

SPRING / SUMMER 2026

BARUCH

ALUMNI MAGAZINE



EMBRACING THE LIMELIGHT

BARUCH ALUMNI STAND OUT
ON THE STAGE AND SCREEN

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

03



BARUCH ALUMNI MAGAZINE

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni and Friends,

We have completed yet another successful academic year at Baruch College! At Commencement, held June 1, we celebrated the achievements of our 2026 graduates who are now members of our illustrious alumni network. I look forward to seeing how they become involved, vibrant contributors to this community.

Baruch College continues to receive accolades for the opportunities that we provide for our students and faculty. *The Wall Street Journal*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and others name the College #1 for achievements, including value and economic opportunity. And Baruch now holds two 2025 Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education designations: Opportunity Colleges and Universities and Research Colleges and Universities. This is an uncommon dual distinction held by only 33 other institutions nationwide.

We also have an institutional responsibility to prepare our students for today's world of work. Artificial intelligence is already impacting industries, organizations, and

specific jobs in myriad ways, so it is incumbent upon us to educate our students for the jobs that are emerging.

Baruch is committed to leading, and not merely responding to, this rapid transformation, ensuring our students are prepared to lead with both expertise and integrity. Through strong partnerships with business and technology leaders and our AI-focused curriculum, we are preparing our students to thrive in a technology-driven economy.

With our global alumni network that is now more than 180,000 strong, we are able to partner with some of the world's leading technology firms. Baruch is uniquely positioned to move faster and in more demonstrable ways, and soon we will launch the AI Professional Hub, which will help mid-career professionals upskill to meet this changing environment. We hope many alumni will take advantage, amplifying Baruch's impact in even greater ways.

No matter where technology takes us, there will always be a vital need

for human connections. In this issue of *Baruch Alumni Magazine*, you'll meet a trio of actors who are making their voices heard and expanding the hearts and minds of their audiences. I am also inspired by reading about some of our most seasoned alumni who range from 88 to 103 years old. While there are certainly more out there, these amazing stories provide us with the ultimate inspiration, living lives that have made positive impacts over, at a minimum, seven decades.

As we make summer plans, I hope some of yours will include staying connected to Baruch. Whether on or off campus, your success, mentorship, and generosity inspire our students, keeping Baruch's mission alive while ensuring that its impact continues.

Thank you for continuing to support Baruch as we move into an exciting future.

Sincerely,

S. DAVID WU
President, Baruch College



EMBRACING THE LIMELIGHT

Baruch Alumni Stand Out on the Stage and Screen

BY SALLY FAY

Hollywood may have its iconic sign, but New York City—with its glittering Broadway marquees, venerable repertory companies, iconic performance spaces, and thriving TV and film production industry—more than holds its own as a beacon of opportunity for would-be performers.

So it's no surprise that pursuing an education in such a rich entertainment environment might inspire dreams of a show business career in some Baruch alumni.

Meet three Bearcats who have been carving their niche in the entertainment industry—and are redefining what it means to be a success.

A VOICE FOR INCLUSIVITY

Thomas Ellenson ('25) has spent his entire life rising to challenges. Born with cerebral palsy, the New York City native navigates the world using a power wheelchair for mobility and a voice output app on his iPad

for speech. But his disability hasn't stopped him from pursuing his passion and nurturing his talent for the performing arts.

Ellenson's introduction to theatre started from day one.

"When I was in the hospital as a newborn, my dad sang 'Bring Him Home' from *Les Miserables* to me ten times a day," he says. "My mom told my dad I'd think my life is a musical. Well, she was kinda right!"

A self-described "certified theatre kid and musical theatre nerd," Ellenson has seen so many musicals that he's lost count.

His participation in the inclusive city youth theater group Creative Arts Team (CAT) while in high school transformed him from an enthusiastic audience member to an active participant.

"Before joining CAT, I never imagined I could perform on a stage," says Ellenson. **"I discovered that theatre and acting allow me to be fully free."**

In fact, the theatre group played a major role in Ellenson's decision to enroll at Baruch College. He'd begun his undergraduate studies at SUNY Purchase, but wanting to remain in the City when schools returned to in-person learning post-pandemic, he transferred to Baruch because it was where he'd started acting: CAT's annual show is performed at the Baruch Performing Arts Center (BPAC). He completed his BA in arts administration in 2025 with a focus in theatre and a minor in music.



Realistic about the dearth of casting opportunities for disabled actors, Ellenson has built his theater resume by writing, directing, and acting in his own shows.

He began writing and developing his autobiographical story in high school and, at age 20, performed his one-man show *It Is What It Is* at the NYC ONE Festival's playwriting competition—and became the youngest artist to ever win the festival. His first-place finish led to a widely praised five-night off-off-Broadway run at New York City's Flamboyán Theatre.

More recently, Ellenson won the 18th Annual United Solo Theatre Festival's Best Production Award for his second autobiographical piece, *Well, Life Sucks*.

"Whenever tough things happen, making theatre is my coping mechanism," he explains.

Determined to continue to share his story on his own terms, he's currently working toward a fall 2026 off-Broadway staging of his third show, called *Me, This Life, and I*, inspired by some recent challenging life experiences.

Besides his theatre work, Ellenson has landed acting roles in the TV series *Speechless* and the made-for-streaming movie *Out of My Mind* and appeared in two episodes of the recent Ryan Murphy horror drama series *Grotesquerie*, in which he played a psychologist.

Ellenson has high praise for Murphy's "outside-the-box" casting approach: "He cast me because of my unique way of communicating, which fit the doctor's character perfectly. That is a [disabled performers'] dream—being cast in normal roles that have zero connections to our disability."

He emphasizes that such unconventional casting benefits both the actor and audience, given the diverse perspectives that disabled actors could bring to their characters.

"Seeing disabled actors onscreen or onstage also inspires disabled youth because they see themselves represented."

The multitasking Ellenson teases "a few surprises in store" as he continues to grow his career. He aims to be the "Tyler Perry of the theater world. He does it all—actor, director, producer, screenwriter, playwright—and he discusses hard topics through comedy, like me."

Committed to pushing the boundaries and expanding the reach of the medium he loves, Ellenson has big dreams for his next act. He's working on launching his own production company, Thomas Ellenson Productions, in hopes of "creating a space to put on shows that would cast all types of actors in unconventional ways."

AN EVOLVING TALENT

In the words of legendary tunesmith Irving Berlin, there's no business like show business—an axiom that **Michael McDerman** ('06, MS '23) has taken literally throughout his professional pursuits as a performer, content creator, producer, and podcast host.

McDerman's performance roots were established during childhood, from early coaching to summer intensives to classes at the renowned Weist-Barron acting studio. But when he realized that he was more interested in creating, producing, and promoting his own work than in embodying characters created by others, he knew he'd need a different skillset to achieve his goals.

To that end, the native New Yorker turned to CUNY. He earned an



“I think when you put on a mask or a costume, it opens the door for a little more freedom.”

to my role as a producer of my staged game show.”

While diversifying his Carmella Cann brand, McDerman ventured into drama. He wrote, produced, and starred in an independent short film, *It’s Me, Matthew!*

McDerman’s dream of owning and operating an independent production company ultimately came to fruition in 2024 when he formed In The Cann Productions, LLC, through which he’s created and produced three seasons of *In The Cann With Carmella Cann*. Available online and on numerous streaming platforms, the podcast, hosted by McDerman’s alter ego, is a mix of social and political topics and entertainment segments in a drag-themed format.

McDerman views drag performance as a way to push boundaries and challenge audience expectations.

“I think when you put on a mask or a costume, it opens the door for a little more freedom.”

He credits the transferable skills he learned at Baruch with enabling him to remain relevant and distinctive as a performer as drag culture has become integrated into the entertainment mainstream.

“I didn’t want the podcast to be campy; I wanted to create a space for social commentary where I can interview real people and question assumptions. Principles that I was learning from my master’s degree gave me tools that added credibility to my content.”

McDerman’s transferable skills complement each other: while he applies professional business structures to his entertainment projects, he’s also applied creative, out-of-the-box thinking to traditional corporate roles he’s held in NYC public sector organizations, among



Photo: Jeff Eason



associate’s degree in business administration from Borough of Manhattan Community College before enrolling at Baruch, where he completed his bachelor’s degree in corporate marketing and communications in 2006. McDerman returned to his undergraduate alma mater, leaving with an MS in industrial and organizational psychology in 2023.

While finding his niche as a creative, McDerman received an invitation from a drag performer friend to be a guest on their show. The opportunity turned out to be serendipitous; McDerman began developing the persona of effervescent drag sensation Carmella Cann, a character he describes as his polar opposite.

“As Michael, I am not flashy, and I prefer to blend in. Carmella, on the other hand, was bold, fearless, and in your face.”

Performing as Carmella, McDerman cultivated his improv skills by hosting shows in cabaret lounges and bars popular in the LGBTQ+ community. He enjoyed a breakthrough year in 2004, when he launched a live late-night game show, “Who’s On Top? Featuring Carmella Cann,” at Posh, an iconic Hell’s Kitchen bar.

“Between that show and some ‘stunt casting’ on the *Ricki Lake Show* and *Law and Order: SVU*, I gained the visibility I needed to grow,” he says. “It was also the first time that I really applied my business school training

them talent acquisition and DE&I coordination at the FDNY.

“The two worlds feed each other.”

As an entertainer, McDerman says he’s most proud of the projects in which he played a role as a creator and producer.

“If you have a dream, take the risk and go after it!”

A STORYTELLING SUPERHERO

Celia Au’s evolution from Baruch College student to in-demand TV and film actor would make for an implausible movie plot.

The Hong Kong–born Au, whose family immigrated to New York when she was 3, enrolled at Baruch with a vague intention of studying international business—until a trip to the Museum of Television & Radio during a freshman year marketing class introduced her to how TV commercials had shaped culture using techniques such as storytelling and subliminal messaging. These tools, she realized, were superpowers that “can change the world for better or worse—and I wanted to use that power for good.”

Au earned her bachelor’s with an ad hoc major (combining advertising and marketing, graphic design, and communication) and a minor in theatre arts.

Though she found an acting class that she took for her minor to be fun, she couldn’t wrap her head around how

PERFORMING MAGIC AT BARUCH

Whether the performing arts represent a career aspiration, an outlet for creative expression, or a source of enjoyment as an audience member, students at Baruch benefit from a range of opportunities, both in the classroom and beyond.

According to Associate Professor Susan Tenneriello, PhD., a faculty member in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts (FPA) and deputy chair in theatre at the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, there are numerous ways for students to gain practical performing arts experience.

In productions staged by the department each fall and spring, students not only act in the shows but also work as assistant directors or assist with stage management, set design, tech components, backstage management, and marketing. FPA also supports independent projects led by student theatre makers and engages renowned theatre artists to bring experiential components of performance into the classroom.

“This spring, with support from a Harman Program grant, we hosted the venerable improv theatre Upright Citizens Brigade, who visited classes to conduct improv workshops with students,” Tenneriello says.

Experiential learning and classroom programming within the department share synergy with the Baruch Performing Arts Center (BPAC), also housed within the Weissman School. Led by Managing Director Howard Sherman, the center serves not only the College, but also the local community and the City at large. Through its range of programming

in theater, music, literary and spoken word, dance, and film, BPAC reflects the intellectual rigor and diversity of thought that embodies the ethos of Baruch College.

BPAC hosts on-campus performances, student theatre classes, and stage productions in distinct spaces—ranging from a 1,000+-seat auditorium to an intimate recital hall. Its Bernie West Theatre accommodates student theatre classes and productions.

It also works closely with FPA in its support of the Silberman Residency, which brings a musical ensemble to campus each semester to conduct classes and performances. Another program, the Great Works Reading Series, presents a staged reading of scenes from major dramatic works that complement the FPA curriculum. The Silberman Residency draws about 300 students each semester, whereas the Great Works program brings roughly 700 students.

Both are not exclusive to students pursuing performance art degrees, notes Sherman.

“They also reach students who are fulfilling other degree requirements, introducing the performing arts where there may not have been prior exposure.”

BPAC offers discounted prices for any professional work that it presents—for both Baruch students and anyone with a CUNY ID—to encourage more engagement in the arts.

“We can only offer a taste, but I hope it makes them hungry for more,” Sherman says.



people made a living from it. When Au asked her professor exactly that, his wry response, “If I knew, I wouldn’t be teaching,” changed her life.

“Storytelling is a superpower.”

“My stubbornness kicked in, and I thought... well, I’m going to find out for myself.”

in dozens of short films and full-length movies, including a starring role in *In A New York Minute*, which won Best Feature Film at SOHO International Film Festival NYC.

from horror to sci-fi to thriller, and is working to put together a film fund.

With little formal acting experience, Au applied what she’d learned from her major to gain visibility and exposure in the entertainment industry. Pursuing opportunities both in front of and behind the camera, she took acting classes, landed an internship at a casting office, and worked at a cable network. She actively promoted herself through social media (@itsceliaau on Instagram) and cultivated a distinctive aesthetic that helped her to stand out in a crowded field.

Among her numerous TV credits are a main role in the Netflix supernatural martial arts action series *Wu Assassins*, a recurring role in the AMC comedy-drama series *Lodge 49*, and appearances in Comedy Central’s *Awkwafina is Nora from Queens*, NBC’s *S.W.A.T.*, CBS’s *The Equalizer* and *Madam Secretary*, and the Marvel action series *Iron Fist*.

“On the surface, these are edge-of-your-seat stories, but at their core, they’re rooted in history, human nature, and the circumstances that shape us,” she says. “Ultimately, the stories I’m most attracted to leave the audience a little more understanding, empathetic, and compassionate toward one another than when they sat down. As I learned at Baruch: storytelling is a superpower.”

“I was a terrible actor in the beginning,” says Au. “But I was fortunate to meet generous people along the way who pointed me toward the right classes and coaches, taught me how to find work, and helped me understand the industry.”

Au has also ventured into writing and directing, though nowadays she’s finding her greatest fulfillment in the role of producer.

Au’s use of her superpowers extends far beyond the movie set. She has spoken at Fortune 500 companies about the power of storytelling in business and culture, mentors women of color through Unlock Her Potential, and is involved with initiatives dedicated to amplifying voices that don’t always get the platform they deserve.

Today, Au boasts a lengthy acting resume that encompasses both television and film. She’s been cast

“Impactful storytelling requires a balance of artistic integrity and commercial viability. Part of my role is helping the filmmakers I work with achieve that balance,” she says.

She currently has a strong slate of projects in development, ranging

“Giving the right people a seat at the table, and a microphone, is something I care deeply about.”

A NEW DIRECTOR AT MISHKIN

BY ERIN MCLAUGHLIN (MA '23)

Earlier this year, Dr. Maika Pollack was named the new director of Baruch College's Mishkin Gallery. She brings with her decades of experience in curation, art history, teaching, and gallery leadership.

Prior to arriving at Baruch, Pollack held faculty and gallery leadership positions at Princeton University, Sarah Lawrence College, New York University, and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. A known voice in the arts, she also serves on the board of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA-USA).

Dedicated to Sidney Mishkin ('34), the Mishkin Gallery—affiliated with the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences—has been a local cultural institution since 1983. Through museum-quality exhibitions alongside fellowships, scholarships, publications, and public programming, the Gallery connects both the public and the Baruch community with the arts.

Drawing on her teaching background, Pollack is leading hands-on student learning, such as through the Nagelberg Fellowship program. With her guidance, fellows gain arts administration experience at the Mishkin Gallery by contributing to exhibitions and initiatives that are aligned with its mission.



Pollack is also shaping dynamic exhibitions this fall, which will feature both student and alumni artists. Under her leadership, the Gallery will update and reprise its 1997 exhibition feature talks from alumni about art collecting and student-alumni networking, *Alumni Collect: 20th Century Masterpieces from the Collections of Baruch College Alumni*. Additionally, throughout the semester, she will be at the helm of the curation of a wide range of student exhibitions.

Pollack says she is inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit of Baruch.

"I look forward to creating a dynamic exhibition space welcoming students, the Baruch community, alumni, and beyond," she says, "while continuing the Mishkin Gallery's reputation as a 'jewel' of Gramercy Park."



ADDITION AT 17 LEX

The Lawrence & Eris Field Building—affectionately referred to as “17 Lex” by alumni and students—unveiled a new student multipurpose room this semester, featuring comfortable seating, a large-screen TV, and convenient charging stations to support both study and social activities. This marks the first of many student-focused makeovers planned for the building over the next few years.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

How Ava Monaco ('28) Earned Her Spot on the Men's Soccer Team

BY SARA J. WELCH

Ava Monaco ('28) loves numbers. Her favorite? The number 13 on her jersey.

In pre-K, she had already memorized her times tables. In grade school, she used an abacus. In high school, she visited the New York Stock Exchange to watch her father's company ring the opening bell—and that clinched her college plans. She decided to study math and finance at the Zicklin School of Business, from which both of her parents—**Kris** (MBA '01) and **Gail** (MBA '00)—had graduated.

An avid soccer player, she played the field for all four years at Hunter College High School to prepare for college tryouts. When accepted to Baruch College, she assumed she would try out for the women's team.

But there was one small catch: Baruch doesn't have a women's soccer team.

Other CUNY schools offered her the chance to play on their teams, but as a Macaulay Honors student, she'd already been accepted into the Zicklin School as a freshman and didn't want to transfer out of the most prestigious business school in the system. So she set out to convince the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) that she should be allowed to try out for the men's team.

"I was sent the bylaws stating that I couldn't play on the Baruch men's team," Monaco says. "But soccer was my main passion in high school, and I didn't want to give up on it because of some rule that didn't make sense to me."

After hours of research, she drew from her internship experience at a corporate litigation firm to send back a list of bylaws about how women could join a men's team.

It worked. With support from the NCAA, Ava sent her highlight reel to the men's soccer coach and showed up for the 6:00 a.m. tryouts on Randall's Island. Joining her were 50 other prospects—all men. After training for two-and-a-half hours every morning for the next week, the coach selected the final team—and Monaco made the cut.

Since joining the team as center back, Monaco has felt welcome by both the team and the head coach.

"No one cares—in a good way. They all just want to play soccer."



FROM JAPAN TO BARUCH

Alumni and friends explored Japanese culture at this year's global forum, hosted by the Office of Alumni Relations and Volunteer Engagement and the Weissman Center for International Business. Ambassador and Consul General of Japan in New York, Satoshi Katahira, delivered a keynote address, followed by a panel discussion focused on how Japan's cultural exports have impacted its economy. Speakers included Dr. Mimi Okabe, **Yoshimi Muto** (MS '91), Megumi Sato-Shelly, and Dr. Shyamala Sethuram.



RECORD-BREAKING NIGHT

This year's Bernard Baruch Dinner raised \$1.96 million for the Baruch College Fund (BCF), making it the highest-grossing dinner in the College's history. With more than 430 guests in attendance—including alumni, donors, and friends—the evening raised money to support financial aid, emergency grants, technology assistance, career services, and faculty initiatives.

The evening's honorees were Professor James Gatheral of the Master of Financial Engineering program (second from right) and Baruch alumnus **Dov Schlein** ('70, MBA '75) (second from left), pictured with Baruch College President S. David Wu and BCF President **Luz Liebeskind** ('85, EMS '08).

An additional \$663,800 was raised at the event to support student participation in the Washington Semester program, unlocking generous matching gifts from BCF trustees **Austin Marxe** ('65) and Buzzy Geduld.



CLASS NOTES

WE WELCOME YOUR SUBMISSIONS! Please email us at alumni@baruch.cuny.edu

'50s *Our Town* profiled **Irwin Engelman** ('55, LLD Hon '00) and his wife Rosalyn ahead of the 70th anniversary of their marriage on November 24, 1956.

'60s *The Wall Street Journal* profiled **Allen Grubman** ('62) about his successful career as an entertainment lawyer. The Federal Bar Council honored **Max Berger** ('68, LLD Hon'19) with

the Whitney North Seymour Award for "outstanding public service by a private practitioner" in February 2026.

'70s Volato Group, Inc. appointed **Alan D. Gaines** ('76) to its board of directors. **Salvatore Napolitano** ('78) published the personal column, "What Veterans Day Means To Me" for Adelphi University. **Nicole Yarling** ('78) performed as a featured violinist

and vocalist for the Gold Coast Jazz Society at the Pompano Beach Cultural Center in Florida.

'80s **Frank A. Oswald** ('83) was profiled for the January 2026 "Checking In" column in *Practical Law: The Journal*. **Andrea Pfenning** ('84) was appointed to the board of directors for South Street Securities Holdings, Inc. *Crain's New York Business* recognized **Helene R**

LIVING LEGACIES: MEET BARUCH'S OLDEST ALUMNI

Last issue, we put out a call searching for Baruch's oldest living graduate—and we were thrilled to receive so many submissions! Read the stories of our two oldest alumni and check out the full list below.

HILDA LIPTON-JAFFE ('42), 103

Hilda Lipton-Jaffe is a lifelong community activist. She served on the League of Women Voters and the Verona, NJ school board, and later worked for the New Jersey School Board Association. As a Baruch graduate during World War II, she volunteered as both a nurse's aide and a price-control inspector.

Today, Lipton-Jaffe is an exhibit tour guide at the New York Public Library, is active in her synagogue community, and travels worldwide to see her two children, five grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

SIDNEY SACHS ('49), 102

Sidney Sachs, a World War II veteran, pivoted his studies from civil engineering to accounting following his service. After decades as a public accountant, he retired as an in-house chief accountant. Sachs is an avid movie, music, New York Mets, and theater fan.

A lifelong Broadway playbill collector, Sachs also enjoys taking the stage himself, including at his building's talent show. He has three children, six grandchildren (three of whom are married), and four great-grandchildren.



Photo by The Washington Post



RECOGNIZING OUR MOST SENIOR ALUMNI SUBMISSIONS:

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TRIVIA PURSUIT: ALUMNA SCORES BIG ON JEOPARDY!

BY MOLLY
TURNER

The night before competing on *Jeopardy!*, **Allegra Kuney** ('16) anxiously steamed the range of clothes she'd packed. *Jeopardy!* films five episodes per day, so, if Kuney progressed, she would need a new outfit to film her next game.

Not only did Kuney win her first game—she won *five* games in a row before ultimately advancing to the 2026 Tournament of Champions semifinals.

“It’s really fun to play *Jeopardy!* Once I won the first game, I was thrilled,” she says. “Everything after that was more and more thrilling. By the time I got to the end of the day, I was like, *What on earth just happened?*”

Like many other contestants, Kuney grew up a fan of *Jeopardy!*, even having auditioned when she was a child. As an adult, she casually took the screening test three times.

In 2025, Kuney progressed through the next stages and was accepted to the contestant pool. While it can take up to two years before accepted contestants are officially invited to film, for Kuney, it all took less than three months.

She had about six weeks to fill any gaps in her knowledge and sift through the countless online tips from previous *Jeopardy!* contestants. Navigating the time management of *Jeopardy!* prep was a challenge for Kuney, who is also a full-time doctoral student in media studies.

What ended up working for Kuney was watching *Jeopardy!* and playing along at home, keeping track of her score, and using a clicky pen to get a feel for buzzing in.

In September 2025, Kuney traveled with her mother to Los Angeles for *Jeopardy!* She arrived bright and early before meeting the other contestants, going through hair and makeup, rehearsing in practice games on stage, and eating lunch in the Sony commissary. At last, it was time to play.

Kuney describes her first run of games as a surreal whirlwind. She filmed three games on her first day and returned the next day to film two more.

“It’s exhausting, and it goes by in the blink of an eye,” she shares.

Throughout the course of her gameplay, Kuney won nearly \$100,000



and fulfilled a lifelong dream. She also made new friends with her fellow players and even attended different watch parties hosted by her Tournament of Champions competitors, Scott Riccardi and Paolo Pasco.

“It’s very validating to know that all my years of browsing Wikipedia and amassing quote-unquote ‘useless’ trivia actually paid off in this really nice and really rewarding way.”

Banks ('85) as one of their notable women in law for 2026. Tao Synergies Inc appointed **Bruce Bernstein** ('86) as vice chairman of its board of directors. Tradeweb appointed **Sandra Buchanan** ('86) as chief people officer. **Jacky Wright** ('86) was appointed to the boards of directors at GraceKennedy Limited and BD. **Gregory Jaenicke** ('87) retired after 38 years in education. **Nicolas Chicorikas** ('88) is the vice president, compliance officer, and community reinvestment officer and

assistant secretary at Rhinebeck Bank in Kingston, New York. **Tonomey Coleman** ('89) is a confirmed associate justice for Massachusetts District Court 1. **Ruth Demetriou** ('89) recently celebrated thirty years of her successful real estate career.

'90s Anthoula Katsimatides ('93) was profiled on her life and career for *NaijaNews.com*. Upwork Inc. appointed **Sabrina Mekhalfa** (MBA '93) as chief accounting officer and principal

accounting officer. *Forbes.com* named **Lara Abrash** (MBA '94) one of America's top 200 CPAs for 2025. *CPA Practice Advisor* also recognized Abrash as one of the most powerful women in accounting for the year. *Madison 365* named **Erlise Ward** ('94) one of “Wisconsin's 32 Most Influential Black Leaders for 2025.” Apollomics Inc. appointed **Yi-An Chu** (MBA '95) to its board of directors. Navan appointed **Shai Weiss** ('95) to its board of directors. **Ling Yin** (MBA '96) was profiled about

TAKING THE HELM OF NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY ERIN MCLAUGHLIN (MA '23)



Kamar Samuels ('99, MEd '20) is one of the most influential leaders in education after having been appointed Chancellor of New York City Public Schools (NYCPS)—the largest school system in the nation—earlier this year. But his career trajectory wasn't straightforward and, in a distinctly Baruch fashion, took him on a detour through corporate America.

His love for teaching first emerged as a tutor for students with disabilities at Bronx Community College, but before beginning his career in education, he earned his bachelor's in accounting from Baruch and soon after worked as a finance manager for the NBA.

Despite working in a corporate setting, he couldn't shake his daydreams of becoming a teacher and decided to earn an M.S. in childhood education from Lehman College and yet another M.S., this time in educational leadership, from Baruch.

Samuels went on to serve as a teacher, principal, and other administrative roles with NYCPS over the next two decades. He gives kudos to Baruch for boosting his business acumen.

"The accounting and data skills that I learned at Baruch translated directly into education," says Samuels. "I was strong at analyzing student data and thinking deeply about how kids learn math. Eventually, my principal asked me to serve as the school's business manager, which helped me refine my budgeting and operational skills."

Samuels believes that equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive.

"We can affirm every student for who they are while holding them to high expectations," he explains. "When we think about culturally responsive teaching, integration, and robust enrollment, we should also be thinking about academic rigor, Public schools must be engines for social

mobility, similar to what Baruch and other CUNY institutions represent."

As chancellor, Samuels plans to implement continued rigorous coursework, multidisciplinary learning, safety, and compassion.

"If we build empathy and the ability to engage across differences, we're preparing students not just academically, but as citizens," Samuels says. "Schools must be safe—physically, emotionally, and socially. Safety also means students' voices are heard. It means they have trusted adults in the building and meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making."

her career in *Grit Daily*. **Richard Souto** (MBA '97) was elected to the Village Board in New Paltz, New York. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Jennifer Rosa** ('98) for excellence in technology. **Noris Perez** ('99) was profiled about her career as a physical therapist for *America's Best in Medicine*.

'00s **Alex David** ('00), president and CEO of Equity Services, Inc., was honored as one of the Top Black Industry Leaders for WSR's 2026 Pathfinder Awards recognizing excellence in wealth management. **Edwin Pieters** (MPA '00) joined the Federation for

American Immigration Reform as of counsel. **Marcin Urbaszek** ('00) is the chief financial Officer, treasurer, and assistant secretary at Blackstone Mortgage Trust, Inc. **Dave Hollander** ('01) is a partner at PKF O'Connor Davies. **Alina Moran** (MPA '01) is the chief executive officer of NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst. Franklin BSP Capital Corporation named **Jamie Smith** ('01) as chief operating officer. **Mosharraf Ali Zaidi** (MPA '01) is the spokesperson for foreign media for the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Cornell University profiled **John Hui** ('02) and his entrepreneurial career for the Startup Cornell podcast. **Todd McGarity** (EMBA '03) is senior vice

president of business development, book services at Lakeside Book Company. **Marcos Mendell** ('03) is a partner at Beghou. **Dave Cuddihy** (MFE '04) is managing director at AQR, the famed CT quant fund. **Lola Ogunremi** ('04) is the chief financial officer for the City of Amarillo. **Ben Shuldiner** (MEd '04) is superintendent of Seattle Public Schools. **Demetra Varsami** ('04) is the Greek afternoon program principal at the Archangel Michael Greek Language Institute. **Wayland Lum** (MBA '05) is managing director at FMG Leading. *Geek Wire* profiled **Jonathan Pan** ('05) about his experience as a veteran and cofounder

FROM COLOMBIA TO KUWAIT TO CUNY

BY SARA J. WELCH

Army veteran **Seijun Hara** ('24) credits divine intervention with her military career.

The daughter of a Venezuelan mother and a Japanese-Venezuelan father, Hara arrived in New York as a teenager when her mother received political asylum. Hara was given temporary residency but couldn't extend it because she'd been born in Colombia, not Venezuela.

"Our lawyer said that my chances of getting permanent status were slim to none," Hara recalls. "I prayed to God for an opportunity to stay in the States."

One morning on her way to classes at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Hara saw a U.S. Army recruiting table. She told them her story, and they said that they could help her pay for college and become a U.S. citizen.

Upon accepting the offer, Hara rose rapidly through the ranks. By age 22, she'd transferred to Baruch and was an economics major in the Zicklin School of Business and also in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). Then COVID happened. Her uncle, who was her father figure, and her mother died.

The shock and grief nearly broke her. She dropped out of ROTC, making her eligible for deployment, and she soon received orders to report to the Middle East. She considered refusing due to emotional hardship, but her captain convinced her to accept the challenge the universe had offered her.



During her tour of duty based in Kuwait, Hara oversaw a section for a cargo transportation company that moved food, water, and other essentials to Kuwait, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Her on-the-ground experience in operations management, plus the Zicklin School classes she continued taking remotely, boosted her resume "200 percent."

Today she's a foreign exchange sales analyst working in the Americas division of Sumimoto Mitsui Banking Corporation, a Japanese multinational bank. She serves customers in Latin America, where her Spanish and Japanese language skills come in handy.

"I'm doing deals for a Japanese bank with Latin American customers—it's the perfect blend," she says. "My customers ask questions about the economy, so I do a lot of reading and critical thinking. I like it a lot."

and CEO of Exia Labs, a startup building AI software to improve military wargaming training. **Perry Sham** ('05) is chief financial officer at NFMCC. **Thomas Davenport** (MPA '06) was profiled about his career in *The Charlotte Post*. **Priyanka Mahajan** (MBA '06) is managing director, investment banking at E.F. Hutton & Co. **Ainsley Goulbourne** (MS '07, MS '12) is the vice president for finance and administration and chief financial officer at Southwestern University. **Monique Francis** (MSEd '08) was named one of the 50 Under 50 CUNY alumni for 2025. The American Bankruptcy Institute selected **Andriana Georgallas** ('08) as one of their "40 Under 40" top insolvency industry professionals for 2025. *Crain's New York Business* also recognized Georgallas as one of their notable women in law for 2026. **Luke S. Bassis** (MBA '09) has been appointed chief procurement officer at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. He also serves on and co-chairs committees for the American Bar Association and Hispanic National Bar Association. Tax Workout Group, P.A. promoted **Ramon-Shane Johnson** ('09, MS '18) to principal. Johnson will also lead the firm's tax compliance group. The New York City Department of Design and Construction appointed **Nathan Toth** (EMPA '09) as its new chief financial officer. **Lewis Tse** ('09) is a managing director and head of the US asset-backed finance at Alvarez & Marsal.

'10s The Black Fashion World Foundation appointed **Maryanne J. Ravenel** ('10, MA '13) to its board of directors. The International Association of Top Professionals honored **Anand Wong** (EMS '10) as the Top HR Leader of the Year for 2025 for his outstanding leadership, dedication, and commitment to the industry. Farrell Fritz promoted **Viktoriya Liberchuk** ('11) to partner. **Lidia Bernik** (MBA '12) is president of curation solutions at MRO. **Miranda Gonzalez** ('12) is

a family medicine physician and hospitalist at St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse, New York. Syracuse University profiled **Jaclinn Tanney** (MPA '12) for her advocacy work and for donating 4 million meals to food-insecure populations in New York City. **Jonathan Batista** (MBA '13) is chief financial officer at Rockland Community College. **David Hersein** (MFE '13) is managing director and head of country risk at Morgan Stanley. **Peter Zehren** (EMPA '13) was named executive director of the Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum in Wisconsin. *Crain's New York Business* named **Leonardo Bodden** (EMBA '15) as one of their "Notable Leaders in Health Care Technology 2025." **Yamil Burgos** ('15) was featured in *The New York Times*' column "The Hunt" about searching for an apartment to buy in Queens. **Ed Herrera** (EMBA '15) is the chief operating officer at REFORM Alliance, where he leads with a people-first approach to foster innovation and operational excellence. **Martsina**

Pilchuk ('15) was promoted to vice president at Harvest Partners, LP. **Diana Arias** ('16) was named one of the 50 Under 50 CUNY alumni for 2025. *Fort Worth Report* profiled **Joaquin Castillo** (MPA '16) about his career as a veteran in public service. **Sanjit Gill** ('16) was promoted to managing director at MacKay Shields LLC. *Marquis Who's Who* recognized **Zihui Cathy Huang** (MS '16) for expertise in real estate. **Juan Carlos Nordelo** (MPA '16) is chief of staff for the acting New Jersey Transportation Commissioner, Priya Jain. **Jason Shaltiel** ('16) is a senior associate specializing in leasing and sales for business properties at CBRE in Tucson, Arizona. **Aamer Alam** ('17) joined The College Board's GenAI Studio to implement workforce enablement AI solutions. **Jacob Gaupman** ('17) joined Draper and Kramer, Incorporated's commercial finance group as a producer. **Christine Fong** ('18) is a senior vice president and investment counselor at Citi. The Staten Island branch

of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People elected **Nicole Meyers** (EMPA '18) as its new president. **Melinda Fagan** (EMS '19) is the chief human resources executive at Ascension Wisconsin. **M. Mero** was recently promoted to director of special initiatives at the Queens Economic Development Corporation. **Aliou Sidibe** ('19, MS '20) was named one of the 50 Under 50 CUNY alumni for 2025. **Rommel Ojeda** ('19) was the alumni speaker for the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism CUNY commencement ceremony on December 19, 2025.

'20s **Jessica Baker Vodoor** (MPA '20) was a panelist for SILive.com's "Conversations with Community Giants: Women Leaders Driving Equity and Impact" event in October 2025. **Mukesh Pant** (MFE '20) was promoted to managing director at Goldman Sachs. **Stephanie Nuesi** ('21) was named one of the 50 Under 50 CUNY alumni for 2025. **Schiro Withanachchi** (DBA '22) is the



Hermanoschy Bernard ('19) and **Lauren Farrugia** ('23) first crossed paths as Lexington League members and admissions ambassadors at Baruch. After five years together, they said "I do" in December 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand.



Ruth Grogan ('17, MS '18) never crossed paths with **Jonathan Grogan** ('18) on campus, but they met while working together at a financial institution. In 2025, they got married and co-founded Juth Investment Advisory (using a business plan that they'd drafted in the Newman Library).



Alana Visconti (MA '23), Director of digital marketing and corporate communications at NASDAQ, married Ian Lowery, vice president of search strategy at CitiBank. They also just welcomed a Baby Bearcat, Benji!

LOFTY GOALS

BY SALLY FAY

For **Bettina Garibaldi** ('04), soccer is more than just a game; it's a part of her identity as a native Argentinian—and the embodiment of the best of the human experience.

“Argentina won the World Cup in 1986, when I was young, and then spent the next three and a half decades breaking hearts,” she says. “But there was always that perseverance, that unwillingness to stop believing.”

So when Argentina finally won the quadrennial event again in 2022, “the entire country erupted. It was the kind of collective joy that transcends sport.”

This year's World Cup competition—the first ever to be hosted across three nations (Canada, Mexico, and the United States)—is even more momentous for Garibaldi. Since November 2024, she's served as chief marketing and communications officer for the FIFA World Cup 26™ New York New Jersey Host Committee, leading efforts to promote the competition and related events in both states (*logo courtesy of FIFA World Cup 26 NYNJ Host Committee*).

A marcom professional for about 20 years, Garibaldi says that the internships she landed while pursuing her BBA in marketing management at Baruch—in the PR



department of Walt Disney Productions in NYC and integrated marketing at MTV Networks—paved her way into the industry. After graduation, she briefly joined a global PR firm, then did consulting work while earning a master's degree from NYU. Her graduate school internship at Ketchum led to a 14-year career there, culminating in her role as executive vice president and managing director of the travel, hospitality, and leisure practice. She left Ketchum in 2024 to focus on her own consulting practice, Bertek LLC, which she'd originally formed in 2016.

Her position with the host committee is something of a full-circle moment; she worked on two previous World Cups, Brazil 2014 and Qatar 2022, while at Ketchum.

One of 11 U.S. operational host committees, the New York New Jersey Host Committee operates within a complex ecosystem that includes FIFA (the sport's global governing body), city and state governments, agencies, tourism boards, sponsors,



and hundreds of partners across both states. It has responsibility for logistics, security, transportation, and fan experiences related to the eight World Cup matches at MetLife Stadium, including the World Cup Final on July 19.

“Our job is to make sure the New York New Jersey region delivers a tournament experience for both visitors and local communities that reflects our global energy and diversity,” says Garibaldi.

Regarding her personal tournament hopes, Garibaldi puts diplomatic neutrality aside. “As an Argentine-American, it's Argentina and the United States, full stop.”

No matter the ultimate outcome, she says, “Ideally, I'd love to see a few unforgettable moments happen right here in the New York-New Jersey region.”

associate dean of undergraduate programs and a professor of professional practice at Rutgers University – Camden. **Yanchen Lama** ('23), **Julia Vigay** ('23), **Divine Adeniyi** ('24), **Liam Cooper** ('25), and

Demaliyah McDaniel ('25) were awarded the prestigious School of Professional Studies (SPS) CUNY Fellowship at Columbia University. These accomplished Baruch graduates represented more than 80

percent of the 2025–2026 SPS CUNY Fellowship cohort. **Gennadii Turutin** (MS '25) was profiled about his career in *Financial Tech Times*.

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ARTHUR S. AINSBERG (1947 - 2026)

The Baruch College community mourns the loss of **Arthur S. Ainsberg** ('68, MBA '72). A trustee of the Baruch College Fund from 1995 to 2011, he was a dedicated member of its Audit Committee. He co-founded Baruch's entrepreneurship competition and generously mentored students for many years.

Arthur was a prominent financial services executive, scholar, speaker, author, and world traveler. He visited every continent, every U.S. state, and every baseball stadium and presidential museum in America.



Arthur was a longtime member of the 17 Lex and Benchmark Societies and a steadfast supporter of his alma mater. To support the Arthur Ainsberg '68 Memorial Scholarship, scan the QR code or visit www.givecampus.com/s/1br2ma



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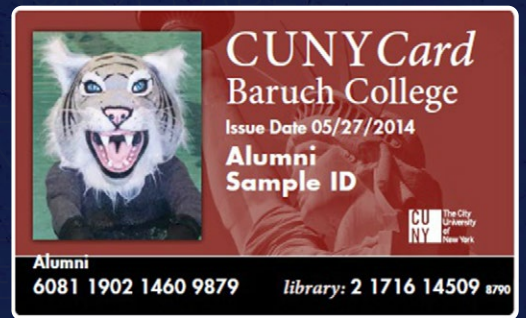
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