




CCNY
GREAT
GRADS²⁰₁₈



The City College
of New York



Meet some of the remarkable women and men in The City College of New York Class of 2018. 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 CCNY mentors and represent all schools and divisions of the college.

Among them are graduates poised to make great contributions in fields as varied as biomedical engineering, Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), medicine and theatre. They are — and advocate for — asylum seekers; and a formerly homeless veteran is on the path to law school.

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Fatimah Barrie

BA, Political Science
Colin Powell School of Civic and Global Leadership
BA, Black Studies
Division of Humanities and the Arts

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"I've been granted the opportunity to be part of illustrious cohorts on campus such as S.E.E.D.S. and the 100 Black Women: Role Model Program."



Glenn Bell

MArch, Architecture
Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture

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"There's a very social conscious awareness here, and it's great because part of the danger of being an architect is that you can go without having that understanding and can ruin a neighborhood or the city."

After graduating with her associate's degree from Borough of Manhattan Community College, Harlem native Fatimah Barrie worked for five years to ensure she could pay for her bachelor's degree at The City College of New York. Her hard work and determination propelled her to the top—graduating Summa Cum Laude with a 3.9 GPA.

The Political Science and Black Studies double major attributes her success to her single mother for inspiring her throughout her college journey. "My mom has been a driving force pushing me and propelling me forward— she has her master's degree from Fordham University in social work," said Barrie.

Barrie was elected to the E-Board of The Roosevelt Institute at The City College of New York in 2017 as their secretary and has been involved in numerous clubs including The National Council of Negro Women, the CCNY Outdoors Club and the Debate Team. She serves as a mentor for

young girls of color residing in East Harlem and created a track and field team for an after school program at P.S. 106 in collaboration with the New York Road Runners: Mighty Milers Program.

"I've been granted the opportunity to be part of illustrious cohorts on campus such as The Student Empowerment Engagement Development Series (S.E.E.D.S.) and the 100 Black Women: Role Model Program," said the recent inductee of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. "I can recall the days former teachers told me I would not amount to much because of lack of interest, yet those doubts are what led me on this path to excellence."

After graduating, Barrie plans to take a year off to study for the LSATs while interning at a law firm or as a legal assistant. Her passion for teaching, civil rights law and education reform will help her make Black and ethnic studies a mandatory requirement for high school students before going on to college.

Raised by a single mother in Coney Island, Brooklyn, MArch I major Glenn Bell knew that he wanted more for himself and strived to make that happen at The City College of New York. His undergraduate studies in architectural technology gave him the opportunity to mentor his peers, and he set up workshops to help improve their digital skills as well as tutored them.

"I was in a neighborhood where I couldn't be a part of change. Change happened around me, but I had no involvement in it and that shaped me into getting into this field because I want to make a difference," said Bell, whose goal is to become an architectural innovator.

He completed his senior thesis focusing on "Reinventing Strategies for New York City Public Housing through a Socio-Political Lens." He and his partner wanted to elicit an ongoing discussion with residents and city officials to reimagine public housing and the green space that surrounds

them in hopes of forging more competent guidelines to yield a safe, efficient and quality lifestyle for its low-income residents.

"My experience with the professors here has been great; they've instilled in me the social responsibility aspect of architecture," said Bell. "There's a very social conscious awareness here, and it's great because part of the danger of being an architect is that you can go without having that understanding and can ruin a neighborhood or the city."

At City College, Bell received a Castagna Foundation scholarship which sent him to Barcelona, Spain to see how they have solved their infrastructural problems. His most recent success is landing a job with Practice for Architecture and Urbanism (PAU) where he'll be an Architectural Designer following a networking opportunity at the college's Sciamme Lecture Series.



Mark Campmier

BE, Earth Systems Sciences and
Environmental Engineering
Grove School of Engineering
Macaulay Honors College at CCNY

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"I learned one of the best lessons of my education: no matter how smart a technology is, it means nothing if users on the ground do not adapt it as their own."



Edwin Cho

BE, Mechanical Engineering
Grove School of Engineering
Macaulay Honors College at CCNY

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"Some students were just like me, some were nothing like me. There was no place on this campus where I didn't feel welcome."

The Macaulay Honors College student has always been interested in the sciences, but Mark Campmier wanted something interdisciplinary and applied. City College's interdisciplinary program in Earth Systems Sciences and Environmental Engineering allowed him to put together classes in engineering, architecture, and science, and to focus on urban environmental issues.

In addition to his classes, he was able to study urban wind patterns in the Optical Remote Sensing Lab, and research strategic solutions to create and save clean energy in the Building Performance Lab. Campmier's internship as a field ecologist for the Natural Areas Conservancy allowed him to collaborate with a diverse team of environmental scientists, engineers and ecologists to meet the challenges of restoring and conserving green and blue spaces in the City.

So many paths opened so many doors, but a discussion with his fellow students crystallized his ambition: he wants to make a difference in the lives of people around the world

by combating indoor air pollution. Through CCNY's Zahn Innovation Center, he and his team designed Rural Ignition—an affordable, clean cookstove that tackles the health, environmental and safety hazards faced by millions in developing nations, where "dirty" technologies cause more than two million premature deaths annually. Through the Macaulay Honors College, Campmier was able to put the cookstove to a real-world test in Sri Lanka.

"I learned one of the best lessons of my education: no matter how smart a technology is, it means nothing if users on the ground do not adapt it as their own," Campmier said. "I am determined to work to make a difference in the lives of people through clean energy."

Rural Ignition went on to win 2nd place in the 2016 Zahn Social Impact competition. Campmier completed his five-year engineering degree in four years with a 3.7 GPA, and will pursue his PhD in Environmental and Civil Engineering.

Edwin Cho graduates with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering from the Grove School of Engineering. The Macaulay Honors College 4-year Merit recipient has a 3.9 GPA.

In his work at City College, Cho focused on renewable energy grids using solar and wind technologies for island communities in the wake of Hurricane Maria. He researched advanced fluid mechanics and sustainable energy conversion when not working on advanced vector calculus.

"I wasn't just attending class to earn my degree," said Cho. "I was there to learn and develop a greater understanding of the world. My professors are brilliant people."

His experience during study abroad trips to Japan and China led Cho to want to explore the world before pursuing graduate school. "I was fascinated by people working on the

same problems globally but in different ways. As an engineer, it showed me there are multiple ways to approach and solve problems."

Unsure what kind of community he would discover at CCNY, Cho quickly became immersed in a diverse student body from all walks of life. "Some students were just like me, some were nothing like me. There was no place on this campus where I didn't feel welcome."

Cho has interned at an architectural firm, drawing and modelling conceptual designs of hydropower energy recovery systems. He is also an Assistant Scoutmaster with the Boy Scouts of America having come late to the organization as a scout in his teens, and eager to continue sharing outdoor adventure and commitment to community service with youngsters in Brooklyn.



Yasmine El Gheur

Class of 2018 Valedictorian
BA, Art History
Division of Humanities and the Arts

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"CCNY was my gateway to the world, lifelong friendships, and new perspectives."



John Kopyta

BA, Interdisciplinary Arts & Science
Division of Interdisciplinary Studies
at the Center for Worker Education

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"It's been a great experience. Without CWE it would have been very difficult to go back to school."

Yasmine El Gheur is not only the first member of her melting pot New York family to graduate from college, but she's also CCNY's Class of 2018 Valedictorian. Her story gets even better. Her academic success and the opportunities available at CCNY inspired her mother Kathryn to return to college. She is now a senior at CCNY majoring in international studies and studio art.

A first generation American from Park Slope, Brooklyn, El Gheur's father is a Moroccan immigrant and mom Kathryn of Colombian/Cuban/Irish-American heritage. El Gheur is graduating with a BA in art history and a 3.94 GPA. She received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, which is awarded to talented students from traditionally underrepresented groups to encourage them to pursue PhDs in the humanities and social sciences. She plans to earn a PhD and become an art historian of contemporary North African and Middle Eastern Art.

Among her other honors, the Downer Award for Study Abroad took her to Paris in summer 2016 to study at the Sorbonne. The next summer, she was in Rabat learning Moroccan Arabic. In addition, El Gheur was a City College Fellowship recipient, winner of the Therese Ralston Connor Award for Art History, and a CCNY Kaye Scholar. She interned at the Jewish Museum and The Frick Collection and participated in the CCNY-Stanford exchange program. It was at Stanford, in summer 2015, that she began her research on contemporary Moroccan photographers that would be a component of her Mellon Mays research project.

El Gheur's father, meanwhile, has been a big motivator in his daughter's academic journey. "He never had the opportunity to consider college for himself, but has been a constant source of encouragement, pushing the importance of a college degree," said El Gheur. "CCNY was my gateway to the world, lifelong friendships, and new perspectives."

He's a 55-year-old former Marine, 6-foot-four and graduating from the Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center for Worker Education (CWE) with a 4.0 GPA. If that doesn't sound compelling enough, there's more to John Kopyta's interesting life story that's about to take a new path, thanks to CWE.

The New Jersey native joined the Marine Corps in his teens, serving four years as a C-130 aircraft electrician at El Toro in California and in Okinawa. Honorably discharged in 1985, Kopyta enrolled in the University of South Florida. He left as a sophomore and worked in construction for the next 20 years before what he calls "the Recession" hit in 2008. Unemployed, he moved to New York and was hired stacking shelves in a grocery store. The loss of that job found him homeless and despondent.

Kopyta spent 11 months in the New York shelter system, but one shelter run by The Doe Fund gave him a fighting chance.

He completed their program "Ready, Willing and Able," and was hired as an education and occupational training associate. Enter CCNY's CWE, whose mission is to provide an excellent education to working adults. "The Doe Fund encouraged me to finish my education and the courses and times at CWE fit perfectly with my work schedule for adult students," said Kopyta. "It's been a great experience. Without CWE it would have been very difficult to go back to school – it's a great service that City College provides."

His degree opens up a pathway to law school. He plans a career in either legal aid or as an environmental lawyer. Kopyta's awards include induction into the Alpha Sigma Lambda and Phi Beta Kappa honor societies. He's also received recognition from Assemblymember Jaime Williams and Governor Cuomo for his community service.



Nancy Larcher

BA, Political Science
Colin Powell School of Civic and
Global Leadership
BA, History
Division of Humanities and the Arts
Macaulay Honors College at CCNY

“Everyone cares so much at City College where super bright students share a passion to make the world better.”



Brandon Latorre

BS/MS, Biology
Division of Science

“The biggest thing I’ll take away from City College is the diversity— it felt like I was exposed to a million different cultures, and I really love this institution for that.”

When Nancy Larcher was growing up in Jackson Heights, her teachers told her Brazilian immigrant parents not to teach her their native language Portuguese if they wanted her to learn how to speak English.

“I was so happy to take three years of Portuguese at City College and embrace that part of my background,” said Larcher, a Macaulay Honors College scholar who graduates as a double major in history and political science. “Everyone cares so much at City College— super bright students share a passion to make the world better, and wonderful professors connect in-class learning to real world action,” she said. “I am really grateful I spent my four years here.”

An active advocacy for the LGBTQ and immigrant communities earned Larcher a Partners for Change

fellowship. The one-year program for undergraduate students interested in developing applied research skills and working with community organizations led to an internship with Human Rights First, working closely with asylum seekers.

After graduation, Larcher will work on an oral history project with other CCNY students through the Clinton Global Initiative University program. Her ultimate goal is to serve the public through her research— either as an historian using oral history as a tool to integrate community organization with academic research, or as a civil rights attorney.

“Both my parents took ESL in the CUNY system, so they were thrilled that I would receive my education at City.”

Bronx native Brandon Latorre has always been a nature activist at heart since his mother instilled in him a belief that people should make an effort to preserve nature and improve the natural environment. With a BS/MS in Biology from The City College of New York, Latorre will continue his education at Michigan State University where he’ll pursue a PhD in habitat restoration.

Throughout his time at City College, Latorre participated in research on ecology and evolution as an Honors Research Student at City College and as an REU Student at Colby College in Maine. He also accompanied Biology Professor David Lohman on a fieldwork expedition to Southeast Asia to collect butterflies for genetic research.

“The biggest thing I’ll take away from City College is the diversity— it felt like I was exposed to a million different

cultures, and I really love this institution for that,” said Latorre, who also minored in Jewish studies and creative writing. “After communicating with people that I’d never met from completely different backgrounds, I grew extremely interested in their cultures.”

Although Latorre was ineligible for financial aid, he worked as a janitor to pay for college; and his acceptance into the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, the City College Academy for Professional Preparation, and numerous scholarships helped lighten the financial burden.

After earning his PhD, Latorre would like to work in academia as a professor doing research in restoration, for a non-profit conservancy to preserve natural environments, or at a government agency helping to restore habitats.



Claire Lynch

BA, Political Science
Colin Powell School of Civic and Global Leadership
BA, Jewish Studies
Division of Humanities and the Arts
Macaulay Honors College at CCNY

"CCNY has provided me avenues to so many different places that I never thought I would be able to access."

From the deserts of Morocco and Jordan, to the floors of Congress and the UN General Assembly, Claire Lynch has traveled widely on her academic journey. And she thanks City College. "CCNY has provided me avenues to so many different places that I never thought I would be able to access," said Lynch, listing internships and study trips that took her to North Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. and New York. There were Jewish studies class trips to Morocco— home of a large Jewish community— and Italy. A Catholic of Irish-American heritage, she pursued Arabic in Jordan for six weeks. Lynch also excelled in the United Nations General Assembly with one of the Colin Powell School's highly successful Model UN teams and interned for Senator Charles Schumer in D.C.

Yet the highlight of her CCNY experience, in her estimation, was an internship, as a Colin Powell Fellow, at the New

York-based Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect. The nonprofit's mission is genocide prevention. There Lynch attended briefings and meetings at the UN, addressing mass atrocities in central Africa. At one meeting, she met then UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon.

Along the way, Lynch, who's graduating with a 3.9 GPA, earned top honors for academic excellence. She's a Macaulay Goldsmith Scholar, a program that prepares students for graduate education. She was named a Truman Fellow in her junior year, joining a highly selective national program for future leaders in public service. Lynch's latest award, a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant grant, will take her to Madrid this fall for a year teaching in the Spanish capital's bilingual education system. An MA in international peace and security, and law school, are on the radar for the Bayville, Long Island, resident after that.



Irving Mota

MS, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
School of Education

"The faculty and administration at City College told me, 'You are at the right place. We've never dealt with this before but we will find a way, we will figure it out.'"

Irving Mota graduates with a master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the School of Education, having persevered in the face of governmental challenges and natural disasters.

In 2012, while completing a bachelor's at City College in bilingual childhood education with cum laude honors, Mota was unsure if he would be able to work as a teacher due to his undocumented status. "I went to speak to the department, to Professor Tatyana Kleyn, and opened up about being undocumented."

Professor Kleyn, along with the faculty and administration at CCNY, worked with Mota and gave him confidence. "They told me, 'You are at the right place. We've never dealt with this before but we will find a way, we will figure it out.' They knew I was passionate about teaching and that I wanted this."

Born in Mexico, Mota grew up in New York's Hudson Valley, undocumented and unsure of his future. But he didn't let that stop him from pursuing his dreams or eventually sharing his story in Dr. Kleyn's documentary, "Living Undocumented: High School, College and Beyond".

Fortunately, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was announced shortly after his 2012 graduation and Mota became a bilingual teacher at PS 75 in Manhattan.

In 2015, Mota moved to Puerto Rico with his husband and pursued his master's degree as an independent study under Professor Kleyn. He was on a Skype call for a class when Hurricane Maria hit and changed life for everyone. Nevertheless, he completed his studies and currently teaches first grade on the recovering island.



Seroosh Naeem

BS, Biomedical Sciences
CUNY School of Medicine

"So many languages and different cultural events—you can learn about so many different people."



Jin Won "Lucius" Seo

BA, Theatre
Division of Humanities and the Arts
Macaulay Honors College at CCNY

"I wanted to explore how miracles happen at CCNY."

Seroosh Naeem was at Yonkers High School when, in her quest to pursue a medical career, she felt the lure of the Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program. It was the campus' diversity that she was drawn to. "So many languages and different cultural events— you can learn about so many different people," she said. Her family had fled religious persecution in Pakistan when she was three because they were from a minor Islamic sect.

At CCNY, she passionately embraced diversity and this was reflected in her volunteerism— whether at the Bronx Muslim Community Center tutoring young people and empowering young women— or at the Best Friends Pet Adoption Center as a pet foster. On campus, her activities included sitting on the Student Life Activities Program Committee, and planning campus events for celebrations such as Black History Month and Hispanic History Month. In preparation for her medical studies, Naeem was a research assistant for

more than two years in Dr. John Martin's neuroscience lab. She studied brain and spinal cord injuries. Her interest in medicine was sparked by the death of her grandmother who'd remained in Pakistan. She died in 2012 of ovarian cancer. "I could not help but wonder how my grandmother's health would have been different if she lived with us in the United States. Her death still angers me. However, in that anger, I have found my purpose."

Naeem, who is graduating with a 4.0 GPA, will remain at CCNY as a member of the second cohort of the CUNY School of Medicine. Her interest is OB/GYN and she hopes to serve minority, underserved communities in the Bronx. Her undergraduate honors include the Sophie Davis Dean's Award for Academic Excellence, a Rudin Research Fellowship and membership in the National Society of Leadership and Success.

As a student at Townsend Harris High School in Queens, Jin Won "Lucius" Seo learned about Harris' role in founding the Free Academy of the City of New York, the original incarnation of City College. "It was mesmerizing to me that there could be a college that offered education to people who weren't ordinarily considered deserving," remembered Seo, who emigrated to the U.S. from South Korea as a child. "It's one thing to have greatness thrust upon you. But to experience a place where anyone can become great? I wanted to explore how miracles happen at CCNY."

Almost every step of his academic career involved happy accidents. When a music class he was enrolled in was canceled, he quickly picked up a basic theatre production and design class to fulfill the requirements for his Macaulay Honors College scholarship. "I was assigned wardrobe for 'Richard III'. When I received an email about the rehearsal

schedule, I showed up to the first one, not realizing my attendance wasn't required. The cast was surprised a crew member came to the rehearsal. But they welcomed me and I attended every one after that."

He has acted in, stage managed and directed productions at City College and managed the CCNY Theatre Club. Last summer, he earned a fellowship at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. "It's the community that I love in theatre," said Seo. "Theatre is a people business and I enjoy making art together."

Seo will be the costume designer for an off-Broadway musical this summer and has offers in theatre education and stage managing as well. He plans to discover the area of theatre he will ultimately concentrate on before he applies to graduate school next year. "The education I received here is phenomenal."



Luz Maria Valdiviezo

BE, Chemical Engineering
Grove School of Engineering

"I was surprised to see how driven students are to succeed at CCNY and how willing they are to go out of their way to help incoming college students accomplish their goals, too."

Born in Mexico, Luz Maria Valdiviezo came to New York City as an infant with her parents. From the beginning, her intellectual gifts and exceptional work ethic made her stand out in New York City's public schools. And this May she graduates with a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering, a GPA of 3.8, and an unlimited future.

Valdiviezo came to CCNY as a SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) student, and almost immediately wanted to give back to the program that helped give her the confidence to pursue engineering; she was a SEEK tutor for three years. Her stellar academic performance places her in the top five of the sixty students graduating in chemical engineering this year, and enabled her to work in the Kretzschmar lab, where she is part of a team exploring optical properties caused by the patterning of various nano-sized Janus particles in the air-water interface. This summer she will continue her research work in colloids at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden.

Valdiviezo's awards include the Patell Award for Academic Excellence in Chemical Engineering and the 2018 SEEK Engineering Award, and membership in Chi Alpha Epsilon (XAE). She was also a recipient of the S Jay Levy Fellowship for Future Leaders.

She wants to work as a chemical engineer in private industry — perhaps in a company like Corning. But first Valdiviezo plans to take a year off to work, and then complete a doctorate in materials science.

Asked what surprised her most about her time at City College, you might expect this first generation college student to talk about the ten-hour days she spent in the lab. Her answer— "I was surprised to see how driven students are to succeed at CCNY and how willing they are to go out of their way to help incoming college students accomplish their goals, too."



Zhiying Zhu

2018 Salutatorian
BE, Biomedical Engineering
Grove School of Engineering

"Finding people just like me coming from the same socio-economic and ethnic background, struggling with English, but also having and sharing the same optimism for the future was exhilarating."

An immigrant from China, Zhiying Zhu completed her requirements for a BE in biomedical engineering with a 3.91 GPA. It's a crowning achievement for the Class of 2018 Salutatorian after overcoming adversity. Poverty forced her to work odd jobs from age 13 after arriving in New York with her mother and a young sister. "Although working two or more part-time jobs and completing a rigorous engineering curriculum were difficult, my passion for research and health care did not diminish," said Zhu. She gained both research and bedside care experiences at several institutions, including CCNY, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, the University of Texas at Austin and the National Cancer Institute. In her estimation, the technical skills she acquired from these experiences prepared her for a more engineering role in medicine.

Her accolades at CCNY include a NASA New York Space Grant Fellowship, the Harold Shames Award for

Undergraduate Excellence, a Colin Powell Fellowship in Leadership and Public Service, and the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women Scholarship. She's been a Student Support Services Program student since her freshman year and received the Charlotte and Arthur Zitrin Scholarship awarded to a select group of SSSP students.

A month after commencement, Zhu will sit for her MCAT with the goal of pursuing an MD/PhD and a double career as a medical doctor and researcher. Her dream is to merge the gap between bench-side research and bedside care. Needless to say, she considers her time at City College transformational. "CCNY gave me the first opportunity to explore, to try different things and not be judged," she said. "Finding people just like me coming from same socio-economic and ethnic background, struggling with English, but also having and sharing the same optimism for the future was exhilarating. We were not born with silver spoons in our mouths— CCNY just helped better our futures."



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