



The background of the entire page is a photograph. The top half is a clear, bright blue sky. The bottom half is filled with the dense, green foliage of trees. In the lower right corner, the dark grey roof and a small portion of a building with white-trimmed windows are visible, partially obscured by the trees.

GREAT GRADS 2017

Meet some of the remarkable young men and women in The City College of New York Class of 2017. The students chosen for this year's Great Grads excel in the classroom, have personal stories that inspire us, and illustrate the transformative power of the City Experience. They were nominated by their professors and represent all schools and divisions of the college.

Among them are graduates poised to make great contributions to fields as varied as quantum mechanics and immigration law, adults returning to college to start new careers, and an astrophysicist who is the first of her siblings to attend college and is now the Class of 2017 Valedictorian.

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"Hearing stories of how other victims overcame their attacks gave me the strength to overcome my own. This is when my activism began."

Troy Blackwell, Jr.

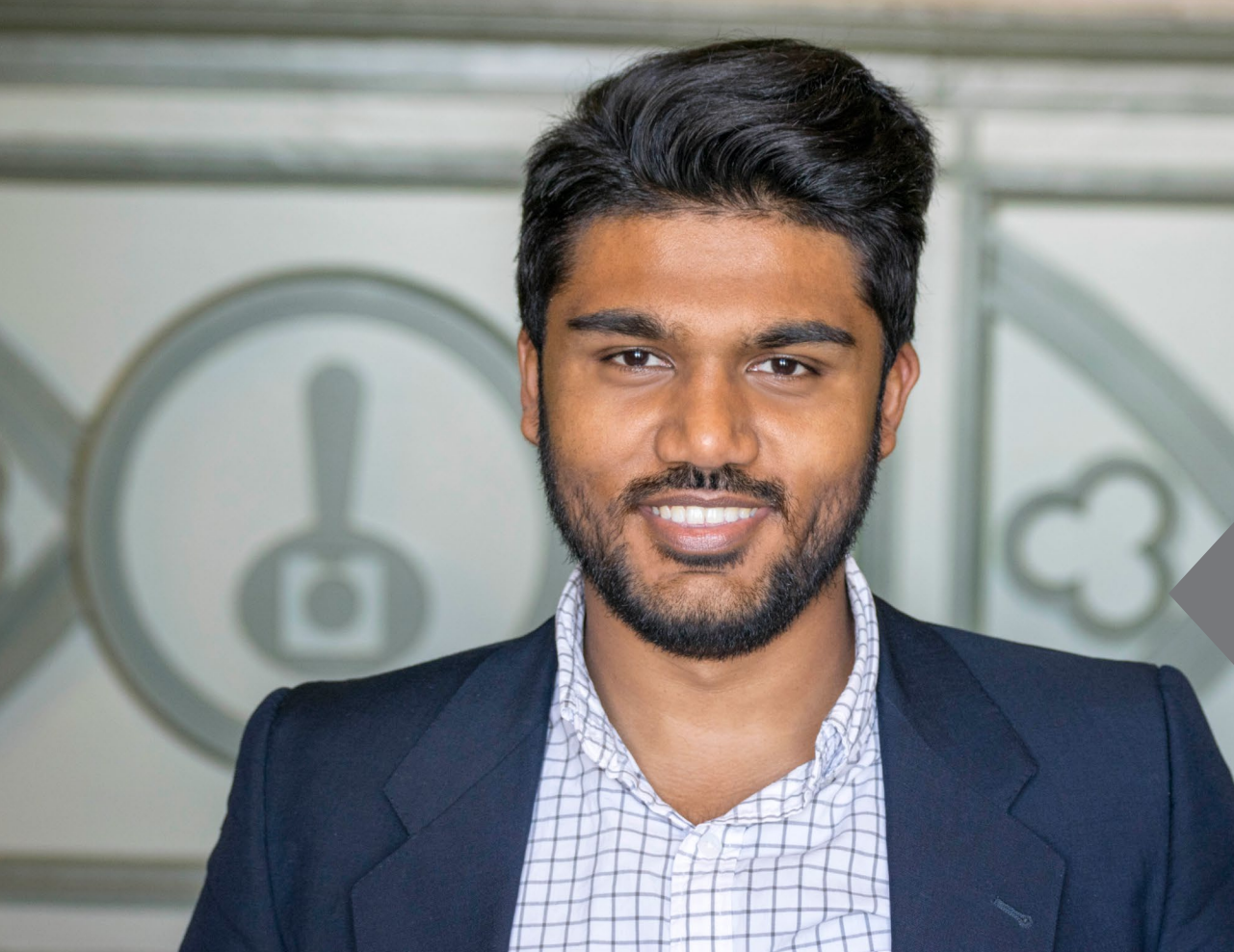
BA, Ad/PR, **Division of Humanities and the Arts**

BS, Political Science, **Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership**

Troy Blackwell's remarkable ability to turn adversity into a catalyst for change is one of his greatest attributes as he leaves City College as an outstanding member of the Class of 2017. The Ad/PR and political science double major spent the last months of the Obama administration in Washington, DC, as a White House intern. It was the pinnacle of an undergraduate career filled with awards and accolades such as the Gilman Scholarship and public service fellowships from the Colin Powell School and Judy and Josh Weston program. It also marked a milestone in the activist path he'd embarked on after an unpleasant event years earlier when he was the victim of a hate crime. "Hearing stories of how other victims overcame their attacks gave me the strength to overcome my own. This is when my activism began," he recalls.

Blackwell volunteered for LGBT groups and credits CCNY, particularly his mentors in the Media & Communication Arts department, for enhancing his activism and teaching him to be a stronger communicator. That would ultimately lead him to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. In his application, he emphasized how a White House internship would not only help him, but also help his community and give a voice to millions who sometimes feel voiceless.

Post-CCNY, Blackwell plans a career in public service and advocacy.



"As a community service activist, I am always looking for ways to help people. My goals are to help students achieve their maximum proficiency in academics, work, and giving back to the community."

Safat Chowdhury

BE, Earth Systems and Environmental Engineering, **Grove School of Engineering**

Safat Chowdhury is passionate about service. In his 2013 freshman year, Chowdhury was selected to attend the CUNY Office of Special Programs, SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) and College Discovery Student Leadership Academy. He channeled what he learned into serving as the president of the SEEK Club and as a senator for the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), ultimately becoming USG president.

He served as a member of the Queens Community Board 4 and the New Visions Democratic Club. "As a community service activist, I am always looking for ways to help people," says Chowdhury. "My goals are to help students achieve their maximum proficiency in academics, work, and giving back to the community."

Chowdhury is a SEEK Scholar, a SEEK mentor, a member of Chi Alpha Epsilon National Honor Society, a member of the National Society of Leadership and Success and a member of the Muslim Students Association. He is the recipient of the Marian & Anthony Belli Outstanding Graduate of the Year award, Distinguished SEEK Mentor award, the Joseph Ma Memorial Award, and the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) Renee Gutman Scholarship for Leadership.

Interning for the Department of Environmental Protection for two summers, Chowdhury has also worked in a co-op program at Con Edison as an Engineer Aide.

Looking ahead, he would like to pursue an MBA.



"I am committed to working with other professionals to lower the infant mortality rate and prevent the sudden death of a newborn or infant, especially among racial and ethnic minority groups."

Autumn Hinds

BS, Biomedical Science, CUNY School of Medicine **Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program**

When Autumn Hinds was in 8th grade, she lost her one-year-old cousin to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Hinds knew then she wanted to work in the healthcare field with babies.

As a student at Leon M. Goldstein High School for the Sciences in Brooklyn, Hinds heard about the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education at City College, a BS/MD integrated program.

"I knew the bar was high for entrance to Sophie so I thought I would take it as a sign from God if I got in. And I did! It was not for me to second guess."

During her time at CCNY, Hinds conducted research on the risk factors for SIDS at St. Barnabas Hospital and Columbia University Medical Center, tutored fellow students in

molecular biology, and facilitated a narrative medicine workshop at the Northeast Group on Educational Affairs Annual Conference, a branch of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

She also fit in a theater minor, a course of study she believes helps her in absorbing and reacting to people's stories as a medical professional.

Hinds will complete her MD degree at SUNY Downstate, possibly with a pediatric specialty in neonatology.

"I am committed to working with other professionals to lower the infant mortality rate and prevent the sudden death of a newborn or infant, especially among racial and ethnic minority groups."



"SEEK gave me an opportunity to study at City College and to find out how much I like architecture."

Cheuk Kei Hui

B.Arch, Architecture, **Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture**

The first in his family to attend college, Hong Kong native Cheuk Kei Hui knew that life after high school would be a transformative experience—a chance to pursue his dream of architecture. At City College, the former ESL student credits SEEK for his acceptance into the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture.

"SEEK gave me an opportunity to study at City College and to find out how much I like architecture. At first, my parents were concerned about my major choice, but now they see that I'm successful and how architecture has changed me for the better," said the 22-year-old whose high school art teacher sparked his interest in architecture through pictures of the Guggenheim Museum.

In 2015, Hui got the opportunity to do research in Berlin, Germany, at top applied sciences university Beuth Hochschule für Technik, where he and his team came up with urban planning solutions for a growing population and climate changes in Berlin, winning first place. Among his many outstanding awards, he took top prize in the 2016 Annual NYC Student Masonry Design Competition.

After graduation this June, Hui hopes to return home to Hong Kong but plans to come back to New York City to get his architecture license.

"CCNY has given me the ability to achieve greatness and build a better future," he said.



"It was here at City College that I was challenged to create my own experience and persevere in my endeavors."

Elaine Johnson

2017 Salutatorian

BA, Psychology, **Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership**

Attending college in Manhattan was the last thing on Elaine Johnson's mind when she graduated from high school. "After 17 years, I thought I had experienced the extent of what living in Harlem had to offer. I was wrong," she says. "Not leaving was the best choice because it was here at City College that I was challenged to create my own experience and persevere in my endeavors."

In 2015, she received The Colin Powell and Jeannette K. Watson Fellowships, programs whose mission is to expand the vision and develop the potential of promising students. Watson provided internship opportunities (and wonderful memories) of dancing with geriatric patients to Bob Marley after being trained in milieu therapy. In her Colin Powell seminar, Johnson developed a strong passion for youth development.

Johnson is graduating as Class of 2017 Salutatorian and as Valedictorian of the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership. These accolades are a reward for the SEEK standout's excellence in CCNY's Psychology Honors Program. Johnson completed her BA degree with a 3.9 GPA and will be receiving the Bernard R. Ackerman and Outstanding SEEK Graduate of the Year Awards.

After graduation, Johnson will attend the University of Cambridge in England for research on the development of resilience in youth. She then plans to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology.



"I realized I was very lucky to be accepted to City College so I took advantage of everything the school had to offer in terms of learning and experience."

Lukas Lindwasser

BS, Physics and Math, **Division of Sciences**

School was never a priority for Lukas Lindwasser growing up in New York City, but when his family relocated upstate in his sophomore year of high school, he decided it was time for a change. "I didn't like failing and having to show my parents poor grades."

Part of the transformation involved an outstanding physics teacher. Lindwasser applied to CCNY. "I realized I was very lucky to be accepted to City College so I took advantage of everything the school had to offer in terms of learning and experience."

With a plan to pursue theoretical physics, Lindwasser's family thought he might be over his head after the challenging early days in school. Undaunted, he researched numerical approximations to quantum mechanics which became his thesis project, and "enjoyed every moment." Lindwasser also

founded the Advanced Physics Tutoring Center, tutoring students in subjects like quantum and statistical mechanics. Lindwasser worked extensively in CCNY's Institute for Ultrafast Spectroscopy and Lasers focusing on potential uses of near-infrared spectroscopy on biological tissue for the detection of cancer growths.

At CCNY, Lindwasser received numerous honors including the City College Fellowship, the Rich Scholarship, the Martin A. Tiersten Award in physics, the Dr. Jerry A. Gelbwachs scholarship, and the Ward Medal for students with the highest GPA in physics.

Lindwasser will attend UCLA in September to pursue a PhD in theoretical physics.



"When I saw the campus, I thought, wow, this is a really nice school. I immediately fell in love with CCNY."

Reginald Onyema

BS, Biology, **Division of Science**

Reginald Onyema completed high school in Nigeria before emigrating to the U.S. to attend college in Indiana. When he traveled to New York City to visit his brother's Hamilton Heights neighborhood, he spotted the CCNY buildings. Onyema quickly felt connected to the city vibe and the warmth of the student community. "When I saw the campus, I thought, wow, this is a really nice school. I immediately fell in love with CCNY."

During his time at CCNY, Onyema has been active on campus in CCAPP, the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) that supports talented underrepresented students pursuing STEM and health-related fields. He also worked as a peer mentor and tutor for the Division of Science.

Onyema led the Peer Health Exchange at City College, recruiting and training 50 college volunteers to teach weekly health workshops in public high schools lacking comprehensive health curricula.

Drawn to veterinary medicine, Onyema worked extensively as a volunteer and intern in animal hospitals and even the Bronx Zoo. "I was amazed by the impact you can have in such a short time. If an animal is sick or injured, in just a couple of days there can be a strong transformation to happy, cheerful, and playful."

He graduates with a bachelor's degree in biology with honors and will attend Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine in the fall.



"As an English Language Learner, I have seen how responsive newly arrived immigrant students become when there is a teacher who shows empathy and patience."

Liliana Russi Calderón

BS, Bilingual Childhood Education, **School of Education**
BA, Romance Languages, **Division of Humanities and the Arts**

Liliana Russi Calderón came to the US from Colombia without speaking any English. "I didn't like English but I learned to like it. I went into a monolingual teaching program with eight other students from Colombia so I didn't feel like a stranger."

From her own experience, Russi Calderón learned that knowledge can be transferred. What she learned in English, she already knew in Spanish.

"As an English Language Learner, I am familiar with the struggle of learning a new language and how crucial it is to have a teacher that supports and understands you. I have seen how responsive newly arrived immigrant students become when there is a teacher who shows empathy and patience."

At CCNY, Russi Calderón has received the Ward Medal, the Downer Award, and the Hecht Scholarship for Academic Excellence and Community Service.

As a student teacher, Russi Calderón has already put her teaching techniques to work and following graduation, she will teach in English and Spanish in a dual language program in a New York City public school and pursue her master's in Special Education.

With a master's degree, and eventually a doctorate, Russi Calderón plans to help a diverse population of students succeed, with different language acquisition strategies and a deeper understanding of how their needs can be addressed.



"Getting to meet and talk to Dr. Henry Kissinger certainly tops my list of unique events experienced at City College."

Pascal Santschi

BA, Economics, **Colin Powell School of Civic and Global Leadership**

Pascal Santschi grew up with dyslexia and was tracked for vocational school as a teenager. Following a decade working as an electrician in Switzerland, he wanted a more formal education.

A green card allowed him to come to New York where he continued working as an electrician and welder. He met his wife, a CCNY alum, who urged him to apply.

Santschi, the first in his family to graduate from college, completed his economics degree in three years with a GPA of 3.98. "I have been introduced to so many new concepts and ways of thinking that my perspective on the world has changed. I have become well-rounded and impartial, and more engaged in the world than before."

Santschi was one of six students invited to meet with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to discuss the state of the world. Arranged by Colin Powell School's then-Dean Vincent Boudreau, "We talked about the U.S. presidential election before it happened and he was talking about Egypt's political stability, as well as the Vietnam War. Getting to meet and talk with Dr. Henry Kissinger certainly tops my list of unique events experienced at City College."

Santschi's honors thesis revolves around urban economics, considering the economic determinants of crime rate changes in Chicago. "As an economist and data analyst, I am interested in the social forces that impact wages, crime, and education."

He intends to pursue graduate studies in data analysis.



"I hoped to be an astrophysicist – I just wasn't sure how to accomplish that goal. CCNY provided both the support and the education to enable my dream."

Ellianna Schwab

2017 Valedictorian

BS, Physics, **Macaulay Honors College at CCNY**


Ellianna Schwab grew up in a strict orthodox tradition where the expectations for women did not always include a college education. Determined to attain one, Schwab found the encouragement at City College. "I hoped to be an astrophysicist—I just wasn't sure how to accomplish that goal. CCNY provided both the support and the education to enable my dream," she says.

The first of her siblings to attend college, Schwab is graduating from the Macaulay Honors College at CCNY with research honors in physics and a 3.9 GPA. She's also reaching for the stars. Her stellar work at City, culminating in a BS degree, has earned her acceptance to top-ranked astrophysics PhD programs, including Columbia University and UC Berkeley. Her academic honors include a Goldwater

Scholarship, awarded to the most promising research-bound students nationally in the STEM fields; and a coveted NSF Graduate Research Fellowship. The latter recognizes and supports exceptional students pursuing graduate-level research.

Schwab thanks her alma mater for preparing her brilliantly for the next step in her dream to become an astrophysicist. "Throughout my undergraduate career, my research has been supplemented and motivated by CCNY's rigorous coursework in theoretical physics," she says.

"Her future in physics and astronomy will be grand. She personifies the very mission of City College," sums up her mentor, CCNY physicist James Hedberg.

A portrait of Jennifer Stevenson, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a black blazer. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with green and white architectural elements.

“Through my work experience, I know a lot about housing and lending, and there are places where people definitely need advocacy.”

Jennifer Stevenson

BA, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (concentration in Public Administration)
Division for Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center for Worker Education

After a 26-year hiatus from any formal education, Jennifer Stevenson, a single mother of two, knew that she wanted more than her job as a bank lending officer. At the City College of New York’s Center for Worker Education (CWE), the 48-year-old defied conventions, graduating summa cum laude while still holding a full-time job.

“This was a complete game changer, and going back to a place where I had people in similar work situations and sometimes with similar struggles was key. Each professor was amazing, and there was something more than their just showing up for work,” said Stevenson about her time at CWE.

Stevenson also knew she wanted to attend law school, and

her interest flourished when she got accepted into the CCNY Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies where she became fascinated with how social policy works in New York City.

With a scholarship to Brooklyn Law School, Stevenson plans to focus on criminal defense or advocacy. She is also interested in juvenile justice, which stems from her own experience in a group home as a teenager.

“Through my work I know a lot about housing and lending, and there are places where people definitely need advocacy. Coming from a place where I was put in a group home, I met a lot of people who went in there and just never cycled out of it,” she said.



"CCNY has provided a space of not only diversity, but also a place where I feel included."

Yatziri Tovar

BS, Political Science, **Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership**

As co-founder and former president of The City College of New York's Dream Team, Yatziri Tovar made it her mission to advocate for undocumented students. A DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipient herself, Tovar, whose parents migrated from Mexico City to the U.S. in search of better opportunities when she was a baby, knows how important it is for undocumented students to have a safe-haven on the college campus.

"I started the CCNY Dream Team and created a safe space for undocumented students. I had the support of different faculty like our faculty advisor Professor Tatyana Kleyn—she's always been a key instrument for us," said Tovar.

Tovar embodies City College values—to welcome, protect

and celebrate all people—through her leadership and activism. A stellar speaker at campus rallies and beyond, the political science major is an active member of Make the Road New York, which builds the power of Latino and working class communities.

"CCNY has provided a space of not only diversity, but also a place where I feel included. Professors and faculty have always looked out for me; they have understood and supported me every step of the way," said Tovar.

Tovar will continue to educate, protect and advocate for her community after graduation and work for a non-profit organization. Long term she plans to pursue immigration law.



"I'd taken art classes in middle school and high school but it was here that I rediscovered my passion for art history."

Alexandra (Sasha) Whittaker

BA, Art History, Division of Humanities and the Arts

Art and painting are interests long ingrained in the DNA of Alexandra Whittaker's family. Her maternal great-great grandfather was the noted Imperial Russian painter Konstantin Nikolaevich Egorov (1883-1937).

Born in Bronxville, NY, to an American father and a Russian mother, Whittaker always had an inclination for art from childhood. But it was the cultural aspect of international studies that intrigued her by time she entered the Macaulay Honors College at CCNY as a freshman. Her discovery of CCNY's expansive art offering sparked a personal renaissance. "I'd taken art classes in middle school and high school but it was here that I rediscovered my passion for art history," says Whittaker. She would go on to develop

a special interest in the history of photography. A study abroad fellowship to Prague and Kraków deepened her interest in art and architecture from Central and Eastern Europe. Whittaker spent fall 2015 as a curatorial intern at the National Gallery in Prague.

The culmination of her academic success and passion is a Fulbright Study/Research Grant to Poland this fall. She will spend nine months at Adam Mickiewicz University (UAM) in Poznań researching post-World War II Polish photography, studying Polish and taking courses at the UAM Institute of Art History.

Whittaker plans a career as a museum curator, specializing in photography.



"I've enjoyed the opportunity at City College to work on something with a team of students and then put it into action."

Christopher Yang

BS, Computer Science, **Grove School of Engineering**

Technology, for example, video games, was something that was always available to me, but I had never really taken the time to understand how it actually worked," says Christopher Yang. "It was almost like magic. But now I finally understand how it all comes together."

Computer science major Yang has distinguished himself at CCNY winning the Zemansky Introductory Physics Prize, the CCNY Grove Scholarship and participating in National Science Foundation research.

One of Yang's research projects was Smart Cane, a robotic cane paired with mobile device software to help visually impaired people navigate indoor spaces like colleges and places of employment.

"The technology is designed to learn the area and improve the experience for the user, expanding employment and other

opportunities for visually impaired people," Yang explained.

Yang and his fellow students demonstrated the technology at the Albany state legislature to NYSID, which creates jobs for people with disabilities. The project won the NYSID CREATE award and was funded for \$1000. Another initiative involving crowd sourcing for assisting the visually impaired was accepted for presentation to the 2016 Emerging Researchers National Conference in STEM.

"I believe in persevering and working with people," Yang says. "I've enjoyed the opportunity at City College to work on something with a team of students and then put it into action."

After graduation, Yang will start at Bloomberg LP as a software developer.

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