



freedom dreaming

a cuny tlh public  
knowledge project

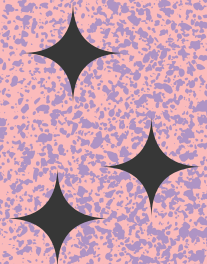
2023

In *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Bettina Love, the chapter "Freedom Dreaming," posits that artistic mediums can be utilized as a way to express individuals' unique narratives while shaping their visions for the future. She writes:

"Writing, drawing, acting, painting, composing, spittin' rhymes, and/ or dancing is love, joy, and resistance personified. Art provides more to communities than just visual and sonic motifs: it is one of the key ingredients to a better world. Art that inspires for a better world. is rooted in intense design, research, and musings for justice filled with new-world possibilities. Social justice movements move people because they ignite the spirit of freedom, justice, love, and joy in all who engage with the work. Art helps people remember their dreams, hopes, and desires for a new world:"

Our TLH Knowledge Project engages with the artistic medium of zines in order to call upon our personal narratives of “new world” possibilities, for our education and beyond.

This zine project poses multiple questions to its contributors - how did you make your way to CUNY? What led you to pursue an education at this singular moment in history? How can we document our unique educational and personal narratives and how do these stories relate to the limitless potential of re-imagining a new CUNY? What do you envision for the future of your education and how it relates to the opportunities provided by the CUNY system?



# STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS

## Brooklyn College

Jeanette Davila

Joann Gomez

## The City College

### of New York

Alexa Aviles

Keyli Guzman

Antonio Johnson

Bora Kucur

Jannat Mahi

Christopher Neira

Mhelvin Prangan

Catherine Reith

## John Jay College

### of Criminal Justice

Destiny Baxter

Caroline Rivera

Alexander Rosario

Sunny Lee

Esther Vandervelde

## Hunter College

Gina Di Graziano

Roman Garnica

Yasmin Herrera



I will Be the first in my  
family to graduate from  
College

Catherine Reith.

At John Jay College, they gather and learn,  
Students of criminal justice, with a passion to discern,  
The mysteries of law, and the workings of the mind,  
To seek the truth, and justice to find.  
They come from far and wide, with diverse backgrounds,  
United in their goal, to uphold the laws' bounds,  
Their studies are rigorous, but they persevere,  
For they know their knowledge can ease many fears.  
In John Jay College, they prepare for the fight,  
For justice, for order, for what is right,  
Their education sharpens their skills,  
To make a difference, with the power of will.  
These students are the future, of a safer society,  
Equipped with knowledge and empathy,  
From John Jay College, they shall emerge,  
Ready to serve, and to make the world a better merge.

by Sunny Lee

# EDUCATION IS A RIGHT



MY PARENTS  
WERE ABLE TO  
MIGRATE TO THE  
UNITED STATES  
WITH THEIR  
DEGREES TO  
HELP THEIR  
FAMILIES RISE  
FROM POVERTY



By: Mhelvin Prangan

I stumble and fumble up the stairs of my success  
While blinded by the possibilities of hope  
I look for instruction on how to climb the ladder  
I try to leap to the next step,



Before it all crumbles below .

Esther Vandervelde



Learning about politics expands every horizon within my mind. Reading Plato's, *The Republic* where he questions if justice truly exists makes my neurons zoom as I question our current society. When writing notes about Aristotle's, *Politics*, where he shares his views that humans differentiate themselves from other living things by the blessing of government, I suddenly cannot wait to become an asset within politics. Being taught about the American congress and their duties results in me daydreaming in class about my aspiration of being a member in the House of Representatives.

When being educated about the American government I feel emotions I do not typically experience with other subjects. Learning about government liberates me because I feel an instant rush of passion which distracts me from daily inconveniences or stressors. With this, I crave learning more about politics due to the positive emotions I experience. Educating myself about the American government liberates my busy mind because it is something that truly gives me fulfillment.



THE MANY

PERSONALITIES OF  
JOHN JAY COLLEGE



The  
Forensic Scientist



The  
Police Officer



The  
English Professor



The  
Politician



The  
Artist



The  
Lawyer



The  
Psychologist



The  
Social Worker



The  
Judge

Antonio  
Johnson

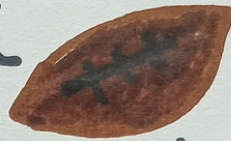
# My Favorite Hobbies

sports

Benefits: leads to  
improvement in  
teamwork/socializing

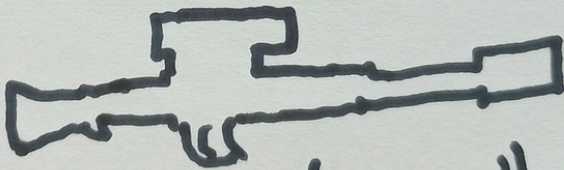


basketball



Football

## Video Games



Call of  
Duty

Benefits:

- critical thinking
- leadership
- creativity
- communication skills

Personal Narrative

I started my college education at Hunter College in August of 2020, towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I knew many friends and former classmates that were deferring enrollment and others that were moving to campus and living in dorms even knowing that all of their classes were online. I chose to do neither of these things. Instead I chose to join the Yalow Scholars program at Hunter College because I wanted to be able to prioritize both my education and my family life during such a scary time.

Originally, I was a chemistry major on the pre-PhD track with an intention to enter the research field. However, if I learned one thing from being a college student in the middle of a pandemic it was that life is too short to waste on something that you don't enjoy. This may seem like an obvious clichè, but it was a particularly difficult lesson for me to learn. I couldn't admit to myself that I wasn't happy on the path I was following, mostly because I was afraid to let anyone down. Over time I have come to realize that other people's expectations of who I should be are not my responsibility. Because of this, midway through my second year of college I decided to apply to Hunter College's School of Education, to which I was accepted, and I am now pursuing a BA/MA in Chemistry Adolescent Education.

I was really excited to make this switch, but I did still have some reservations about eventually beginning my teaching career in a post-pandemic world. However, as I got deeper into my coursework my conviction that I had made the right decision only grew. And what's more than that is that I realized that I am actually grateful that I will teach in a post-pandemic world. Going through college as a young adult during a pandemic challenged me in ways that I never could have anticipated and had a lasting effect on myself and my peers. Students that were children or teenagers at this time were affected just as drastically, if not more so. They deserve to have teachers that can not only empathize with them, but that can *relate* to them. They deserve to learn from people that can use their experiences to help them overcome the unique challenges they face, both academically and otherwise.

Attending Hunter College at this exact moment in history changed my entire outlook on my future, the pressure I placed on myself and allowed others to place on me, and on what role I want to play in shaping the next generation.

## An Unusual Way to CUNY

By Joann Gomez

I was lost going in circles darkness surrounded me. Bad choice after bad choice. I wanted it to be easy, I wanted to pick a career and stick with it. I wanted to know I had purpose, a reason for being on this planet, but no matter where I looked I found no path. Until there was light an energy so powerful I could not refuse, I knew this was my path. 32 and going back to school.

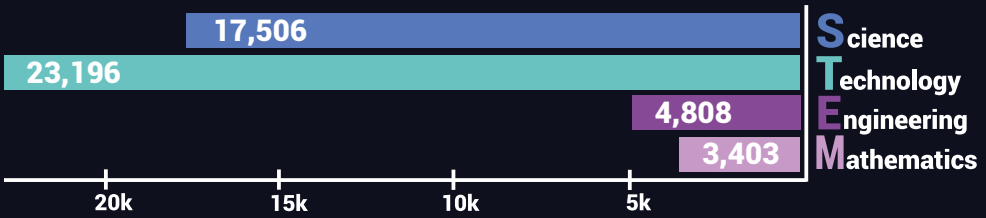
Life is unpredictable like that “you plan and god laughs” one of my ultimate favorite life quotes. I always said I’m never getting my masters. I’m never going back to college. I was fresh out of college 21 and in love or so I thought. I began working as a pastry chef the hours were long, the days endless. I plated desserts working under one of the best chefs in New York City. I would cry on the train home filled with anxiety and stress until one day I could not take it anymore, I quit. I found another job working as catering sales manager; I helped plan beautiful weddings, baby showers, engagement and birthdays. From one day to the next, the company had no money. I went in one day and I had no job, I was laid off. Laid off? What was I supposed to do now? I could not find another job; I didn’t want to go back to restaurants. My Aunt offered me a job waitressing and decorating cakes part time, I needed the money so I took it. I got pregnant. 23 and pregnant now, I was definitely lost. I couldn’t focus on my career with a child. I stopped working. I stopped trying. I was not meant to have a career.

My daughter was born, life became all about her, I was second and she was everything. I decided if I couldn’t have a career I was going to be super mom. Homemade food, no tv, reading, and mom groups, I could do this. I could be super mom. My daughter was about 3 and I began speaking to a mom about her job, she told me she was a paraprofessional. A what? I went home and did research. I thought I could do that so I did, I become a paraprofessional.

I worked at John Bowne High School as a paraprofessional for 5 years; my students would tell me Ms. you have to become a teacher! Me a teacher? No way! After 5 years I was itching, I wanted to do more, help the students more. I knew I was not living to my full potential. I wanted a career. My AP told me “Joann you would make a great teacher there is new program para to teacher program you just need a nomination from the principal”. That was my sign. I took it and ran. My principal gave me the nomination and I applied to the program. I was nervous, what if I was not accepted, and what if I was accepted? I would have to go back to school. I had two little kids, left my relationship of 10 years to follow my heart to be with the women of my dreams and came out to my family. My life was in complete silent chaos. I was going through a lot but at the same time everything was right and I was happy. I saw the path, I opened my email and there it was congratulations you have been accepted to the para to teacher program at Brooklyn College.



# Enrollment in **TECHNOLOGY** Disciplines



Popularized by Computer Science and Technology Majors, Technology Is the most enrolled discipline of the STEM. With a community Mostly Popularly picked by men but culturally diverse.

From the 23,196 students enrolled:



6,620 Enrolled in Technology



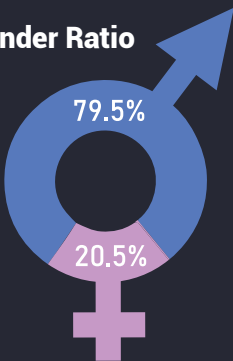
7,784 Enrolled in Computer Science

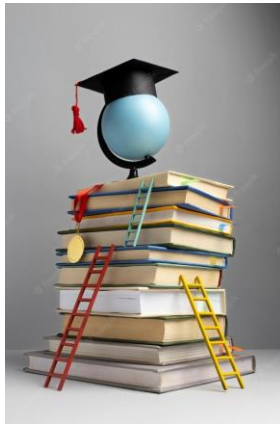


8,792 Enrolled in another CIS.

Many undecided major college students are interested in joining a STEM discipline, come join the Technology discipline! This is an approach for these students more through a community aspect rather than the classic future wages, costs, and graduation rates that are always used to convince students to pick a major, especially the STEM ones. Enrollment in STEM disciplines presents a data set that can tell us who are the members of the community of STEM majors.

## Gender Ratio





I'm Jannat, and I grew up in a working-class immigrant family in the Bronx. I always knew that education was important, but my family couldn't afford to send me to a private university. That's why I worked hard in high school and was accepted to several colleges, but ultimately chose to attend CUNY because of its affordable tuition and its reputation for academic excellence.

My decision to pursue an education at CUNY was also influenced by the current moment in history. I saw how the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the economy and created widespread unemployment, and I knew that a college degree would give me a competitive edge in the job market. I also felt a sense of responsibility to use my education to help my community and make a positive difference in the world.

For the Freedom Dreaming Zine project, I decided to document my unique educational and personal narrative through a memoir-style essay. In my essay, I described the challenges I faced growing up as an immigrant, the sacrifices my family made to support my education, and my determination to succeed despite the odds.

I also envisioned a future for my education and for the CUNY system. I believe that CUNY has the potential to reimagine itself as a more inclusive and diverse institution that prioritizes the needs of its students. I envision a CUNY that provides more resources for mental health support, career development, and community engagement. I see myself as a future leader in this new CUNY, using my education to create positive change in my community and beyond.

---Jannat Mahi

# WE SHOULDN'T BE TEACHING OURSELVES MATH!

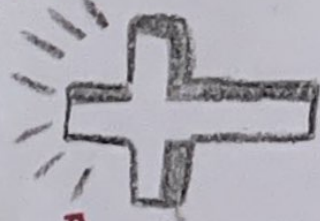
CCNY SHOULD PROVIDE A  
BETTER MATH CURRICULUM,  
AND RESOURCES. STUDENTS  
SHOULDN'T BE THE ONES  
FAILING BECAUSE THE  
PROFESSOR HAS FAILED TO  
TEACH EFFECTIVELY.

KEYLI GUZMÁN





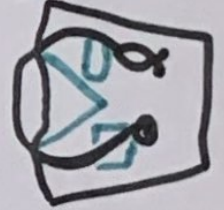
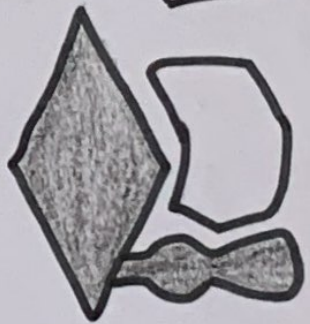
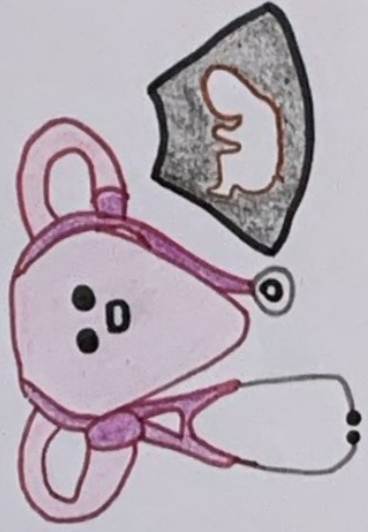
Trust in the  
your heart, and  
your own  
In all your  
him, and he  
your paths.



Lord with all  
do not lean on  
understanding.  
ways acknowledge  
will make straight

OB-GYN

- Proverbs 3:5-6



# Success = Money?

College in many households is incredibly stressful. There are so many expectations placed on you the second you enroll in a school. Many parents assume the grades you are receiving during high school are going to be the same during college. However, what they do not know is that the classes and the amount of work are not the same.

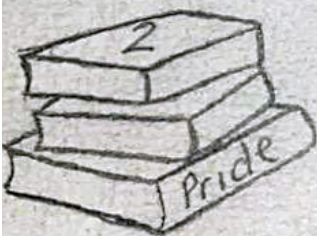
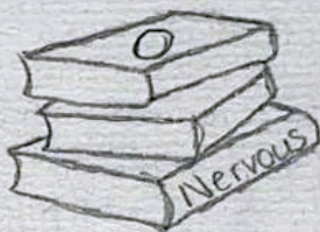


College/academic success, in my opinion, should be determined by a set goal pre university, and the outcome afterwards. Mental health is incredibly important and if you are not mentally doing well but with a degree, that does not really help. You need to eventually be in a field where you enjoy the work so that way you can look up to every new day rather than looking down upon them.



Success is not a number, but a lifestyle. Someone that earns a lot of money but does not have much time to spend with family, is not more successful than a family well built with time and communication, even though that person/family might not earn as much. Again, this is all my opinion. Someone who is happy with their lifestyle and their income, I would consider them to be successful.

NEVER  
GIVE  
UP!



LOOK MOM  
WE  
MADE  
IT!





**It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't**

by Alexander Rosario

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

In studying for the LSAT, I learned

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

In reading Mendez v. Westminster, I learned

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

In discovering Operation Wetback, I learned

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

In going to school for 17 years I learned

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

Now I'm burdened by the knowledge that

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

In my head, in my friendships, in my family,

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

Maybe one day it'll be about what we learn, but for now

*It's not about what we learn, it's about what we don't*

## Embracing the Maelstrom

Even if I could abbreviate,  
bound against one script,  
No podium to elevate  
Only a solitary alliance, devoid of wit.  
You can clap as an audience  
count as witnesses,  
but I'm compelled, not constricted.

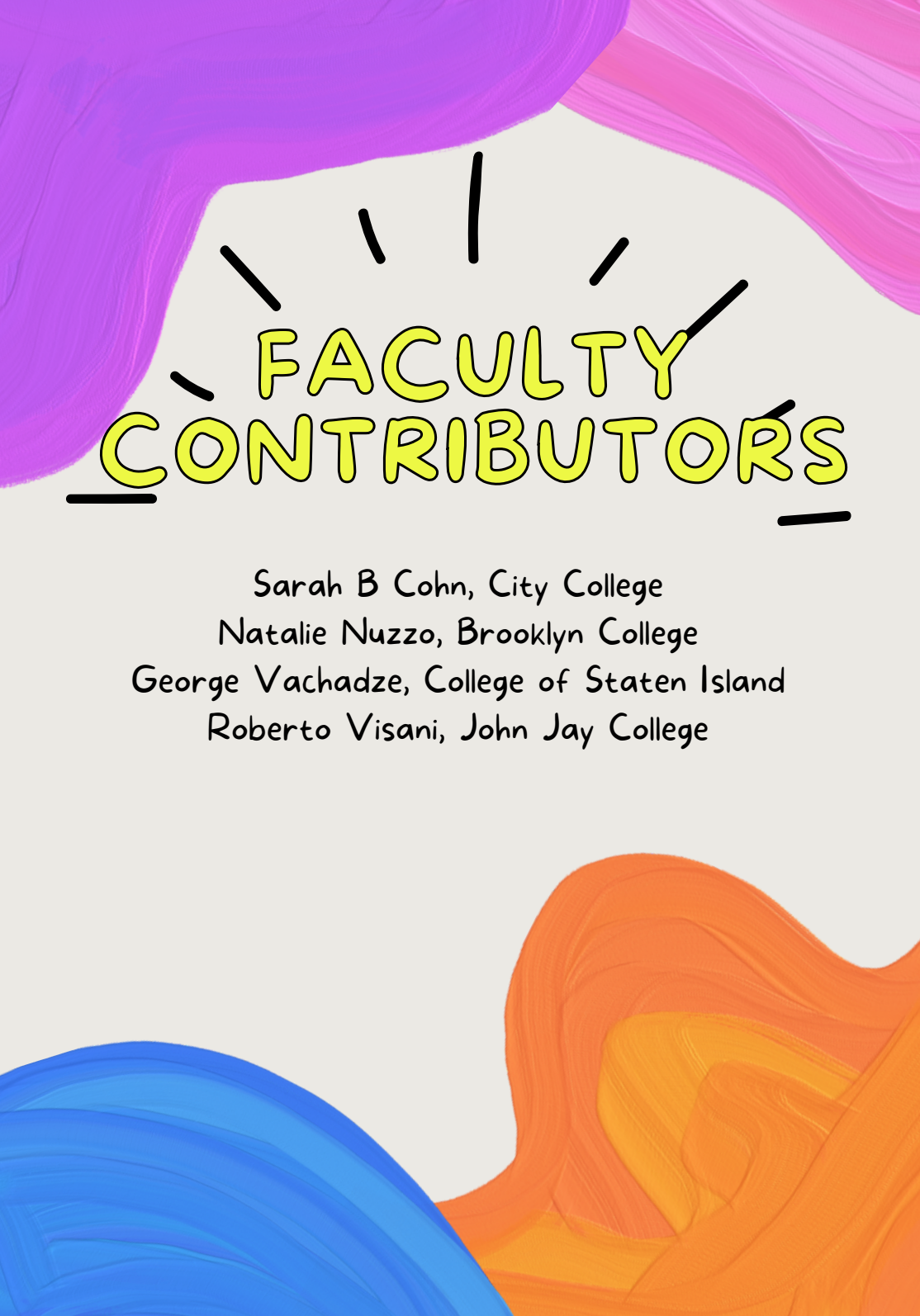
Articulate, then I'll enunciate, in my reluctant youth  
(Echoes from afar)  
It appears words plummeted  
by the pristine modicum of truth  
that displacement lies not the distance of the shoreline  
but from us and the borderline on the life raft, we explore, minds adrift.  
My lissome tongue can still paddle and lift.

Deposits of minerals got out of the coast.  
And the wind of symphony and sounds  
Stuns our respiration. Reading through the idle boast.  
I can sway and stay in this vast ocean until my thoughts drown.

This raft is mine to abandon. Its meaning became trite, leaving marks.  
You listen to the boisterous wind, seeking a canon of light.  
Steering as the flag unfurls.  
But to navigate, you should engage with its bloodshed remarks.

Our echoes reveal the gap between us,  
So sing a symphony and take me off the flag.

-Roman Garnica



# FACULTY CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah B Cohn, City College

Natalie Nuzzo, Brooklyn College

George Vachadze, College of Staten Island

Roberto Visani, John Jay College

Dear Khenpo Pema,

This letter feels more urgent now – Who will carry on your teachings, who will say *bell-ooo!*, like a game show host, on Sunday afternoons, I dial into you. What you've taught me: a platonic, transcendent love that materializes in the clouds that compose the Mother Tara. The anger still sits in my chest, lava waiting to consume. But I temper my inner fire as a responsibility to myself and others. These concepts are new now. The spiritual name I was given by Khenpo Migmar was Kunga Lhamo, Goddess Beloved by All. A name more impossible to know than my own.

Today I led meditation sessions for each of my classes. I used the Samatha method and had students focus on their breathing and count up to the number ten, breathing in for one, breathing out for two. When we end, we begin again. I'm not quite sure what the word dialogic means, but I understand it may have something to do with being in conversation. I know I'll never live the life of a monastic, but I work to embody the presence of the Buddha, fail constantly, curse someone out for a parking spot. *As far as authorship is concerned, one could say it always points to something or somebody else behind the alleged author: God, Muse, a prompter, an inspirer, a shadow, a ghost, an anonymous writer, a crowd, a social class, the will of the people, imagined voices and fictive figures, modes of representation and hallucination.*<sup>i</sup> I compose myself through language, the said and unsaid, the words that burn at our chests.

When I was a child, I would hide in confession booths, the mahogany wood and smell of frankincense, guilty until proven innocent. Burgundy velvet kneeling pews, and those fine spindles of woven wood, I could see through the screen, couldn't you, O Father who art thou? I was drawn to the candles in the scapular, the long slender wooden sticks to light them, a flame I would revisit to be sure it was still alive, in memento mori, the only aspect of Catholicism I identified with now and then is the pageantry. I am unforgiving, full of multiplicity.

*But of all the things that must be forgotten, the most essential is that once upon a time and not that long ago, the gods, spirits, saints and ancestors and demons were familiar and recognizable members of the social world, in miracles, apparitions and devotions amid the relationships of everyday life.*<sup>ii</sup> Here are the saints I pay patronage to: La Madonna, Saint Therese of Lisieux, Santa Marta, Barbara, martyrs erased from the Biblical page. I wear a bright blue medallion of Lourdes most every day. I was Roman Catholic before I was Buddhist. I still pay my respects to San Gennaro, do the sign of the cross, pin a dollar to his hem. I did not believe in the resurrection then, but I observed a higher power, watched him reincarnate herself as a woman.

I shift to Sylvia Plath. My first real poet, of course, library born Sicilian girl that I am. *It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs.*<sup>iii</sup> I spent most of my middle school years eating lunch alone. One of my students today, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, told me she only has one friend. Collectively, we have reached new levels of loneliness. Pervasive, the economy churning along, as if that could dispel the germs in the air. Last week, in a fit of pain, I told my lover: *I exist*. As if we needed a reminder. I'm interested in sky burials, a Tibetan custom in which the dead is placed at the top of a mountain to decay or nourish, depending on which side of the life cycle you see yourself on. Bury me in the means of production.

Yours in the dharma,  
Natalie Wood

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<sup>i</sup> *Can poetry be Dialogic?* weebelly.com. (2010, November 30). Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <http://www.weebelly.com/29/can-poetry-be-dialogic/>

<sup>ii</sup> Orsi, R. A. (1985). *The Madonna of 115th street: Faith and community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. Yale University Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Plath, S. (2013). *The bell jar: A novel*. Harper Perennial.



Higher education is an essential foundation of modern society as it provides individuals with specialized training and expertise and exposes them to diverse perspectives and experiences. High education allows students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills and foster a lifelong love of learning that is an essential component for personal and professional growth and upward intergenerational social mobility. Higher education is a "public good" linked to a variety of societal benefits, such as a greater sense of community and civic engagement, thoughtful opinion formation on a variety of political and social issues, and economic growth.

Over the last 15 years, I had an opportunity to observe the system of high education from insight. In my opinion, there are several challenges faced by the traditional high education system which make the high education less equitable and less effective.

The high cost of a traditional college education makes it increasingly unaffordable for many students to attend college or continue their educational journey. The high cost also leads to student debt, financial stress, and unequal access to educational opportunities. The high cost of a traditional college education is due to the embedded rigidity - either a Baccalaureate degree (with 120 credit hours completed) or nothing. Such a requirement is not often well-suited to the needs of individual students and limits their flexibility and creativity in the learning process. Think for a moment about a student who must take a class because the class is required to complete the major. Such rigidity also leads to inefficiency because students are spending a lot of time and money on courses that may not be directly relevant to their future career goals or personal interests.

Traditional college education often focuses on theoretical knowledge and may not provide students with sufficient practical experience or skills that are directly applicable in the workplace. This is especially true for liberal arts education which fosters critical thinking and a love of learning, however, have limitations in preparing students with practical skills that are directly applicable in the workplace environment.

The traditional college education tends to be classroom-based, with a focus on lectures, readings, and written assignments. While this can be an effective way to learn theoretical concepts, it does not provide students with enough hands-on experience or opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. This led to a disconnect between the skills and knowledge that students acquire in college and the skills and knowledge that are in demand in the job market.

A possible solution for the above problems in the traditional education system is a lifelong learning model, which will allow individuals to continually update their skills and knowledge throughout their careers. In the lifelong learning model, the existing inefficiencies of the traditional high education system will decline because students will emphasize more on skills rather than degrees. The emergence of a lifelong learning model in high education is already visible as colleges and universities offer more certificate programs with targeted training. The certificate programs will be more affordable in terms of time and money and will become more accessible to a wide variety of individuals than traditional college degrees are. I would like to see the City University of New York be a leader in implementing a lifelong learning model.

# FREE CUNY FOR ALL

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My grandfather got his  
undergraduate degree from  
City College in 1943.  
Tuition was free.

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## FREE EDUCATION IS FREEDOM

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Although I paid for both of my CUNY  
degrees, I am a direct beneficiary of  
tuition-free CUNY. It allowed my  
family to build inter-generational  
wealth.

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## EVERYONE DESERVES THE SAME

**The teacher I aspire to be....** I asked students to describe their ideal professor. The following are some of their thoughts.

by Roberto Visani

**To have an open mind and relate to the students** Empathetic, Accountable, Good at Communication, Flexible, Strays from

traditional teaching **MORE THAN JUST A POWERPOINT Dad joke humor, teaches the material, Passionate about their profession,**

**wants to inform future generations** Cleverness in Classroom management, write clearly so others can understand, allow students to fail and try

again, give verbal praise for successful progress **Kind, engages the class, open to different opinions and able to offer guidance, sense of humor** Intelligent, lenient with work (allows you to raise your grade

towards the end of the semester **Aware of current trends, Not too strict but not careless** Can cheer up the class – does mental

health checks **Adapts to multiple situations** Motivates students

to get work done and think critically **Creates an exciting and**

**welcoming environment** Understands that we have issues outside of class

*Have a happy face and be respectful towards students*

**Provides time for students to get extra help** Transparent about the rules, requirements and expectations **Gives opportunities**

**outside of class** **Sweet, gentle and considerate, I value a professor I can share a real world connection with** *Someone who can*

*be influential* **Structure for lesson plans, High proficiency in the subject area, availability to communicate** **Speaks about topics that are about life** *Someone who is compassionate and comfortable. Someone I can go to for advice. A professor that allows me to ask for*

*help.* **A professor that is flexible about handing in work.** **A professor that is clear and organized on how they want work submitted.**

*A balance of lecture and hands on learning. Not uptight, can make jokes, even if they are bad. Makes learning fun.*

**Resourceful. Passionate about their subject. Understanding. Respectful. A good communicator, fairness. Patience. Open to change. A great listener** Receptive, realistic **Someone who encourages student engagement and discourse and guides discussion towards in depth analysis.** **Some-**

**one who allows stupid questions when you don't understand something.** **More hands on activities. Less written work and more speaking participation.**

**Willing to listen to different points of view**



education as  
liberation

EDUCATIONAL  
JUSTICE