



The City College
of New York

Meet some of the remarkable women and men in The City College of New York Class of 2020.

In this era of COVID-19, the world has changed in unprecedented ways, and City College's students have finished this academic year knowing that their experiences will be shared for generations to come.

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 structural engineering, Early Childhood Education, landscape architecture and medicine. They've faced and prevailed against challenges including war, disability, domestic violence and institutionalized racism on the path to becoming public servants, policy makers, and teachers for change.



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Benjamin Akhavan

BArch, Architectural History & Theory
Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture
Macaulay Honors College

“City College has given me the confidence to excel. I’ve been caught between languages and cultures, and I chose to study architecture because of its ability to transcend borders—both literal and cultural.”

Benjamin Akhavan’s parents came to the United States as political refugees during the Iranian revolution in search of an inclusive way of life. As a Jewish-Iranian American, Akhavan’s culture inspired him to pursue architecture at The City College of New York.

“City College has given me the confidence to excel,” said the Macaulay Honors College student. “I’ve been caught between languages and cultures, and I chose to study architecture because of its ability to transcend borders—both literal and cultural.”

He maintained a 3.9 GPA while balancing school work, a two-hour commute, extracurricular activities and a part-time job as an assistant designer for Exhibition Design & Production at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He also served as president of the CCNY chapter of the American Institute of Architecture Students, as student liaison to the Architectural Alumni Board, and as a teaching assistant for advanced architecture courses.

“With every challenge, there is opportunity. As the first in my family to pursue a design degree, I had to learn how to navigate the unique structure of architecture school,” said Akhavan. “That propelled me to reach out to friends, advisers, and professors, which allowed me to create lifelong relationships and discover new mentors where I otherwise would not have.”

Akhavan pursued study abroad in architecture at the Technion–Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, Israel, and more recently, he co-founded Future Architects of the Middle East, an organization fostering dialogue concerning Middle Eastern architecture.

He has been awarded the Sciamé Design Scholarship and will attend Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, in pursuit of a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design. He would like to teach architecture someday and open a design practice that can positively contribute to the built environment.



Propa Akter

BSEd, Childhood Education
School of Education

“I represent the overcoming of obstacles and the hustle it takes to become successful in New York that only City College students understand.”

A first-generation immigrant born in Bangladesh and raised in the Bronx, Propa Akter is the first in her family to graduate from college.

But when Akter graduated from Brooklyn Tech High school in 2010, she did not have a clear idea about what academic or career path to pursue. She began her studies at York College and then received her associate’s degree at Bronx Community College (BCC). Working as an embedded tutor in education courses at BCC, she found her calling.

“I didn’t always believe that I could become a teacher, but my advisors at BCC and then at CCNY told me I could expand, and gave me the confidence to believe I could do it.”

Akter is driven to give back to the community that raised her and work with underrepresented students with special needs or English Language Learners in the New York City school system. “The Department of Education is my passion and my people,” she said.

Studying Childhood Education at City College’s School of Education, Akter has balanced three part-time jobs while maintaining a 3.7 GPA: as a substitute paraprofessional at

P.S. 107, an afterschool group leader for Aspira of New York, and as a tutor and mentor at Bronx Community College. “I am grateful that my supervisors were always supportive of my pursuit of education.”

Multiple cultural identities and diversity are key to her mission. As a member of the Young Muslim Sisters youth group in her community, she conducted homeless kit drives and planned domestic violence awareness and anti-bullying events. She is a member of New York City Men Teach, a CCNY partnership with the city that aims to increase the number of minority teachers in NYC public school classrooms.

Growing up in a lower socioeconomic immigrant community, being educated in the public school system and even taking a break from college, Akter says, “I represent the overcoming of obstacles and the hustle it takes to become successful in New York that only City College students understand.”

She is committed to teaching in the city’s public schools but is keeping her options open to one day teach abroad. “I learn more about myself in the process,” Akter says of teaching in the public schools. “That’s the magical part.”



Gina Bravo

BS, Psychology and Sociology
Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership
Seek Program

“The encouraging community at CCNY has constantly pushed me to further develop into an ambitious scholar, both eager to engage and always ready to learn.”

Gina Bravo, a native of Washington Heights, was raised by parents who left Mexico in search of economic prosperity and educational opportunities. Throughout her teenage years, she searched for answers to topics such as gender roles and social norms that were rarely talked about in her community.

“Due to a beauty standard followed in Mexico, my skin was bleached at age fifteen,” said Bravo, a first-generation student. “The awareness I had of such practices initiated my interest in different societal and environmental factors impacting the types of messages my community was receiving.”

That incident ignited Bravo’s passion for studying psychology and sociology at The City College of New York where she was accepted into the SEEK Program, a higher educational opportunity program that provides academic and financial support to students.

Her interest in community service grew as she became a mentor to first-year students in the CCNY Bottom Line Program. She continued to show her dedication to serving her community in the CUNY Service Corps program where she worked on projects that focused on NYC’s most urgent needs, and as an adult education program assistant

at Literacy Partners where she taught English to low-income parents.

Bravo participated in the S Jay Levy Fellowship for Future Leaders and the SEEK Research Fellows Program where she is an EEG lead. She helps analyze the effects of the smartphone-based mindfulness training using electrocardiogram recordings.

“As I continue my studies, I am continuously reminded of the importance of diversity on campus and the ways it enriches our education,” said Bravo, who was inducted into the Chi Alpha Epsilon National Honor Society (XAE). “The encouraging community at CCNY has constantly pushed me to further develop into an ambitious scholar, both eager to engage and always ready to learn.”

She plans to continue working in the research field and apply to a PhD program in psychology. Her goal is to increase healthy discussions about the need for diversity and research as well as the types of challenges first-generation students face throughout their academic careers.

She is the second person in her family to graduate from CCNY. Her brother, Hector Bravo, also graduated from CCNY in 2016.



Kereen Brown

BS, Early Childhood Education
**Division for Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center
for Worker Education**

“CWE is a special place... Classmates become like family and the faculty are extremely supportive and drive you to succeed.”

Like a champion prizefighter who's overcome the toughest of challengers to triumph, Kereen Brown can revel in her BS degree in Early Childhood Education from the Center for Worker Education with immense pride. In her senior year, the Women's Forum of New York recognized the single mother of three for her perseverance by presenting her with a \$10,000 fellowship. The awards go to high-potential women, age 35 and over, who've made extraordinary efforts to overcome extreme adversity disrupting their lives and education.

Brown's struggles started early. A victim of childhood abuse, she became a teenage mother and, when faced with possible homelessness, dropped out of Hunter College to work.

Marriage and years of continued domestic abuse followed. Nearly a decade and two more children later, Brown decided to return to school, seeking a new direction. CCNY provided a path in January 2017. She'd always been

an outstanding student even amidst her tumultuous life, graduating top of her high school class. Still working full time, Brown began two years of academic excellence at CWE as she laid the foundation for a new career.

In another lifechanging decision, she harnessed the courage to file for a divorce. “I was finally able to see clearly into a new future,” said the Jamaica, West Indies native, hailing CWE for helping her realize her dream. “It's a special place, unique because of its intimate setting. Classmates become like family and the faculty are extremely supportive and drive you to succeed.”

The Queens resident completed her coursework in Dec. 2019 with a 3.92 GPA and an array of honors. In addition to the Women's Forum Education Fund Fellowship, they include the Alpha Sigma Lambda Scholarship and the Barbara Aronson Award for Social Justice.

Brown plans a career as a kindergarten teacher.



Yardelis Diaz

BS, Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program
CUNY School of Medicine

"I was determined to find ...resources that would allow me to remain living near CCNY, which was key to my development and success."

Yardelis Diaz was the first in her family to obtain her high school diploma and now her bachelor's degree. Her tenacity for overcoming hurdles has pushed her to continue to pursue her MD at the CUNY School of Medicine at The City College of New York.

"During my first year of college, my father unexpectedly lost his job which caused my family some financial stress," she said. "I was determined to find financial resources that would allow me to remain living near CCNY, which I believe was key to my development and success."

She moved into an apartment near the college with three of her peers, but shortly after, a fire displaced the four roommates. Diaz quickly identified emergency financial resources, located some temporary housing, and eventually found a new apartment.

For her ability to overcome obstacles and inspire others, she was granted the Alan Seelig Memorial Award. She also received the Pyser Edelsack Award for Distinction in Community Health & Social Medicine.

Through the Marlene MacLeish Research Fellowship, she was able to research the effects of NOSH-aspirin as a possible preventative solution for ulcerogenic activity of aspirin or naproxen.

The Leonard Davis Fellowship led to her volunteering and conducting community-based research with In Arms Reach Inc., a STEM mentorship and college preparation program for children of incarcerated parents and youth from under-resourced communities in NYC. Diaz will receive her MD in 2023.



Alexandros Gloor

BS, Physics and BA, Philosophy
Division of Science
Division of Humanities and the Arts
Macaulay Honors College

“Accepted to CCNY and the Macaulay Honors College, I recognized that the tuition-free program offered a freedom of mobility following graduation as opposed to the trap of college debt and limited options.”

Born in Berlin and raised in Greece, Alexandros Gloor is a first-generation immigrant who speaks Greek, English, Spanish, Italian and German. Following the divorce of his Greek mother and Italian father, Gloor came to New York with his filmmaker mother when he was in middle school. While in high school, he became fascinated by science fiction and astrophysics.

Gloor wanted to stay in New York for college and considered city schools including NYU and Columbia but knew the physics program at City College was very strong. “Once accepted to CCNY and the Macaulay Honors College, I recognized that the tuition-free program offered a freedom of mobility following graduation as opposed to the trap of college debt and limited options.”

As an undergraduate researcher working with professors Vinod Menon and Carlos Meriles, Gloor studied quantum systems at the Center for Discovery and Innovation, City College’s state-of-the-art facility for scientists working across multiple disciplines.

Gloor is also the lead author of a study on the foundations of the standard model of cosmology, and researched hyperthermia as cancer treatment last summer in Greece.

The connection between physics and philosophy is undeniable, said Gloor and he found his City College professors in both disciplines to be exceptional. “Philosophy and Physics used to be one and ought to be approached as being closely related. Forgetting that can often lead to misunderstanding the physical consequences of what one learns.”

Honored with Zemansky Prize for Outstanding Scholarship in Physics, Gloor was also a Goldman Sachs Scholar, and a Partner for Change Fellow in the Colin Powell School. He also volunteered as an embedded City Tutor with adult learners at CCNY and with middle school students at the Community Health Academy of the Heights.

Gloor plans to move on to graduate studies.



Sabastian Hajtovic

Class of 2020 Valedictorian
BS, Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program
CUNY School of Medicine

“At the soup kitchen clinic, I have had the unique privilege of forming a bond with a vulnerable population that generally does not have a good experience with the medical field.”

Sabastian Hajtovic is graduating summa cum laude with a 4.0 GPA from the CCNY-based CUNY School of Medicine’s (CSOM) Sophie Davis Biomedical Education Program. The Queens resident has earned a BS degree in biomedical science as he continues work toward his MD from CSOM in spring 2023.

Brought up in Rockaway Beach to a family of Turkish heritage, Hajtovic is described as a talented researcher and gifted student by mentors. His graduation honors include the Dean’s Award for Academic Excellence. He received the Rudin Research Fellowship in Dr. Linda Spatz’ lab for his work on molecular mimicry and cross-reactive antibodies in patients with lupus. He also received a Colin Powell Fellowship in Leadership and Public Service, under which he studied NYCHA housing conditions and asthma prevalence. He was on the Dean’s List for his entire undergraduate career.

Hajtovic has shown exemplary leadership and excellence outside the classroom and lab, too. “I have been actively involved in the planning and operation of a monthly, student-run, free medical screening clinic at a church soup kitchen. We primarily do blood pressure screenings and

counseling—all under the direction of Dr. Holly Atkinson, a wonderful mentor who oversees the clinic. I’ve had the unique privilege of forming a bond with a vulnerable population that generally has neither a permanent residence nor a good experience with the medical field.”

He’s served as treasurer, and is currently president-elect, of the CSOM chapter of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), for which he’s coordinated an opioid crisis summit and Naloxone (opioid overdose prevention) training sessions. Hajtovic is also president of the Surgery Group at CSOM. Serving as a BronxCare Hospital pediatrics department intern, Hajtovic designed a screening program for Social Determinants of Health. He was recently elected to the National Student Advisory Board PHR as Co-Chair of the 2020 National Student Conference.

As he works toward his medical degree, Hajtovic is interested in pursuing a surgical subspecialty. His interest in neuroscience peaked last summer during a six-week research fellowship at Istanbul University, working in a neuro-immunology lab and shadowing the neurosurgery department.



Isabella Joseph

Class of 2020 Salutatorian
BArch, Architecture

**Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture
Macaulay Honors College**

“I am continually inspired by the broader implications of our work and the ways architecture can foster relationships between people and place.”

A member of CCNY’s Macaulay Honors College, Isabella Joseph is graduating summa cum laude with a 3.94 GPA. She will receive a bachelor of architecture degree from the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture and is the first CCNY Salutatorian from the Spitzer School. She minored in anthropology.

Born of Indian immigrant parents in upstate New York, Joseph is a Macaulay Honors standout. She’s lauded in the Spitzer School of Architecture as “a model of the future student who pursues diverse skill sets to more effectively perform and address society’s myriad of issues.” She’s made the Dean’s list every year at City College.

Joseph helped revive the J. Max Bond Center for Urban Futures, the Spitzer School’s applied research center, and was recently part of a team that developed mapping resources for community boards 9 and 10 in response to COVID-19. She gained valuable experience as an architectural intern at the global firm Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) Associates collaborating with its design team on the Changi Airport Terminal 5 project in Singapore.

“Initially I was drawn to the inherently interdisciplinary nature of architecture, from the creative ingenuity of art to the practicality of engineering. I quickly learned how much more it entails beyond simply the design of buildings; I am continually inspired by the broader implications of our work and the ways architecture can foster relationships between people and place.”

Her other accolades include being named a WX Women in Real Estate Scholar of Merit this April, CUNY Chancellor’s Global Scholarship in summer 2018; and the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) Greenbuild Scholarship in fall 2016.

Crossing disciplines, Joseph received a Climate Policy Fellowship from the Colin Powell School. Her work included co-writing a policy brief with teammates from economics and mechanical engineering on innovative financing strategy for resilience projects at NYCHA public housing developments. She is currently working on concurrent architectural and written thesis projects also dedicated to NYCHA housing in the architecture school and the Macaulay Honors College.



Mahmoud Khedr

CUNY BA, Social Entrepreneurship

“CCNY gave me a testing ground to learn, find my interests, and even space to fail. I am leaving with life-long friends, mentors and invaluable experiences.”

TEDx speaker, Forbes 30 Under 30 Scholar, Clinton Fellow and social entrepreneur—Mahmoud Khedr has done it all at City College. His final accolade is a BS degree in social entrepreneurship, a major the Egyptian immigrant crafted for himself in the exclusive CUNY Baccalaureate program for highly motivated undergraduates. Khedr excelled at CCNY, utilizing what he learned in the classroom to pursue interests outside with unrelenting passion. His goal: simply to make the world a better place. He worked at what he described as the intersection of technology, government, health, and social impact to, among other things, establish FloraMind, a start-up to address the global youth mental health crisis. Khedr previously worked at Facebook, Google, Echoing Green, and The New York City Mayor’s Office of Tech & Innovation.

His profile as a global advocate and speaker on mental health, youth empowerment, and social entrepreneurship earned Khedr, who was born in Giza and came to the United States at age 11, numerous honors. That includes

recognition from former President Bill Clinton, General Colin Powell, Forbes, TEDx and Stanford University. He was a Colin Powell Community Engagement Fellow and placed second in the 2017 National Intuit Product Management Competition.

Post-CCNY, Khedr’s focus will be FloraMind and its vision of empowering young people with the skills, resources and knowledge to flourish through their mental health. His memories of his alma mater shall, well, remain unforgettable.

“CCNY gave me a testing ground to learn, find my interests, and even space to fail,” he said. “I am leaving with life-long friends, mentors and invaluable experiences through building clubs like the Entrepreneurship Student Club, founding companies like Runr and FloraMind and leading initiatives through the Stanford University Innovation Fellows at CCNY.”



Marija Krstic

PhD, Civil Engineering
The Grove School of Engineering

“My students thank me for inspiring them and that gives me the strength to persist, knowing that I made a difference in the lives of our students at CCNY.”

“My childhood consisted of wars, the divisions of countries, embargo and sanctions,” says doctoral candidate Marija Krstic of her early years in Nis, Yugoslavia, now part of Serbia. Her family not only survived NATO bombings during the Kosovo war; Krstic was also born with an incurable visual impairment and functions today at 50% vision capacity.

Krstic arrived at City College in 2012 with bachelor and master degrees in civil engineering, specialized in materials and structures. She obtained a second master’s degree and continued onto the PhD program, researching innovative cementitious materials for concrete production. She spent eight months at UT Delft in the Netherlands conducting micro-level tests at one of the most prestigious materials evaluation labs in the world.

In transformative research for both the recycling and concrete industries, Krstic was part of a City College civil engineering team that characterized a glass powder to replace cement in the production of concrete. The material developed by Urban Mining Northeast and evaluated with Dr. Julio Davalos, professor of civil engineering in City College’s Grove School of Engineering, entails micro- and macro-structure studies and applications of a new glass powder ingredient for concrete from post-consumer recycled mixed-color glass that has no value-added market.

The results are impressive for research and use in real world applications.

“Cement is the binder in concrete, but its production emits an equal amount of CO₂. Microscale materials (pozzolans) are used to partially replace cement and enhance concrete performance,” notes Krstic. The most common pozzolan used is fly ash, a byproduct from coal burning plants but due to plant closures and conversions to natural gas, there is a severe shortage of fly ash, which makes this CCNY development significant.

The material was tested for sidewalk construction in South Jamaica, Queens, by the New York City Department of Design and Construction, and was also utilized by developer Durst in three components of construction on a 23-story building in Long Island City, a first-time use in a U.S. high rise building. The research at CCNY has greatly contributed to the development of recently approved national ASTM standards for production and implementation in practice.

Krstic plans to remain at CCNY as a post doc as more work has to be done on glass in concrete including across disciplines such as architecture. Already a member of City College’s adjunct faculty working with undergrads, Krstic says, “My students thank me for inspiring them and that gives me the strength to persist, knowing that I made a difference in the lives of our students at CCNY.”



Daniel “Cash” Langford

MLArch, Architecture
Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture

“Design is not linear.’ I heard this on the first day of studio... at City College. It’s turned into a mantra that has helped rationalize my past and provide perspective when setbacks arise.”

Growing up on a farm in rural Texas, Daniel “Cash” Langford was fully expected to take over the family business — cotton and peanut farming.

After receiving his bachelor’s in agriculture and applied economics at Texas Tech University, Langford spent time learning farm operation and designing sub-surface irrigation. Feeling unfulfilled, he decided to pursue his passion for landscape architecture, moving from his hometown of 2,000 to his dream city, New York.

Langford sought out City College to learn how to apply his knowledge of rural landscape systems to a city scale. One of his first studio projects aimed to reintroduce the rural microbiome to areas of New York lacking in beneficial bacteria that we encounter when interacting with farm animals, like goats and sheep. Cash continued to incorporate his rural background into his studies by completing his final design studio on “Pointillist Prairie: Playa Lake Restoration in the Great Plains.”

Through his research on playa lakes, Langford wants to provide strategic recommendations for restoring playa lakes to increase habitat and aquifer recharge in an increasingly arid landscape.

Living and studying in New York City allowed Langford to broaden his horizons in academics as well as his community serving as Chair of Intersectionality with the ASLA Student Chapter; organizing Queer Ecologies, a panel to discuss inclusivity and anti-oppressive design, and ArchiteXX; a moderated panel that aims to recognize how designers are improving racial and gender equity in their projects and careers.

After graduating, Langford plans to continue his apprenticeship with the Urban Design Unit at the New York Department of Transportation where he has been learning how to create public space opportunities in the public right-of-way under and adjacent to elevated transportation structures. From there, he is interested in pursuing a career in landscape architecture focused on creating public landscapes that integrate natural systems to be more resilient spaces in the era of climate change.

“Design is not linear.’ I heard this on the first day of studio and numerous times during my time at City College. This has turned into a mantra of mine that has helped rationalize my past and provide perspective when setbacks arise.”



Terrell F. Merritt

BA, Advertising & Public Relations Program
Division of Humanities and the Arts

“It is so empowering to be guided by people who truly believe in you and fight to make sure that you and your CCNY peers are taken seriously as capable, rising professionals.”

Terrell F. Merritt made the leap to advertising and public relations after studying computer science for three years at a private institution. The move put financial strain on the first-generation student, but he was able to find job opportunities that financed his education at The City College of New York.

“The support I had from faculty and staff at CCNY really helped me, and that especially goes for the professors and advisors from the Department of Media and Communication Arts,” said Merritt. “It is so empowering to be guided by people who truly believe in you and fight to make sure that you and your CCNY peers are taken seriously as capable, rising professionals.”

Merritt ran for national office of CCNY’s chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) where he was named vice president of brand engagement. He has also served as secretary, vice president and chairperson for PRSSA.

He has worked with local public schools on their diversity outreach teams through p.s. alumni, New York City’s public school alumni network, and as junior outreach coordinator for the New York City Department of Education.

“The people and resources here instilled confidence and drive in me, and that is a huge part of what got me this far,” he said. “Now, I will be the first in my family to graduate with a bachelor’s degree, and I can only hope to serve as a symbol of possibility to those following me.”

Merritt works as a social media and digital marketing assistant for The City University of New York (CUNY). He looks forward to growing as a multifaceted public relations practitioner, particularly using social media, event management and data analytics to amplify underrepresented voices.



Mathiu Perez Rodriguez

BS & Accelerated MS Biochemistry
Division of Science

“CCNY is where everything started, where everything came together. Without my mentors I wouldn’t be where I am.”

At age 17, Mathiu Perez Rodriguez packed his bags and left his native Ecuador alone. Disillusioned by prospects in his homeland, he set out to seek a new life in the US. Ecuador’s loss was ultimately City College’s gain. After transferring to CCNY a few years later, Perez’s focus, fortitude and intellectual appetite established the biochemistry honors research student as one of the best nationally.

He leaves City with combined BS and MS degrees in biochemistry, and a reputation as a pioneer. That is because he is the first student to graduate from City College’s accelerated MS program in biochemistry. The accolade punctuates four years of excellence at CCNY replete with major honors.

Mentored by Ruth E. Stark, a CUNY Distinguished Professor, Perez’s recognitions include: a scholarship from the National American Chemical Society; Louis Stokes Alliance, AMSNY, City College and MARC fellowships;

multiple undergraduate research honor awards from Harvard Medical School, the American Chemical Society’s Scholar honor, National Institutes of Health Fellowships; and the Barry Goldwater Scholarship, America’s premiere award for undergraduates majoring in math, science and engineering.

Perez is leaving his alma mater with one of the biggest research awards in the country, a National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Fellowship. He enters the highly competitive program this summer for one year before heading to medical school. The program promotes biomedical research training in allergic, immunologic, or infectious diseases.

“CCNY is where everything started, where everything came together,” he said, while lauding Stark and his lab mentor, Dr. Dastmalchi. “Without my mentors I wouldn’t be where I am. I am grateful for that.”



Rossmery Almonte Tejada

BA, Social Work
Division for Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center
for Worker Education

“CWE is a safe environment with enthusiastic professors who helped me discover and develop my potential, motivating me to be a better professional and human being.”

“Making the decision to return to school at 52 was not an easy task,” says Rossmery Almonte Tejada. “I felt doubt, I was afraid that my classmates would make fun of me because I was not as young as they are. I was afraid that my accent would prevent me from communicating with my professors.”

Almonte Tejada spent years as an actress/comedian in the Dominican Republic and in her adopted home of New York City, before enrolling in Borough Manhattan Community College (BMCC) in 2015 to pursue her associate’s degree in Human Services. She was inspired to continue on to a bachelor’s degree at The Center for Worker Education (CWE) in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Social Welfare.

“CWE made me feel that I came to the right place to acquire a great higher academic education. It is a safe environment with enthusiastic professors who have helped me discover and develop my potential, instructing and motivating me to be a better professional and human being.”

Almonte Tejada describes the CWE community as working people who are focused and determined with no time to waste. “I cannot deny that it has been very challenging to be a mother of two, a provider, a full-time college student with two full-time jobs. The journey has been difficult, but I did it!”

She acknowledges her professors for their guidance, instruction, patience, and an environment of unconditional support in the learning process.

While working as a benefits counselor for the SNAP food program in East Harlem, Almonte Tejada continues to pursue her passion for theater and performing. After appearing in the Off-Broadway Musical “I Like It Like That” in 2016, Almonte Tejada was cast in the 2019 Off-Broadway musical and New York Times Critic’s Pick “GUARACHA” at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. She was nominated for the Independent Theater Awards for Hispanic Actors (ATI) and received the 2020 Association for Latin Entertainment Critics of New York (ACE) Award for Best Actress/ Musical Theater.

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