Business learned firsthand that entrepreneurship isn't just about the bottom line.

As part of a course led by Professor Chris Meyer, a lecturer in the Lawrence N. Field Department of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, students traveled to Panama to offer their consulting expertise to small businesses, artisans, and farmers.

Throughout the week-long excursion, students presented marketing, inventory management, and financial management plans to independent workers and businesses in need of fiscal guidance. The group developed their skills in personalized consulting by tailoring strategies and tactics to each client's unique needs. From business plans to inventory sheets to logos, students made a tangible impact before boarding their return flight.

Alexis Galindo ('25) reflects on the impact he and other students had on a local business owner.

"My group gave her a crash course in financial literacy," he says, "to make sure she understood the daily ledger of



what she sold and that she was tracking her inventory so that she could better plan her restocking trips for the following week."

Professor Meyer is proud of his students' tireless efforts to improve the economy of a small community.

"Baruch students did a great job and had a great experience on this trip," Professor Meyer says. "Working with entrepreneurs in rural Panama gave them a chance to put their

education to work in a place where they could have a real impact. They found ways to help these entrepreneurs make progress towards their goals using their creativity, social skills, and hard work."

Students brought their expertise to Panama—and ultimately brought back lessons on empowering small communities.

—ERIN MCLAUGHLIN-DAVIS



BEAUTY OF THE ARCTIC

While Professor Emeritus of Art Leonard Sussman may be best known to the Baruch community as a faculty member, he is also a highly accomplished photographer. And over the last decade of his nearly 60-year career, Sussman has specialized in capturing the arctic landscape through photographs. These photos, part of an exhibit called *In the Ice*, were taken during a 5,000-mile, 52-day National Science Foundation research cruise on the United States Coast Guard icebreaker, *Healy*, to understand the impacts of climate change on the Arctic.

"Being and photographing *In the Ice* for over one month was a wondrous and magical experience," says Sussman. "Though it was a long journey, I never tired of seeing and photographing the landscape."

—MOLLY TURNER



ADDRESSING HATE

BARUCH UNVEILS ANTISEMITISM STUDIES LABORATORY

Baruch College has launched The Antisemitism Studies Laboratory (The AS Lab) at the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences—the first antisemitism research center within the CUNY system. Under the guidance of Baruch's Sandra Kahn Wasserman Jewish Studies Center and thanks to an annual \$50,000 gift from the Laterman Family Foundation, the laboratory will advance research, pedagogy, and community engagement to fight against local and global antisemitism.

The Laterman Family Foundation, led by Joshua Laterman, who chairs the AddressHate Initiative, emphasizes the need for a lab that explores the spread of antisemitism and provides students and researchers with tools to address hate through data science, public policy, journalism, and political science. Laterman has a strong connection to Baruch, serving as a trustee of the Baruch College

Fund just like his father, the late Bernard Laterman ('52).

"We are excited to partner with Baruch College on this effort," says Laterman. "Education and research are key to combating intolerance, and an urban academic hub like Baruch is well positioned to shape the next generation of leaders in the fight against antisemitism."

CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez praises the initiative.

"It's a welcome reminder of why higher education remains an invaluable resource in the movement against hate."

Baruch College President S. David Wu explains the significance of the Laterman Family Foundation's gift.

"At a moment when combating antisemitism requires bold ideas, rigorous scholarship, and collaborative actions, this support will

make a meaningful difference," he says.

Elected officials praise the laboratory's goal to increase campus solidarity and inclusion.

"The AS Lab at Baruch College will pioneer groundbreaking research and analysis that will foster cutting-edge approaches to the age-old hatred that is antisemitism, all while developing and attracting world-class experts to our extraordinary Manhattan community," says U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler.

"Students deserve to feel safe on their college campus," says State Senator Kristen Gonzalez. "The Antisemitism Studies Lab is an important step towards addressing those concerns and promoting campus unity."

The AS Lab positions Baruch College as a national leader in conversations against hate, both on and off campus.

—ERIN MCLAUGHLIN-DAVIS



Baruch President S. David Wu (second from left) announces The Antisemitism Studies Laboratory, along with (left to right) Weissman Dean Jessica Lang, Foundation Trustee Joshua Laterman, and Dr. Sarah Valente, Director of Baruch's Wasserman Jewish Studies Center.



THE BUSINESS OF INFLUENCE

BARUCH ALUMNI MAKE THEIR MARK ON SOCIAL MEDIA

BY SALLY FAY

The global proliferation of the internet has spurred a sea change in modern society, affecting virtually every aspect of our lives. It's even spawned new social concepts like "viral moments" and "internet fame." The profusion of content creators and potential influencers on platforms such as Instagram, Twitch, and TikTok has reshaped how businesses communicate with consumers, as a strong online following often attracts the interest of brands who aim to expand their marketing channels.

So what does it take to stand out in an online space where almost anyone in the world can create and disseminate interactive content? Three high-internet-profile Baruch alumni share their perspectives on attaining and navigating social media fame.





SPREADING THE NEWS

Those who think they know New York City might be surprised by what they can learn from John Friia ('15). For the past five years, Friia has been sharing City-centric content as the creator and face of *Here in New York*, primarily on TikTok (@HereInNYC) and Instagram (@here_in_ny). His posts, which spotlight community-focused news events, hidden-in-plain-sight gems, and quirky historical tales, have amassed more than 20 million views and 300,000-plus followers.

Friia, who describes himself as a content creator with a journalistic bent, says that his love for sharing stories was ignited by writing for the school newspaper in junior high. A journalism major at Baruch, he wrote professionally for his local Long Island paper and various NYC publications and, after earning a TV journalism-focused master's degree at CUNY's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, worked as a content producer for News 12 and NY1.

"Local news was always my passion because those are the stories that directly impact people's day-to-day lives," he says.

Friia began creating online content as a way to share his beloved city with a broader demographic. A self-described one-man band, he serves as *Here in New York*'s researcher, scriptwriter, online talent, videographer, editor, and publicist. He's been covered by the *New York Post* and *Newsweek*, appeared on *The Drew Barrymore Show* and NBC's *New York Live*, and landed a monthly segment on PIX11's lifestyle news program *New York Living*.



He's increased his visibility through a collaboration with Curb, producing weekly videos that air on Taxi TV.

"Getting messages from people saying they see me on the backseat taxi screens while they're on the go in New York is just surreal," he says.

Friia attributes his internet success in part to the storytelling and production skills he's honed, plus his sense of what resonates with viewers. Subway and public transportation videos always perform well, he notes (his video about the launch of NYC congestion pricing hit more than 12 million views on Instagram).

"New Yorkers have a love-hate relationship with the subway; we like to complain about it, so those videos get lots of engagement."

Current internet fame notwithstanding, Friia is mindful of the possible pitfalls of a social media marketing career.

"As a creator, you need to stay on top of not only internet trends but also the changing political and social climate," he says, citing current uncertainty surrounding TikTok ownership and access as one example. But he notes that he's prepared to shift gears and take *Here in New York* to avenues other than social media.

For now, though, Friia is savoring—and sharing—the perks of his internet fame, such as access to off-limits areas of iconic sites.

"I've seen the Empire State Building from the river that runs underneath it all the way to the 105th floor at the base of the antenna—literally the top—where people who built it wrote their names, and where I got to leave my mark as well," he says. "A real pinch-me moment."

Watch the Video



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

For self-described foodie Gavriella Grossman ('22), social media started out as an entertaining vehicle for exploring and sharing her enthusiasm for food and cooking.

"I launched my Instagram account, NY Food Sharings, in 2013 while in middle school," says the New York City native. "During the era of the crazy rainbow bagels and milkshakes with giant slices of cake on top."



Back then, Grossman had no thoughts of building a career out of what she saw as a hobby. Then one of her posts yielded an invitation to visit a restaurant and create content about it. After that, she began networking at influencer events and learning about the business side of online content creation.

Since then, Grossman has forged a career in the food space, both under her Instagram (~200,000 followers) and TikTok (300,000+ followers) accounts (@nyfoodsharings) and as a full-time content creator for New York-headquartered Chip City and, currently, H&H Bagels, where she's also their social media manager.

"We're just building our social media presence and have been expanding nationwide, so it's been an awesome challenge," she says.

Though Grossman briefly focused on her own social media full-time after graduating from Baruch with a degree in business communications, it wasn't a fit.

"I found it stressful to live brand deal to brand deal, so my current path is the best of both worlds."

The popularity of NY Food Sharings' food- and cooking-related content translates to a variety of revenue streams for Grossman, including brand-sponsored posts and user-generated content (which

continued on page 9

INFLUENCER 101

The phenomenon of social media influencers has broad academic, sociological, and political implications, and Baruch is well versed in the conversation. We asked Stuart Davis, PhD, a media studies expert and associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies in the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, to explain some of the issues at play.

From an academic standpoint, is there a commonly accepted definition of what it means to be a successful “social media influencer”?

Drawing on the work of communication scholar Alice Marwick, I’d make a distinction between two different kinds of social media influencers. “Social media-enabled influencers” are celebrities with some degree of fame who use social media to expand their personal brand, make money, or gain influence. The clearest example is President Donald Trump’s mobilization of support and interest through Twitter. The second kind, which I’d call “social media micro-celebrities,” are more or less “normal” people who strategically utilize social media to build and maintain a base of followers—Khaby Lame’s work on TikTok being one example.

Both types draw on a “parasocial relationship” with their audiences, where individual followers can see themselves as friends with or part of the lives of these celebrities.

In terms of what defines success, the simple answer is the number of followers and subsequent influence. These can be monetized or leveraged to create new economic opportunities, or even to build political support.

What factors are driving the phenomenon, and what factors might influence the landscape for influencers and content creators in the future?

From a sociocultural perspective, as social media usage becomes more ubiquitous, people (especially young people) tend to peg both their own sense of self-identity and how they evaluate others on the quantification inherent in these kinds of media.



From the perspective of the influencers (especially young influencers), being a content creator offers the possibility of making a career on one’s own terms amidst an increasingly precarious job market and growing wage deflation in many fields.

As with screenwriters, actors, musicians, and other creative professions, the increasing sophistication of artificial intelligence will be a concern.

Does Baruch integrate the topic into its curriculum?

There are currently several classes in this area, including Social Media Marketing and Contemporary Issues in Digital Media. In addition, both the Zicklin and Weissman schools are seeking to incorporate the idea of “building a personal brand” into a variety of courses.

Beyond the classroom, do you pursue any academic or research interests in the various aspects of social influencers and/or content creators?

I worked on a study that looked at self-branding among journalists covering the U.S.-Mexico border as reflected on Facebook and Instagram. I’ve also published several articles and book chapters looking at how the “brand identity” developed by a prominent Brazilian politician led to irresponsible and dangerous epidemiological practices during the Covid pandemic.

Grossman creates specifically for a client company's use). Among her partnerships, she's worked with chains like Starbucks and Raising Cane's on high-profile Manhattan openings and has teamed with brands such as Hellmann's mayonnaise and Doritos on recipe content.

Grossman's Baruch education has played an important role in preparing her for success as an online content creator.

"I took an awesome public relations class where I learned about the role of social media in PR campaigns. It proved to be really helpful in understanding what companies are looking for when they work with influencers and content creators."

Grossman says it's hard work, but also a fun challenge, to stay relevant as a content creator amidst the crowded social media landscape.

"A lot of it is networking and making good connections with brands," she says. "My aim is to make sure that their marketing goals are achieved with my content in a way that also aligns organically with my audience."

Whether posting paid or unpaid content on her social media, Grossman is mindful of what resonates with her followers.

She notes that pasta content does well.

"My socials are like 90 percent pasta," she explains.

She says that viewers seem to find sensory imagery like cheese pulls or gooey chocolate "really satisfying. I tried doing healthier content, but I love posting the indulgent, amazing food I taste and sharing New York's incomparable food scene. So, everything in moderation."



A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

When Hailey Ra ('24) launched her TikTok account (@haileyra) back in 2019, she never imagined she'd experience a viral moment that would change her life.

Then a teenager in suburban Rochester, New York, where her parents run a

martial arts school, Ra enjoyed creating and sharing videos for her friends' and her own amusement. In 2020, she posted a clever take on a popular TikTok trend, "cheat on me I dare you," featuring her family: third-degree Taekwondo black belt mom, sixth-degree black belt dad, and her two brothers (who, like their sister, are fourth-degree black belts).

The video became a TikTok hit, garnering more than 20 million views on that platform alone. A post showing her and her brother, with whom she performs in international Taekwondo competitions, sharing a silly moment in their training garb was even more popular.



As her follower count ballooned (Ra now has more than 760,000 followers on TikTok and some 70,000 on her Instagram account, @haileyra), advertisers took notice, including big players like Nike and combat sports promoter ONE Championship.

"It was really exciting when I first got reached out to," she says. "Dealing with content marketing has been a huge learning experience."

Ra's marketing collaborations have evolved along with her content.

"It has shifted to sharing more dimensions of my life and my identity. That's definitely opened up niches for dealing with a lot more diverse brands."

In her experience, marketers are looking for exposure that feels authentic and real.

"The audience is smart; I can't pull out some outlandish excuse just to promote a product," she says. "It's also really

important to me that it's something I'd genuinely use myself or would share with friends or family."

Since graduating from Baruch with a degree in human resource management, Ra has been balancing her work as a content creator with her full-time job as a talent acquisition professional for NYC-based multispecialty medical group Rendr. She credits Baruch with giving her the skills and tools to approach her social media presence as a business rather than just a hobby. But even without the income stream, Ra says she'd still be sharing videos.

"When I launched my account, it was just for fun, but I've continued doing it because it's a way not only to connect with people who share common backgrounds and interests like martial arts, but also to share more about my life and my world with people who didn't know about it."

She recounts the feeling of community when she and her brother represented the United States last fall at the World Taekwondo Poomsae Championships in Hong Kong.

"Athletes from countries all over the world were like, 'We know you guys!' It was so cool. Social media brought us together on a more personal level. I think that's my favorite part."



INNOVATION AHEAD

As in many success stories, these Baruch alumni rose to social media prominence through a combination of talent, entrepreneurship, hard work, and a little serendipity. They've found ways to connect with their audience against a shifting internet backdrop that will continue to evolve.

Whatever yet-to-be-imagined manifestations of the online social landscape the future may bring, it's a good bet these innovative influencers will find new creative channels through which to share their passions.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Alumni:

As we head into the summer months, I can't help but look back on what a busy and eventful academic year it's been for the Office of Alumni Relations and Volunteer Engagement—filled with a homecoming reception, a Lunar New Year celebration, corporate network events, mentoring opportunities, and so much more.

The highlight, in my opinion, was our annual Baruch Alumni Changemakers Awards ceremony and dinner last September, in which we once again highlighted some truly amazing alumni who are making a major impact on their industries and communities.

The event has become one of our signature programs, and we're already looking forward to the next one in the fall. What makes the event so special is that you can nominate your fellow alumni to be an award recipient. So, scan the QR code and tell us why your friend or former classmate deserves this honor at our next Changemakers ceremony in the fall—we'll share more details about the event soon, and we're looking forward to reading all your nominations!

Best,



Gregory M. Leporati



60s Last semester, **Lawrence Balter** ('60) awarded senior **Ayana Barnes** ('25) with the Dr. Lawrence Balter Excellence in Psychology Scholarship for psychology majors who have demonstrated academic excellence.

70s **Warren Alexander** ('72) is an acclaimed novelist who released his latest satirical novel, *Success Is Not an Option*, in September 2024. The United Way of Greenville County appointed **Henry Horowitz** ('73) to their board of directors. Natoo Pet Foods named **Joel Katz** ('74) its vice president of North American sales. Atea Pharmaceuticals, Inc. appointed **Arthur S. Kirsch** (MBA '75) to

their board of directors. **Robin J. Miller** ('78) presented an artist talk, "A Sankofa Journey: The African in America," for Black History Month at West Falmouth Library in Massachusetts. *Variety* named **Matthew Lichtenberg** ('79) as one of its Business Managers Elite Honorees.

80s **Steven Moskowitz** ('81) released his travel memoir, *World Travel Adventures: True Encounters From Over 100 Countries By An Ordinary Guy With Extraordinary Experiences*, under the pen name Steve Freeman in 2012. Last summer, Book Authority ranked it the #14 best adventure travel book and #52 best travel book. **Debra J. White** ('83)

released her debut memoir *All Shook Up: Finding Purpose After Traumatic Brain Injury*. **Helene Banks** ('85) was named to *Legal 500's* inaugural New York City Elite ranking series. The Vera Institute of Justice named **Sandra Buchanan** ('86) to its board of trustees. *Crain's New York Business* named **Susan Fox** (MBA '88) one of its Notable Leaders in Health Care.

90s **Edward Villafane** ('92) is the managing director of The Tides Inn in Virginia. **Michael Palmer** ('93) was an ORBIE Award Finalist in 2024 for recognition of technology executive leadership in his role as chief information security officer of Hearst. **Jessica Fowler**

(MPA '94) is the new vice president of business development at Vivacity Infrastructure Group. **Sanjay Thapar** ('94) joined Baker Botts as a partner in its corporate practice. Jewish Family Service of Atlantic & Cape May Counties named **Katherine Gorno** ('95) its chief financial officer. Nature's Miracle Holding Inc. named **Daphne Y. Huang** ('95) chief financial officer. **Torrey Maldonado** ('96) was the keynote speaker at Vassar College's 161st Commencement in May. *City & State New York* named **Molly John** ('97), audit partner and Americas telecommunications co-leader at EY, one of its 2025 "50 Over 50." **Alina Trigub** ('97, MBA '06) released her book, *Your Legacy on Main Street: Mastering the Art of Passive Real Estate Investing* in September followed by a TEDx talk in December titled "How to Teach Your Kids Financial Literacy." **Michael Aluko** ('98) is a partner with the global law firm Norton Rose Fulbright. *Crain's New York Business* named **Ann-Marie Foster** (EMPA '98) a Notable Black Leader of 2024. **Ching Yin** (MBA '98) joined Sycamore Advisors as senior vice president. The Seamen's Society for Children and Families appointed **Janet Leslie** (MSED '99) to its board of directors.

00s | **Jennifer Conwell** ('00) has joined the regulatory consulting firm Iron Road Partners as director. **Edward Jimenez** (MBA '00) is the president and CEO of Main Line Health in New Jersey. Blackstone Mortgage Trust, Inc. elected **Marcin Urbaszek** ('00) to serve as deputy chief financial officer and principal accounting officer. **Alla Chertkova** ('01) was promoted to vice president on the finance and accounting team at Dune Real Estate Partners. **Lesa O'Daniel** (MBA '01) is directing her husband's new Netflix comedy special, *Felipe Esparza: Raging Fool*. The award-winning healthcare

continued on next page

FROM FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT TO UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR

Mildred García ('74) knows firsthand how education can change lives.

The daughter of Puerto Rican migrants, García experienced the impact of public education at a young age. As a student at PS8 in Brooklyn, García attended plays and went to museums that her factory worker parents would not have been able to afford.

However, it was her time at Baruch College that would change the trajectory of her life and her family's lives forever. She studied business education, hoping to teach while holding a work-study position in the dean's office, which gave her a first glimpse into higher education as a career.

Fast forward to today, and García now serves as chancellor of the California State University system—the first Latina to lead a public university system. As chancellor, García manages 23 university presidents and works closely with the CSU board.

García cites Baruch's diversity and welcoming atmosphere as two important factors that helped her, as a first-generation college student, fall in love with academia.

"No one in my family had gone to college, and there I was, not knowing," García says of her time at Baruch. "My life has been dedicated to helping others reach what I have reached because I understand. My education changed the trajectory of my entire family."

After graduating from Baruch, García briefly taught before landing a full-time staff position at LaGuardia Community College. From there, her higher education career soared, eventually serving as the first systemwide president for all six campuses of Berkeley College in New York and New Jersey.

Although she had extensive experience as a university president, including at CSU Dominguez Hills from 2007–2012 and Cal State Fullerton from 2012–2018, the scope of her new chancellor role is a different challenge.

"It doesn't matter which job you have—you are always struggling with work-life balance," García says.

More than anything, the values that García learned from her parents have been a guiding light.

"My parents always told us that the only inheritance a poor family could leave you is a good education."

Like CUNY and Baruch College, CSU aims to provide a high-quality education for as many people as possible. García's goal as chancellor is to open the doors for other students—just as Baruch did for her.

"I want to give opportunities to excel for every student, regardless of their background and regardless of their socioeconomic status."

—MOLLY TURNER



BABY BEARCAT



Ivy Teng Lei ('14) is now a proud member of the “working-mom club” after she and her partner, Michael, welcomed Emilia in October 2024. In addition to being a mom, Lei serves as the State of California's first Chief Digital Strategy Officer and board president for Immschools, a nonprofit serving immigrant students and families in K-12 public schools.

IT startup company Twiage—created by **John Hui** ('02)—was acquired by TigerConnect, a leading healthcare communication technology company. Hui will stay on to continue leading the growth of Twiage. Valley National Bancorp appointed **Eyal Efrat** (EMS '03) as an independent director to its board. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Hesham Almekkawi** (EMBA '03) for expertise in global business leadership. **L. Hazel Jack** (MBA '03, MSED '10) was promoted to vice president and chief of staff to the president at Colgate University. **Sanjay Pani** (MBA '03) is the founder and CEO of Rally Bulls, a platform designed to make financial education engaging, competitive, and accessible. **Daniel Weinstein** (MBA '03) is the chief accounting officer at Grindr Inc. *Crain's New York Business* named **Alexis Adams** ('05) and **Dwayne Brown** (MPA '08) as Notable Black Leaders of 2024.

Cadawalader elected **Sulie Arias** ('05) as special counsel, real estate. **Rudy Cazares** ('05) is an inaugural member of the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families Bunker Labs CEOcircle cohort. Sponsored by JPMorgan Chase, the 71-member cohort of veterans and military spouses will work together for 13 months to grow their businesses and learn from industry experts. Ipsos MMA appointed **Joseph LaSala** (MBA '05) as vice president of marketing. Intelligent Protection Management Corp. appointed **Sidney Rabsatt** (MBA '05) to its board of directors. **Ikhwan A. Rafeek** ('05) has joined Blank Rome as a partner in the firm's finance, restructuring, and bankruptcy group. **Nelson Santana** ('05) won a prestigious I Love My Librarian Award from the American Library Association, which included a \$5,000 cash prize. **Gleb Lerman** ('06) was promoted to managing director of

investments at Hudson Valley Property Group. **Raymond Manna** (MBA '06) was named an adjunct professor of marketing strategy at Yeshiva University. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Adam R. Peck** (MBA '06) for expertise in marketing. Peck is the founder and chief executive officer of his marketing agency, Adapdiv LLC. The American Federation of Government Employees named **Rushab Sanghvi** ('06) as general counsel. **Megan E. Kanefsky** (MS '07) was promoted to director at J.F. Lehman & Company. **Famod Konneh** (MPA '08) was promoted to deputy commissioner of ethnic outreach for the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit in New York. **Iyabo Oyewo-Hall** ('08) was appointed director of Queens College's Center for Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Understanding. **Saurabh Joshi** (EMS '09) is the president of payments at CSG. **Janet Leslie** (MSED '09) was honored by the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce with the distinguished Louis R. Miller Award for her dedication to mentorship. **George Ng** ('09) is the commanding officer of the 101st Precinct of the NYPD in New York.

10s | **Jim Lally** (MS '10) has joined PodcastOne as its head of business development. **Mary Olushoga** (MSED '10) performed with The Fire Ensemble at the 39th Annual Brooklyn Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in January. **Ilda Rastoder** ('10) was named to *Crain's New York Business* 40 Under 40 Class of 2024. **Ben Guttman** ('11) is the incoming executive director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation. **Vera Hart** ('11) is the new chief financial officer of health technology company PicnicHealth. Community Access appointed **Sean Ramsaywak** (MPA '11) to its board of directors. **Jason Zachter** (MBA '11) has joined UBS as a managing director and financial advisor. **Shio Khetsuriani** (EMS '12) launched clubnparty in August 2024, an app for finding, organizing, and hosting parties.

In two months, the app garnered more than 500 downloads, 11 hosted parties, and 300 unique guests. **Vlad Lackovic** ('12) was named Special Representative to the U.S. for Trade and Investment for Slovakia. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Bhavesh Patel** ('12, MS '13) for expertise in financial services. **Pelin Serpin** ('13) became a partner at Latham & Watkins LLP. **Katherine Garcia** (MPA '14) has joined the governing board of Evergreen Action.

David Neumann ('14), CEO of animation production company NEWMATION, is offering the masterclass, "Enter the World of a TV Creator," through Teesside University. Westchester Medical Center Health Network appointed **Leo Bodden** (EMBA '15) as its new senior vice president and chief information officer. **Steve Russolillo** (MBA '15) joined Business Insider as chief news editor. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Nanda Prabhakar**

(MPA '16) for expertise in the nonprofit sector. **Nico Victorino** (MSEd '16) received the prestigious Terrell H. Bell Award from the Department of Education in recognition of his outstanding leadership and service as principal of PS 150 Elementary School in New York City. **Levy Rozman** ('17), also known as GothamChess to his 5.5 million YouTube subscribers, emerged victorious in the Battle of Generations chess match with

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REAL ESTATE REVOLUTIONARY

Today, the concept of an equity "Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)" is a tried-and-true option for investors seeking a stake in commercial real estate—but back in 1991, it was a *radical* idea. And it all originated with Milton Cooper ('49, LHD-Hon. '15).

Back in 1958, alongside commercial-construction craftsman Martin Kimmel, he co-founded Kimco Realty, the largest publicly traded owner and operator of neighborhood and community shopping centers in the nation. And after leading that company for more than 60 years, Cooper retired in early 2025, transitioning to the role of Chairman Emeritus.

For Cooper, creating the REIT IPO for Kimco was "about the democratization of the ownership of real estate," he says. "No small investor could own a portfolio of shopping centers otherwise. This allowed ownership of real estate on a level not before seen."

In other real estate matters, Cooper successfully bucked trends. Instead of going all in on mall development, as many of his peers were doing, he focused Kimco on open-air shopping centers and mixed-use properties anchored by grocery stores, which are more resistant to economic downturns. That formula still holds today. Starting with a first center in Miami, Cooper and Kimmel targeted markets for growth across the country. Today, Kimco owns and operates 568 properties.

Growing up on New York's Lower East Side, Cooper followed his graduation from Baruch with a law degree from Brooklyn Law School. It was a smart move, Cooper says, but for him, real estate—not a law practice—was far more entertaining and entrepreneurial. For more than six decades, Cooper helped Kimco thrive by always looking for ways to improve, diversify, and be ever nimble in an industry that can sometimes be turbulent.

While Cooper may be known to some as the "godfather of the REIT" and received accolades for his leadership, he says that the key to his success is building relationships, trust, and community. That started with that original handshake deal with his friend Kimmel when they agreed to do business together, and it extends to valuing the priorities and well-being of his employees, the company's tenants, and the communities they serve.

"[Some say] that whoever has the gold makes the rules," Cooper says. "But it's really about having an interest in people and treating them the way you want to be treated. That's the real golden rule."

—NANETTE MAXIM





A MOMENTOUS NIGHT

At this year's Bernard Baruch Dinner, the College's signature fundraising event, Jacky Wright ('86), Chief Technology and Platform Officer at McKinsey & Co. (*left*), and George E. Roach ('71), CEO of GER Industries (*right*)—seen here with President Wu—were honored for their outstanding achievements. In total, the gala raised more than \$1 million to support critical areas of need, including financial aid, emergency grants, technology assistance, career services, and faculty support.

SMALL BUSINESS, BIG IMPACT

Growing up in Kazakhstan, Aya Kikimova (MBA '11) had a special connection to small businesses. While her mother climbed the ladder in real estate, her grandmother ran a bustling small deli. Kikimova never imagined that watching her family build success would lead her to helping small businesses thrive.

At age 16, she moved to the U.S. on a student visa. While later pursuing her MBA, she worked her way up in big business, from insurance companies to marketing agencies to Microsoft. However, she could never quiet her entrepreneurial, small-business mindset.

"I was initially working at different corporations, primarily because I was on a visa and had to have a company sponsoring it," she explains.

Once she obtained her permanent visa, she decided to pave a path independent of large companies.

"I thought that maybe this is a perfect opportunity to start something of my own," she says. "I wasn't sure what it was going to be, but I knew that I wanted to leave the corporate world and try an entrepreneurial venture."

After parting from Microsoft, she helped a small, local client referred by mutual friends. With success after success and referral after referral, her small business—centered agency, LeapEngine, was born.

"LeapEngine provides accessible digital marketing services that are affordably priced. Small businesses are usually priced out with larger agencies, so I wanted to make high-quality marketing accessible. These are real people and by helping them, I see the impact right away."

Her human-centered approach makes LeapEngine stand out from other agencies.

"All of a sudden, our clients can pay their mortgage," she says. "They can take a vacation that year. They can grow. They can hire somebody, and they can be happier with their family."

Kikimova reflects on how Baruch College helped her get to where she is today.

"I moved to New York without a job, without any offer, and as an exchange student from a different country," she notes. "I visited Baruch and thought that it was great. It was instrumental with its incredibly strong career and mentorship programs—I found two mentors, and one of them led me to an internship with a global advertising agency. The second helped me get my first job."

In her career journey, Kikimova has made a big impact—one small business at a time.

—ERIN MCLAUGHLIN-DAVIS



grandmaster Pia Cramling in Stockholm.

Quyen T. Wong (MPA '17) has been named associate executive director of patient care and chief nursing officer at Northwell Northern Westchester Hospital. Beyond his career as a senior scrum master, **Jeremiah Addo** ('18) has launched a nonprofit organization that focuses on positively transforming underserved communities through education and philanthropic initiatives. Additionally, Addo currently has a mentorship program with 13 students and has run multiple food and clothes drives in the Dominican Republic.

Abdourahamane Diallo ('18), founder and chairman of Guineans Succeeding in America, has been named an Obama USA Leader by the Obama Foundation. The program chooses 100 emerging leaders from across the country to spend six months discussing and learning in weekly virtual sessions to further develop and apply their leadership skills. **Andrew Kunkes** ('18) was appointed director of emergency relief and recovery for the deputy mayor's office in New York. Soroptomist International of Staten Island honored **Nicole Meyers** (EMPA '18) at their 2025 Ruby Awards for her work in public service empowering women and girls. **Steven Patzer** ('18) served on the Joint Task Force-National Capital Region as a U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class in support of the 60th Presidential Inauguration. **Monica Garay** (MPA '19) is the executive director at Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

20s | *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Amanjot Singh** (MBA '20) for expertise in project management and construction. **Bhim Khatri** ('21, MSIS '22) is the associate manager of fund accounting at SS&C Technologies after three years at PwC within their Asset & Wealth Management Audit Practice. Khatri shared with the Office of Alumni Relations

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DRIVEN BY A MISSION

From developing visual and performance arts centers to founding a comic book publishing company to empowering diverse talent in real estate, Taneshia Nash Laird ('95) has done it all.

A breast cancer survivor who grew up in poverty and lost her home in an explosion during her time at Baruch College, she's always kept moving forward, guided by her passion for supporting communities.

Her career has been led by her love of the arts. Early in her career, she acquired a historic office building and converted it into a first-floor art gallery with upstairs artist-work lofts. In 2012, she founded the entertainment center MIST (My Image Studios) Harlem, which further fueled her dedication to arts and culture. In her arts center career, she held positions including president, inaugural president, and CEO at Newark Symphony Hall and the Greater Roxberry Arts & Cultural Center.

Nash Laird reflects on how she also worked in public service outside of the arts—specifically, in economic development.

"I wrote an op-ed for the *Trenton Downtowner* about what I saw in Trenton and the hope I had for the predominantly Black city with incredible talent that was leaving," she says.

To her surprise, the op-ed led to a job as the head of economic development for the City of Trenton. Decades later, she now serves as the executive director of Project REAP (Real Estate Associate Program).

"There is a persistent gap in the underrepresentation of people of color in real estate," Nash Laird says. "Our founding mission is to increase minority representation with industry education and networking opportunities. Only one percent of senior commercial real estate positions are held by underrepresented groups." She adds, "My favorite thing is that we are able to give people opportunities."

Nash Laird recognizes how Baruch College fostered her passion for both the arts and economic development.

"I got to learn from really brilliant people," she says. "Baruch gave me the opportunity to design my own minor, which I called Black Economic Development. I felt embraced and supported."

No matter what sector she's in or what challenges arise, Nash Laird lets her values lead the way.

—ERIN MCLAUGHLIN-DAVIS



CLASSNOTES

and Volunteer Engagement: “I am truly grateful to the Baruch community and look forward to staying connected and giving back!” **Kimberly Cordero** ('23) was promoted to associate growth marketing manager at DataDog. Since graduating, Cordero also got married and started a bakery business, Piece of Joy Pastries.

Caryl Anne Francia ('23) is a reporter at Pensions & Investments covering endowments, foundations, and emerging managers. **Mia Gindis** ('23) is a reporter with Bloomberg News covering oil futures. **Liz Lebeaux Vantine** (MPA '24) is the deputy director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Denver, Colorado.

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Bert Bogner '38
Philip Wolitzer '41
Harriet Klein Peaceman '45
Leo Ditkoff '47
Warren S. Steinhauser '47
Stanley H. Handman '48*
Oscar J. Olem '48
Irving B. Freedman '49
Carol C. Seltzer '49
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Daniel Markoff '50
Florence S. (Rodkinson) Roher '50
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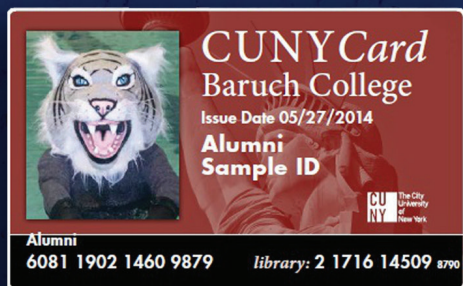
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