

THE OWL

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES



**Reaching
New Heights**
Dance legend Alicia
Graf Mack '03
continues to soar

The Power of Yes

**A Model Labor
Movement**

**BMCC-Columbia NYC
Scholars**

**New GS Residential
Building**

SPRING 2026

THE OWL

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES

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Dancing to Her Own Tune

Recently named artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Alicia Graf Mack '03 is making an impact on the stage, behind the scenes, and at GS.



The Power of Yes

GS has experienced unprecedented progress over the past quarter century—and continues to innovate in game-changing ways.



Model Advocates

New York State's groundbreaking Fashion Workers Act—which went into effect in 2025—has deep roots at GS.



GS Welcomes NYC Scholars

The BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars Program expands access to GS for high-performing community college students.



Updates from Abroad

News and notes from GS's university partners around the world.



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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

Dear GS Alumni and Friends,

In this issue of *The Owl*, we reflect on how much the Columbia School of General Studies has grown and accomplished in the past 25 years (see “The Power of Yes” on page 14). At the beginning of the millennium, GS was poised for a reinvention. It was ready to build on its foundation as the Ivy League’s leading school for nontraditional students and to develop new ways to expand, thrive, and innovate. The time was right for a guiding vision to take GS into the future, and we were fortunate to have such leadership in the late Dean Peter Awn, who, in partnership with Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers, launched a strategic plan that helped chart an ambitious path for GS.

In the years since, GS has continued to innovate and expand, increasing enrollment, building our endowment, developing fruitful domestic and international partnerships, increasing support of student veterans, and much more.

We continue to add new partnerships with community colleges, such as our Borough of Manhattan Community College–Columbia NYC Scholars Program (see “GS Welcomes NYC Scholars” on page 24) and our NextGen Public Health Scholars Program. We are also expanding our global reach, with Dual Degree offerings in collaboration with universities in France, Hong Kong, Israel, Ireland, and more in the works.

Closer to home, we are about to unveil our first dedicated student residence hall, an important milestone for our community. Designed specifically for GS students, this historic building brings together beautiful shared spaces and thoughtful amenities that will help foster connection and belonging. Just as important, the new residence hall supports our long-term commitment to make housing



more accessible, reducing commute times and enabling students to take fuller advantage of the academic and social opportunities that define undergraduate student life.

In these pages, we are also proud to feature the accomplishments of some of our extraordinary alumni. Our cover story profiles the incomparable Alicia Graf Mack '03, a legend in the dance world who has recently been named the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (see “Dancing to Her Own Tune” on page 10). We also report on how the Fashion Workers Act, a trailblazing new law that protects models’ labor rights, was the brainchild of alumna and former model Sara Ziff '11 (see “Model Advocates” on page 20).

As we approach the 80th anniversary of the creation of GS, we look forward to welcoming Columbia University’s president-designate, Jennifer Mnookin (see the announcement on page 6). We will continue to work toward further realizing the potential of our distinctive mission and even better supporting our GS students who bring seriousness of purpose, intellectual curiosity, and a depth of lived experience that enriches the academic environment for all undergraduates at Columbia. Without a doubt, this is our moment.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Rosen-Metsch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90
Dean and Professor



The Future of GS
TAKES SHAPE

With the creation of the first dedicated GS residence hall, the School is embarking on its next chapter, one defined by expanded access and strengthened student support. Just two short blocks from Lewisohn Hall, the residence hall is more than a building—it's a vital resource that will help hundreds of GS students thrive, removing one of the most significant barriers to pursuing a Columbia education. Along with members of the GS Board of Visitors and senior GS administrators, Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 attended the building's "topping-out" ceremony to mark the milestone and celebrate the beginning of a new era for GS.





“I am honored and thrilled to join Columbia University at this important moment.”

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY NAMES JENNIFER L. MNOOKIN PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE

In late January, Columbia University’s Board of Trustees appointed Jennifer L. Mnookin, a nationally recognized legal scholar who serves as the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, to be the next president of Columbia University, effective July 1, 2026.

“I am honored and thrilled to join Columbia University at this important moment,” Mnookin said. “Columbia is defined by rigorous scholarship, a deep commitment to open inquiry, world-class patient care, and an inseparable and enduring connection to New York City, the greatest city in the world. I look forward to working closely with faculty, students, and staff, and with both our local and global community of alumni and friends, to advance the University’s critically important mission and to ensure

that its teaching and research continue to contribute meaningfully to society.”

As Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Mnookin leads a flagship public research campus serving more than 50,000 students across 13 schools and colleges with more than 25,000 faculty and staff, including a medical school and an affiliated health system. Mnookin’s steady, energetic, and effective leadership at UW–Madison strengthened academic and support systems to advance student success and academic excellence. Through constructive engagement with the UW–Madison’s broad set of stakeholders, her leadership also contributed to increased enrollment, strong research growth, and record levels of philanthropic support for the institution.

Prior to her appointment at UW–Madison, Mnookin served for seven years as Dean of UCLA School of Law, following nearly two decades on the UCLA and UVA Law faculties, which included multiple senior academic leadership roles.

As one of the nation’s leading and most-cited scholars in the field of legal evidence, Mnookin’s academic work focuses on evidence, science, and the law, with particular attention to wrongful convictions, forensic evidence, and visual evidence.

Mnookin received her AB from Harvard University, her JD from Yale Law School, and a PhD in history and social study of science and technology from MIT. She and her husband, political scientist Joshua Foa Dienstag, have two children.



2025 MILITARY BALL

Columbia Honors Veterans at Gala Event

Columbia pride filled Pier Sixty on the Chelsea waterfront as nearly 700 veterans, supporters, and leaders gathered on November 14, 2025, for the University's Military Ball. The annual event unites veterans across Columbia and New

York State and reflects a longstanding commitment dating back to the founding of GS for returning World War II veterans. Today, GS enrolls more than 350 undergraduate veterans—the most in the Ivy League—alongside many others across Columbia's schools.



This year's ball honored Columbia University Trustee Secretary Jeh Johnson '82LAW and Trustee Victor Mendelson '89CC and Lisa Mendelson for their monumental impacts on veterans and veteran programming at Columbia. Thanks to the generous support of the Mendelson family, the Mendelson Family Veterans Excellence Fund was established. With record attendance, over half a million dollars in fundraising, and inspiring tributes, the ball reaffirmed Columbia's belief in veterans' contributions to the University and beyond Morningside Heights.

JOSH PARK '24, '26TC

Continuing the Mission

When U.S. Army veteran Josh Park '24, '26TC first came to GS in 2021, Manhattan was a far cry from the military bases he had grown accustomed to. But the transition wasn't just a change of pace. It signaled a new mission: to heal the invisible wounds he had witnessed among fellow service members.

Park enrolled in GS with an impressive record of service. He had enlisted in the Army at 18, spending two years in the South Carolina National Guard before three years of active duty at Fort Drum as an infantryman. He later joined the Army Reserves in California.

"Over the course of eight years, I attended over 10 funerals of friends from the military," Park said. "That's the big drive for me—wanting to make a difference and contribute meaningfully to the veteran community."

Like many veterans, Park faced a jarring shift

when leaving active duty. "I did not really have a support system in New York City," he recalled. "But I found one through the military veteran community at Columbia." That community also inspired him to build one of his own: CU Barbell, a competitive weight lifting club. CU Barbell became both a physical outlet and a place where he could rebuild the camaraderie and confidence he had experienced in the Army.

Originally a computer science major, Park switched to psychology, a pivot motivated by his wish to find meaning after losing too many friends in uniform. By his senior year, he was contributing to two psychology labs—one examining PTSD in veterans and civilians, and another studying emotional responses to the 2024 presidential election.

Today, Park is a clinical research coordinator at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in the



Bronx. His work supports a groundbreaking psychedelic therapy program for veterans with PTSD. One of his chief goals is to dispel the commonly held belief among veterans that seeking help is a shameful sign of weakness.

Park is also pursuing a master's degree at Teachers College, aiming to become a clinical psychologist. "I've seen what PTSD does to people," he said, "and it has made me more empathetic."

864

GS students graduated in 2025

466

Application submissions to the four-year track in the Joint Bachelor's Degree Program with CityUHK in its first full year of recruiting

5

GS students named 2025-2026 Millennium Fellows

68

GS students inducted into Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society in 2025

56

GS students received 63 awards through fellowship programs during the 2024-2025 academic year. Among them are the seventh GS Schwarzman Scholar and the first Columbia University Future Nobel Laureate Scholar.

70

Milestone anniversary of the highly regarded Postbac Premed Program, founded in 1955. The oldest and largest program of its kind in the U.S., it provides students of all ages and backgrounds with a rigorous approach to medical school preparation.

38

GS student researchers presented their projects at Columbia's Fall 2025 Undergraduate Research Symposium

THE PATH TO FULBRIGHT

Matthew Oey '24 shares how Columbia prepared him to pursue his goals



How did GS prepare you for where you are today?

Columbia was one of the most fun, intellectually stimulating, and transformative experiences of my life. I met amazing professors who completely changed my perspective on life. Despite majoring in history, I was provided grants to do research across a variety of fields, from anthropology to political science. I worked as a research assistant to Professor Stuart Gottlieb on publications related to counterterrorism; I also joined Hillary Clinton's think tank, the Institute of Global Politics, where I assisted ex-National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien with a study on America's presidential envoys.

The best part of Columbia was the breadth of perspectives and opportunities. For any random permutation of ideas/topics you could conjure up, you were encouraged to go out and research it, no matter how niche and out-there your ideas were.

A 2025 Fulbright recipient, Matthew Oey '24 is now pursuing an MBA at Milan's Bocconi University and will continue his studies at Harvard Law School. He recently spoke about how Columbia empowered him to realize his dreams.

What does receiving a Fulbright mean to you?

I grew up in Singapore, alongside my family's American publishing business. My parents' work often took us to Indonesia, Japan, and the U.S., with stopovers in Europe. Cross-cultural exploration has always been a big source of inspiration for my intellectual curiosities. In many ways, the Fulbright feels like a natural extension of my long time interests in cultural exchange.

What advice would you give to students who are considering applying for a Fulbright?

Start as early as possible and write lots of drafts. Let the ideas sit and keep coming back with fresh eyes. Also, take full advantage of the Undergraduate Research and Fellowships office. They gave me tons of useful feedback that I think really pushed me over the edge in the selection process.

DECODING MEMORY

Neuroscientist Sarah DeMoya investigates how our cognitive functions change with age

By Carrie Kirby

From a young age, Sarah DeMoya thought she was headed to medical school.

“I had a book called *Germs Make Me Sick*, about viruses and bacteria. I used to read it when I was five years old and ask my friends what germs they had,” said DeMoya.

Then, as a student at Brigham Young University, DeMoya stumbled upon a neuroscience class. “I was hooked,” she said. “I thought it was so cool how the activity of cells leads to behavior.”

Discovering neuroscience put DeMoya in a different direction, where she would zoom in on some of the brain’s tiniest parts to further our understanding of memory.

DeMoya worked at Brigham Young’s Memory and Decision Making Lab as an undergraduate volunteer, then continued in the same lab to earn a master’s degree. She studied long-term memory, looking at how changes in the activity of specific brain regions correlate with memory performance. When she began her PhD at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, she dialed in her focus to study memory at the cellular level. DeMoya observed how the tiny dendritic spines that connect neurons are lost as brains age. She showed that the

loss of a specific kind of dendritic spine—thin, flexible ones—in the parietal cortex is associated with working memory impairments in aging.

While doing this research, DeMoya also took the time to reach out to other women breaking into science. She became the founding president of Women in Science at Mount Sinai and New York Women in STEM, an inter-institutional organization that advocates for women in the early stages of their scientific careers across the New York City area.

In 2018, DeMoya came to Columbia as a postdoctoral research scientist and continued her work with dendritic spines. She discovered that when brains lose these spines, the surviving ones tend to be found in clusters, which aids in the preservation of memory function.

In hindsight, DeMoya reflects on how her undergrad experience helped her find her true path, and she enjoys encouraging her current students on their own journeys. Now a lecturer in discipline in Columbia’s psychology department and a director of undergraduate studies for the neuroscience



PHOTO: VERONICA SZAREJKO

and behavior major, she is opening the laboratory doors to even more students.

With collaborators at Columbia’s Zuckerman Institute, a grant from the Office of the Provost, and in-kind support from the Center for Teaching and Learning, DeMoya developed the class Neuroscience Methods: Cells and Circuits, in which undergraduates learn skills involved in neuroscience research.

Now in the class’s second year, DeMoya has noticed a trend: About half the students come from the School of General Studies, which makes up a third of Columbia’s students overall.

DeMoya thinks this is because GS students tend to proactively seek out what they need to reach their goals. “They are so enthusiastic,” she said. “They say, ‘I want to learn more. I want hands-on experience.’ They want to get into labs, and they see this class as a way to help them get there.”

COVER FEATURE

DANCING *to Her*



Members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
with Artistic Director Alicia Graf Mack.

PHOTO: ANDREW ECCLES

Own Tune

Recently named artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Alicia Graf Mack '03 is making an impact on the stage, behind the scenes, and at GS

By Kathrin Havrilla-Sanchez

For Alicia Graf Mack '03, bouncing back after adversity is simply a part of life. When a devastating diagnosis at age 20 took her burgeoning dance career off course, Columbia's School of General Studies became a pivotal part of her comeback story.

Born in California and raised in Maryland, Graf Mack moved to New York City in 1996 to pursue her dancing dreams, beginning under the direction of Arthur Mitchell, the renowned dancer, choreographer, and founder of Dance Theatre of Harlem.

"I had been with Dance Theatre of Harlem since my senior year of high school and had a quick trajectory to success in the dance world," said Graf Mack. "In 1999, I started feeling pain in my knee with increasing inflammation—it was all unexplained. I pushed through for six months or more until finally I couldn't push anymore and had to stop dancing."

Forced to give up a dream that she'd had since she was a toddler, Graf Mack didn't know what to do next.

"At the time, I lived in Manhattan on La Salle Street and Amsterdam, just a few blocks north of the main campus," Graf Mack said. "On my hardest days, when I felt like I had hit rock bottom—in terms of my physical health, my mental health, in all the ways someone feels like they have nowhere to go—I would

go for walks on campus if I was able. Just being in that environment felt so freeing."

In time, Graf Mack realized that while her path was not turning out the way she had thought, she was still young and could figure out something else to do in life. She attended an orientation for GS and met then-Dean Peter Awn, who told her that her creative dance background was a great fit for the School.

"The thought of becoming an undergrad was overwhelming because it had been a while since I had been in school, and I hadn't really planned on going to college in the first place," Graf Mack said. "But when I applied to GS and got admitted, it was the first positive thing that had happened to me in a year and a half of pushing against a brick wall. It gave me permission to think of myself as something other than a dancer for the very first time."

A New Chapter at GS

Graf Mack began with the Core Curriculum at GS and decided to major in history. An avid writer and the daughter of two social scientists, Graf Mack excelled in this path.

"The GS liberal arts education is so strong in the humanities and social sciences, which suited Alicia perfectly," said Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90. "At her core, she is a humanist: She's intellectually curious, and she'll enhance any conversation that she's a part of."

Around this time, Graf Mack also finally got a diagnosis for her ailments: undifferentiated spondyloarthropathy, a kind of rheumatoid arthritis that involves widespread pain, stiffness, and swelling. When she wasn't in the library, she was in the gym strengthening her body after several major surgeries and, she said, "trying to feel like myself again."

During her first year, Graf Mack became part of a student-led praise dance ministry on



PHOTO: DIANE BONDAREFF

Left: Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 and Graf Mack at 2025 GS Class Day. Opposite page, left: Graf Mack (center, in black), with members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; right: Graf Mack and Judith Jamison at the Dance Magazine Awards 2023.

“I’ve discovered that I thrive in places of learning—they are labs of ideas, and you see how different things can come together in creative ways, whether that’s in a collaborative essay or in choreography.”

Alicia Graf Mack '03

campus called A Time to Dance. At first, she only attended rehearsals, but as time went on and her arthritis began to subside, she joined in on the movements.

“I am so grateful to A Time to Dance because it was in my life from the very beginning at GS,” Graf Mack said. “Movement has been a through line in my life, and the dance ministry carried my spirit in a way that I deeply needed.”

By her senior year, she had begun taking dance classes again, both at Barnard College and at New York’s Steps on Broadway dance studio.

“I first saw Alicia before I met her, performing with several other dancers in the dance department,” said Lynn Garafola, professor emerita of dance at Barnard and author of an upcoming biography of Arthur Mitchell, for which she interviewed Graf Mack. “But one could never really say Alicia was ‘one of several dancers’ because she was quite a remarkable person. Her physicality stood out among everyone—amazing extensions that you could stretch forever and never achieve. I was also astonished because she had serious injuries at the time—I remember her knee was taped, and I know now she was facing other issues as well.”

When Graf Mack graduated from GS in 2003 (*magna cum laude*, honors in history), she was preparing for a full-time position with J.P. Morgan.

“The dance bug had bitten me pretty hard again,” said Graf Mack. “I reached out to Complexions Contemporary Ballet to ask if they needed marketing help for the summer before I was to begin my work at J.P. Morgan in the fall. They had seen me dance and asked if I could fill in for an injured dancer. I went on a trip to Italy with them and performed, and my body snapped back into dance mode.”

Graf Mack pivoted again: She returned her signing bonus to J.P. Morgan, and after the summer tour with Complexions, returned to Dance Theater of Harlem.

“It was something I didn’t expect to happen, and it was a magical time,” said Graf Mack.

Back to the Stage

In 2005, Graf Mack became a principal dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for three years until her arthritis flared up for a second time. She took another break from dance, earning her master’s degree in nonprofit business management from Washington University in St. Louis. During this time, she married Kirby Mack, a Columbia College graduate, former pro football player, and current private wealth manager at Creative Planning.

Graf Mack began teaching dance at Webster University in St. Louis and started to perform again as her body recovered. She went back to Ailey from 2011 to 2014, dancing with the company for a total of six years under Judith Jamison and then Robert Battle. In 2018, she became the youngest and first Black dean and director of the dance division at the Juilliard School. She received her honorary doctorate from Juilliard in 2025.

“Alicia is the definition of grace under fire,” said Jacqueline P. Blackett, deputy athletics director at Columbia University, who knew Graf Mack and her husband when they were attending college. “She is a visionary and so determined and driven. Alicia demonstrates a strong commitment to community, so working with students and young dancers is a perfect fit. She is brilliant at imparting her knowledge and experience to the next generation.”

This past summer, Graf Mack experienced a full-circle moment when she was chosen to become the fourth-ever artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

"I am so happy to be back at Alvin Ailey; it feels like home," said Graf Mack. "It's an environment that I have loved and has been a part of my North Star since I first found out about the company as a child. Seeing Black bodies in motion was eye-opening for me as a young person, and being part of that legacy is so meaningful."

"GS was a remarkable place for Alicia to acquire a varied background in music, hone her writing skills, and learn how to speak to a wide variety of people," said Garafola. "It's so important for dancers—especially those who want to go into management and administration—to know more than just the dance aspect, see a broader picture of the field, and understand how companies are shaping themselves. Dancers can be training themselves for something else, taking a few classes at a time, and places like GS make preparing for post-dance life possible."

Leading the Next Generation

Throughout her career, Graf Mack has maintained a strong connection to her alma mater. In 2008, she was awarded the Columbia Medal for Excellence and was the keynote speaker at GS Class Day; she delivered the Class Day keynote again in 2025.

In 2018, Graf Mack was invited by Rosen-Metsch to join the GS Board of Visitors, which

helps support the School's mission, long-range planning, financial development, and standing within the academic community.

"Alicia has been a light on the board," said Rosen-Metsch. "Not only does she give thoughtful feedback, but she is also a doer. She is one of the key people who has helped bring our School to new heights by working to address everything from alumni engagement and fundraising to food insecurity among students and career development initiatives."

When Graf Mack thinks back on her time at GS, many of the lessons she learned have extended far beyond the classroom.

"When I started at GS, even though I was a performer, I was extremely shy," she said. "I learned how important it is to build relationships with people who can support you. I've discovered that I thrive in places of learning—they are labs of ideas, and you see how different things can come together in creative ways, whether that's in a collaborative essay or in choreography."

"One of the things GS does very well is that it allows students to develop into who they want to be," Blackett said. "GS was perfect for Alicia because it met her where she was—the students here tend to be a little more focused on what they want and are coming back to college to pursue an education after some life experience. She wears a multitude of hats and

makes it look easy—a rare quality in a leader."

Graf Mack hosted three seasons of *Moving Moments*, a podcast in which she interviewed colleagues and friends to discuss the creative process and living a purposeful life in dance. She is now working on a new podcast with colleagues at Ailey and has written a children's book that will be published this year.

"Throughout my life, I have been proud that I've endured," Graf Mack said. "There could have been so many other outcomes for me that were not so positive, but I had a lot of support along the way. During my time at GS, I was also open to opportunities—I just said 'yes,' and I discovered that maintaining a student's or beginner's mindset on all things is so valuable to making the most of life."



YES

The Power of

By Nancy J. Brandwein

A sought-after fashion model studies economics and launches her own skincare brand. An EMT and waiter who enters college as an older student becomes a journalist for Dow Jones and Bloomberg News, covering more than 17 countries. A veteran of the Marine Corps in Iraq fulfills a lifelong dream of becoming a physician. These exemplify the thousands of transformations that Columbia School of General Studies has helped make possible for nontraditional students. Yet perhaps the biggest story of transformation is that of GS itself. In the first 25 years of this century, GS has evolved from a small Columbia extension school largely unknown outside New York City into the global standard-bearer for the Ivy League education of nontraditional students.

Much of this transformation can be credited to the late Dean Emeritus Peter J. Awn's 20-year tenure (1997-2017). Awn saw the enormous potential in highly capable career changers, veterans, and students whose education had been interrupted. He worked to ensure they were fully integrated into Columbia's academic and student life and helped define what GS has become: a school with a habit of saying "yes"—not casually, but intentionally. "Yes" to the value of lived experience. "Yes" to the conviction that GS students belong in the same classrooms and are held to the same standards as their Columbia peers. As early as 2001, along with Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers and his small leadership team, Awn began developing a plan to more fully realize the School's mission to empower these resilient and talented learners and expand their access to elite education.

25 Years of Reimagining What's Possible

Launched in 2005, *Past History, Current Reality & Plan for the Next Decade* (2005-2015) laid out Awn's road map for growing enrollment, increasing tuition revenue, and investing in operations—starting with admissions, moving on to student affairs, and eventually focusing on alumni development. In announcing that he would step down after 20 years of service, Awn credited Rodgers—who has been with GS throughout its transformative quarter century—as “the architect of most of our successful initiatives.” Rodgers says the School's culture of growth and innovation also depends on a willingness to say, “Yes, let's consider this,” as possibilities emerge. “The questions we ask,” he said, “are ‘Is this good for students? Is this good for the School? Does this bring to Columbia a student who otherwise wouldn't be here?’”

In taking the baton from Awn, Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 has built on the School's sound footing and instituted innovative ways to further support and enrich students. Saying “yes” to the potential of nontraditional students means removing the financial barriers they face, and Rosen-Metsch has made financial aid a top priority. During her tenure, the endowment has doubled, and the School has created three more international Dual Degree Programs along with two pioneering community college partnerships that offer full-ride scholarships for exceptional students.

The last quarter century at GS can best be described as progress made with deep intention and commitment, intermixed with moments of opportunity, where the leadership at the School, over two transformative deanships, saw opportunity and moved to embrace it, always driving

GS has experienced unprecedented progress over the past quarter century—and continues to innovate in game-changing ways

the School forward. These commitments reflect GS's larger achievement of turning possibility into practice, again and again, over the past 25 years.

Growing Enrollment

Investing in the School meant growing enrollment, and growing enrollment meant expanding access to an elite Ivy League education. For GS, this started with recruiting the very best students from the nation's community colleges—often the first point of entry for nontraditional students. The “deep and robust” admission plan, said Rodgers, led GS to look for the first time outside the tri-state area and to an aggressive recruitment effort to identify the top students at leading community colleges across the country. At the same time, the admissions office reached out to groups



The late Dean Emeritus Peter J. Awn and Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 in 2017

“We didn’t do this because we thought it would be fun. We did it because there’s a historic connection in the School and because it makes us a better institution having a veteran voice in the classroom. This is a school that takes lived experience seriously. That’s our role.”

Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers

of students that did not enter through college—Wall Street traders, performing artists, professional athletes—by promoting student stories that mirrored the prospective applicants’ own trajectories.

Intensive outreach bore fruit. Enrollment nearly doubled by 2025, now with 2,983 students (as compared to 1,593 in 2000-2001), with 60 percent coming from community colleges. As the School’s reputation grew, the varied pathways students took to get here were nearly as likely to originate in another country as the U.S.; a full 29 percent of GS students are now international, up from 2 percent in 2000. International enrollment was further boosted by the School’s formation of four undergraduate Dual Degree Programs located across the globe, with a total of 603 students enrolled in these programs in 2025.

Growth has gone hand in hand with a more vigilant approach to admissions, one focused on selecting exceptional students who will persist through the realities of balancing Columbia coursework with work, family, or other responsibilities. That attention to fit and readiness, along with the increased number of students coming to GS from greater distances, has helped flip the part-time/full-time ratio from roughly 60/40 to 40/60 and led to higher matriculation rates.

Helping Student Veterans Thrive

As GS was planning for investment and growth, and in the wake of 9/11, Awn and

Rodgers, then admissions dean, knew that veterans—a student population that was central to the origins of the School following World War II—would be returning to higher education, this time from Afghanistan and Iraq. True to form, they didn’t wait for them to enroll; instead, they did something innovative for an Ivy: Rodgers and the admissions team began recruiting veterans to Columbia, visiting military bases around the country and building new connections with specific military units, particularly in the special operations community. Importantly, the School went all in on the Yellow Ribbon Program, putting millions of dollars into institutional grants that were matched by the Department of Veterans Affairs to offer free tuition and fees. “We didn’t do this because we thought it would be fun,” said Rodgers. “We did it because there’s a historic connection in the School and because it makes us a better institution having a veteran voice in the classroom. This is a school that takes lived experience seriously. That’s our role.” And the vets came marching in, with their numbers increasing from only 26 veterans in 2000 to over 300 today. Some of those initial post 9/11 vets formed MilVets, a student organization geared toward providing networking opportunities, resources, and support to help veterans succeed; it is now the largest student veteran organization in the Ivy League.

Paul Yates '05, '08BUS, a founding member of MilVets, recognized early on the importance of fostering connections among Columbia’s veteran community. Today,

Yates continues to do so as cofounder and president of Columbia Veterans, a nonprofit alumni organization, and as a member of the GS Board of Visitors. “What began as a small and challenging effort to support Columbia’s student veterans evolved into a vital exchange of perspectives with veterans and younger students learning side by side, enriching classroom dialogue, sharpening critical thinking, and building lifelong bonds that continue to shape the University and our communities,” Yates said.

With decades of serving student veterans, GS had a deep bank of expertise to share with others. In 2017, Awn and Rodgers partnered one last time to create the Columbia University Center for Veteran Transition and Integration (CVTI). CVTI was designed, said Dave Keefe, its director of community engagement, to “expand and scale the services that GS had built, to provide this model that we refer to as ‘to, through, and beyond,’” supporting prospective students, current students, and alumni. Starting with a single online course, CVTI has since grown into a national presence that “trains the trainers,” partnering with schools, veteran service organizations, and companies nationwide. Keefe says CVTI has reached “an inflection point in building this integrational culture of support for veterans.”

Reimagining Global Education

Intentional growth and investment met opportunity at GS when the prestigious

French university Sciences Po approached Columbia about an undergraduate partnership in 2007—coincidentally just when then-President Lee Bollinger was urging Columbia’s leaders to think more expansively about what it meant to be an international university. GS’s leadership determined that simply enrolling international students or offering limited study abroad opportunities was not enough to prepare students to study and work anywhere in the world. Awn seized the opportunity to partner with Sciences Po in a model that immersed students in two academic cultures.

Inaugurated in 2010, the Dual BA Program with Sciences Po became the template for subsequent partnerships with City University of Hong Kong, launched in 2012 and expanded in 2025 to four-year admissions; Trinity College Dublin, launched in 2018; and Tel Aviv University, launched in 2020. All these programs have drawn a different kind of nontraditional student to GS, subtly shifting the way GS defines nontraditional, focusing on educational path just as much as lived experience. While they have a traditional demographic, Rodgers said, “These students will not be satisfied with a traditional four-year experience on one campus. They have often lived in multiple countries and speak many languages; they are students of the world.”

As Anton Bengt Frederiksson ’15, a graduate of the Columbia-Sciences Po inaugural class, observed, “The Dual Degree programs continue to draw an even broader

array of curious, highly driven students across the U.S. and the globe who may be in search of a differentiated educational path for their sense of adventure or self-discovery to unfold.”

Forging Local Partnerships

The lessons learned in international partnership became an important foundation as GS realized there was work to do with domestic schools, and even more specifically, work to do in New York City. Building on years of success recruiting community-college students, GS has launched two partnerships with New York City institutions that create direct routes to a Columbia degree. Inaugurated in 2023, the NextGen Public Health Scholars Program with Hostos Community College in the South Bronx identifies standout students early, supports them through their associate degrees, and brings them to GS for their bachelor’s work, with a built-in progression to the Mailman School of Public Health. The BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars Program, begun in Fall 2024, similarly offers high-achieving Borough of Manhattan Community College students a full-ride scholarship and a seamless transition into GS to complete their Columbia degrees.

Building Community

It was not enough to welcome ever more exceptional and diverse students to GS; Awn and the members of the GS Student Council (GSSC) focused on creating programming and support systems that addressed students’ distinct needs while also opening doors to the Columbia-wide clubs and activities. From hosting a smattering of events in the 1990s and early aughts—orientation, student-faculty dinners, leadership awards, and graduation—Student Life now hosts over 180 programs a year (exclusive of orientation). These range from identity-based community spaces, such as groups for LGBTQ+ students and student parents, to dedicated and comprehensive support for First Generation Low Income (FLI) students, which represent 40 percent of the student body, and peer-to-peer mentoring and leadership development sessions. Complementing these community spaces is a parallel expansion of academic



Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers and veteran Mark Franklin '19 at the 2019 Military Ball.

Growth of GS Endowment 2003-2025

support, including an increase in the number of advisors. The Academic Resource Center, helmed by Dean Sara Remedios, has grown well beyond its original science and math mandate to offer a range of tutoring, mentoring, and skills workshops in a dedicated campus hub.

Engaging Alumni

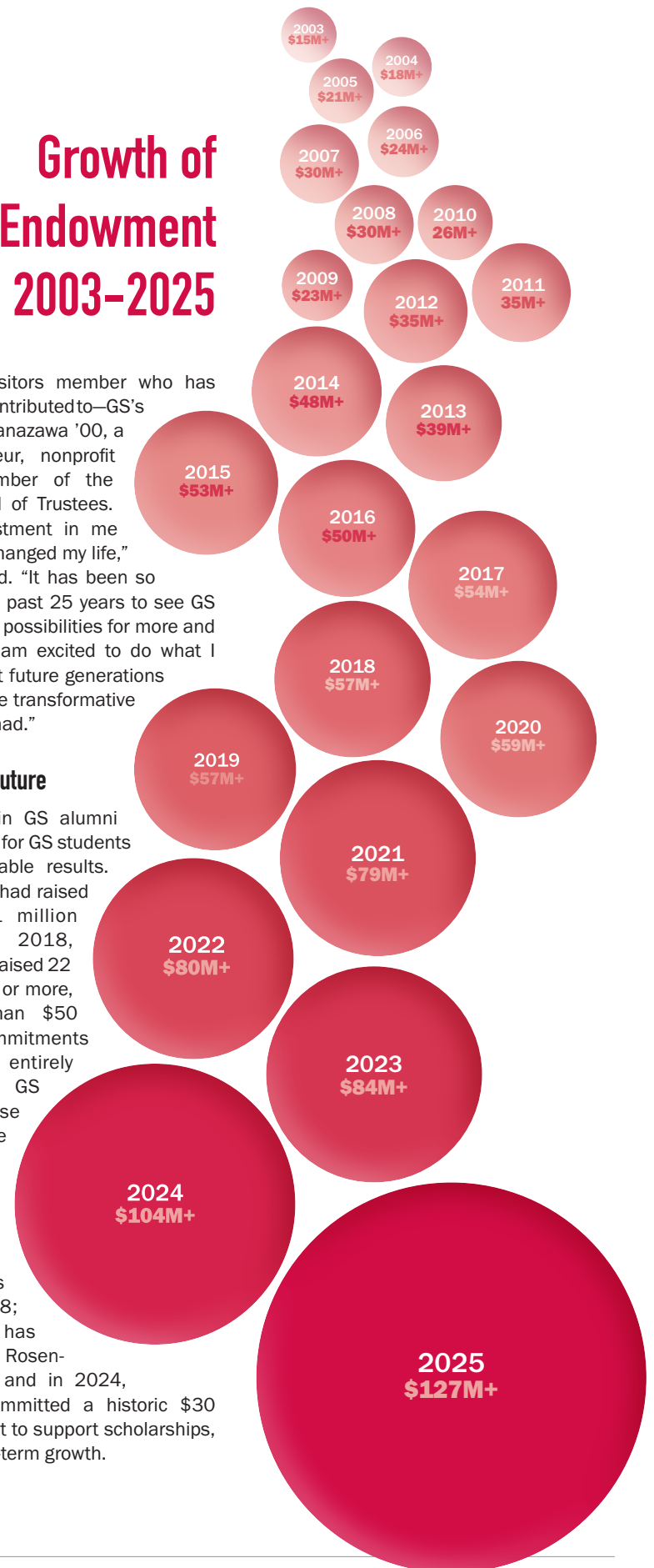
The final piece of the 10-year plan focused on expanding alumni relations and development. Senior Associate Dean for Development and Alumni Relations Jill Galas Hickey describes it as a deliberate hand-off from Awn to Rosen-Metsch that positioned GS to engage alumni more meaningfully and strengthen fundraising. That expansion reflects the instinct that has shaped GS for decades: a willingness to keep saying “yes” to students long after they graduate. GS now counts 24,000 living alumni, with an active core of about 2,500. When Galas Hickey arrived in 2017, the development office had just two full-time staff members; today it has eight, demonstrating the School’s growing investment in alumni engagement. “Everyone has a student-facing part of the job,” Galas Hickey said. “We want to ensure a positive student experience, because that makes you want to be an active alum.”

GS students are often included in alumni programming, and mentorship has become a regular feature of student life. Leadership groups embody that same philosophy. The alumni association remains an active volunteer body, while the Board of Visitors has grown from 13 largely advisory members to 26 engaged supporters focused on long-range planning and scholarships. What Galas Hickey values most is that the board “reflects our students. We want a student to stumble across the Board of Visitors and see themselves.” Entrepreneurs, performers, veterans, and first-generation graduates all serve, mirroring the nontraditional paths GS champions.

One Board of Visitors member who has witnessed—and contributed to—GS’s growth is Kikka Hanazawa ’00, a social entrepreneur, nonprofit leader, and member of the University’s Board of Trustees. “Columbia’s investment in me as a GS student changed my life,” Hanazawa recalled. “It has been so gratifying over the past 25 years to see GS continue to create possibilities for more and more students. I am excited to do what I can to ensure that future generations can have the same transformative experience that I had.”

Investing in the Future

This investment in GS alumni and in fundraising for GS students has had measurable results. Prior to 2018, GS had raised five gifts of \$1 million or more. Since 2018, Columbia GS has raised 22 gifts of \$1 million or more, totaling more than \$50 million in new commitments raised almost entirely in support of GS financial aid. These successes have had a tremendous impact on the School’s ability to provide financial aid to more students. Fundraising has tripled since 2018; the endowment has doubled during Rosen-Metsch’s tenure; and in 2024, the University committed a historic \$30 million investment to support scholarships, housing, and long-term growth.



Looking Ahead

Over the past five years, GS has faced serious tests, from the pandemic to constraints driven by shifting government support. Yet the story of the last quarter century, the first of the new millennium, is, at its core, a story of momentum. It is a story of a school built to adapt, to innovate, and to widen access without compromising excellence. Today, GS has every reason to be confident about what comes next.

In the years ahead, the School that has opened so many figurative doors for students will soon open new ones—in a literal sense. Rosen-Metsch's push to grow the endowment, together with Columbia's historic \$30 million investment, has laid the foundation for one of the School's most critical priorities: dedicated residential housing for GS students for the first time in the School's history. Columbia's purchase of a building in the Morningside Heights neighborhood, just blocks from Lewisohn Hall, will create a home for more than 300 students. Renovated with GS students' specific needs in mind and designed to support belonging and well-being, the building will include on-site resources such as a market co-located with a common kitchen to provide affordable meal choices and spaces for community-building gatherings and events.

At the same time, GS is preparing to build on what it has proven it can do—expanding the NYC Scholars Program to additional New York City community colleges, exploring a parallel partnership with Miami Dade College, and extending its global reach through a new Dual Degree Program in Singapore. Taken together, the commitments reflect a school still guided by the instinct that has defined its rise: recognizing potential—and acting decisively to meet it.

The last 25 years have shown what GS becomes when it says “yes” with intention. The next 25 years will be about translating that same ethos into even greater opportunity, deeper community, and wider impact as GS students take an even more central place in the undergraduate program at Columbia.

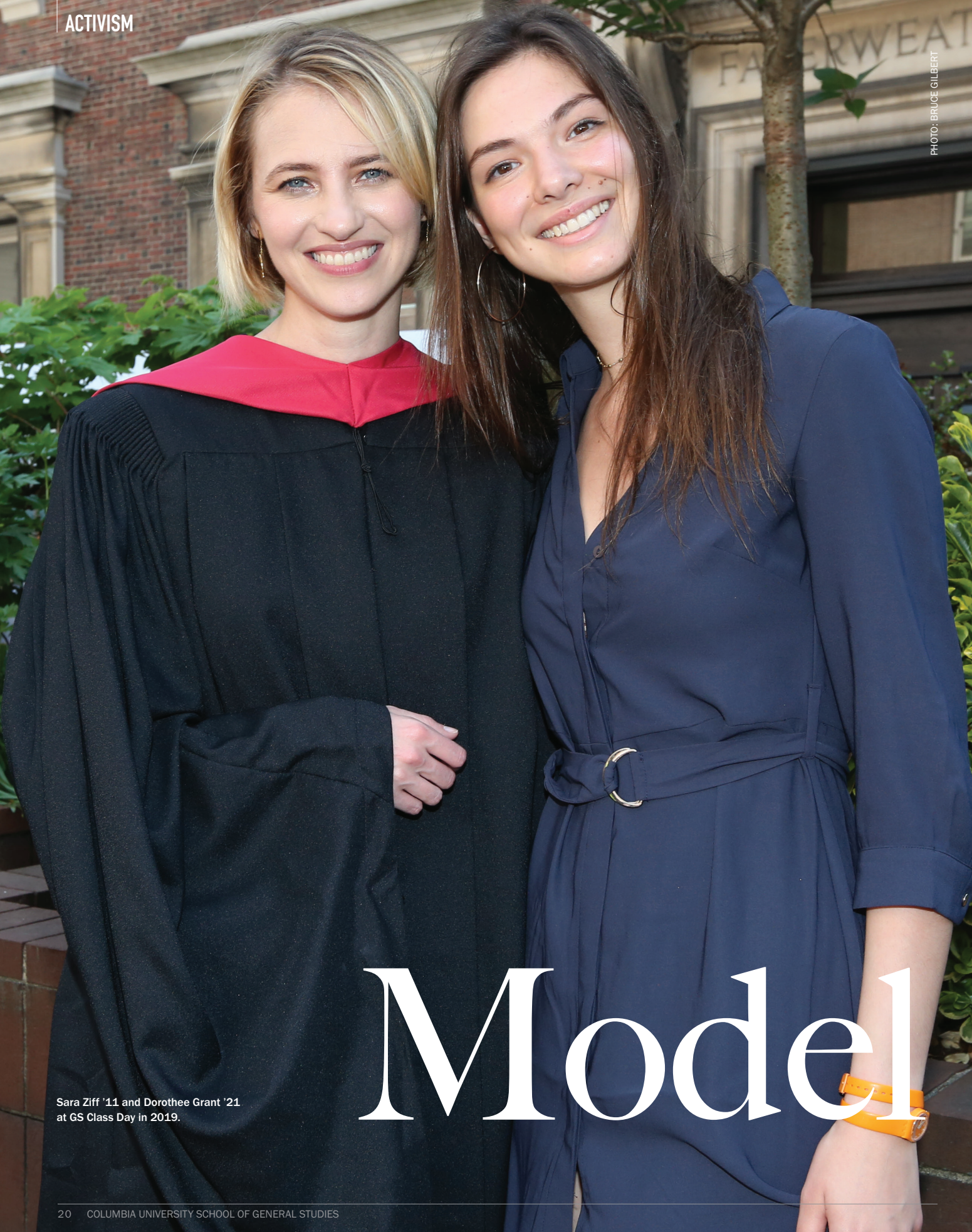
Core Values

For nearly a quarter century, GS students have benefited from foundational Core Curriculum classes

For more than a century, the Core Curriculum has defined the Columbia College experience, challenging students to engage directly with the texts and ideas that have shaped Western thought. Yet until 2012, GS students were not part of this cherished tradition. In his efforts to give GS students the same academic opportunities as their peers at Columbia College and Columbia Engineering, the late Dean of GS Peter Awn pushed for their access to the Core Curriculum. Today, all GS students who come in with less than 30 credits are required to take Core classes of University Writing and the year-long sequence of Literary Humanities and Contemporary Civilization classes. However, they can choose between several options for the Art and Music Humanities classes and can swap in three science courses for Frontiers of Science.

Flexibility also extends to how GS students take these classes—choosing GS-only sections or joining mixed Columbia College classes. Literary Humanities professor Rachel Adams sees her GS section as a bonding experience for cohorts, such as veterans, dual-degree students, and performing artists. She values the atmosphere of openness and curiosity shaped by her students' varied backgrounds and recalled one student in his late thirties, from a STEM profession, who “every day was teaching the class something. Afterward, he told me that taking the class had given him confidence in his ability to talk about literature and culture.” In mixed Core sections, that same maturity helps traditional undergraduates see the works—and the world—afew.

Adams said that it is gratifying to see her students become engaged with the material. She described one student veteran who initially felt that the assigned readings—which ranged from the Sumerian *Exaltation of Inanna* to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*—did not feel relevant to his life. “But one day we were talking about leadership,” said Adams, “and what kind of leader Odysseus was.” After class, the student told Adams about having served in Afghanistan. “The course had been clicking in his mind, and he saw how it resonated with his military experience. And he was like, ‘Wow, this is very cool.’”



Sara Ziff '11 and Dorothee Grant '21 at GS Class Day in 2019.

Model

New York State's groundbreaking Fashion Workers Act—which went into effect in 2025—has deep roots at GS

By Carrie Kirby

In her senior year of high school, Dorothee Grant '21 received an unexpected Instagram message from a premier modeling agency. Still sweaty from cross country practice, she had her mom snap a few photos in their upstate New York yard and sent them in.

Within weeks, the class valedictorian had signed a three-year contract. Instead of college, Grant jetted around the world, getting chauffeured to castings and photo shoots, and walking the runways of New York, Paris, London, and Milan.

Then the bills started arriving.

Grant's agency charged her for everything from mandatory haircuts to a consultation with a nutritionist to help her slim down—even though she had already been pressured to diet to a dangerously low weight.

"I thought that I was getting these things paid for," Grant recalled.

Grant had no control over or insight into what she earned. She sometimes completed a month of work only to learn she owed the agency money.

A Movement Born at GS

It was only when Grant entered Columbia's School of General Studies and connected with former model Sara Ziff '11 that Grant began to understand that her tribulations were part of systemic exploitation in the modeling industry.

After living through her own frustrations and abuse as a model, Ziff enrolled in GS as a political science major and began learning about labor and community organizing. With mentorship from Professor Dorian Warren, former codirector of Columbia's Program on Labor Law and Policy, Ziff started the Model Alliance to fight for the rights of a group of workers who typically garner little sympathy.

"The modeling and fashion industries appear to be very glamorous," Ziff said. "But when you pull back the curtain, the reality is that the modeling industry relies on predominantly very young immigrant women and girls, often just teenagers, who have little control over their working lives and are often put in predatory situations."

Ziff found a longtime ally and mentor in Warren, who helped her understand that "we deserve to have rights and protections like anyone else who works for a living." Warren, who left Columbia in 2015, continues to serve on the Model Alliance Advisory Board.

Beyond models, Ziff wanted to fight for the rights of all fashion workers, "from the

Advocates

“The reality is that the modeling industry relies on predominantly very young immigrant women and girls, often just teenagers, who have little control over their working lives and are often put in predatory situations.”

Sara Ziff '11

runway to the factory floor.” To that end, Ziff and the Model Alliance have fought for garment workers’ rights in Bangladesh and other countries.

For three years, the Model Alliance pushed New York State legislators to pass the Fashion Workers Act (FWA), which became a first-of-its-kind law establishing labor rights for models in 2025. The Fashion Workers Act regulates modeling agencies, which have typically required models to sign a power of attorney agreement, allowing the agency to sign contracts on the model’s behalf. Models often didn’t consent to—or even see—the terms of their own work contracts.

“This effectively makes you blind to your own business dealings and finances,” Ziff explained. “It is a huge amount of power to hand over to someone. In addition, the modeling agencies have claimed that they have no fiduciary responsibility to the young people they represent. This creates an environment of lack of transparency, coercion, and a great deal of abuse.”

Grant, who serves on the Model Alliance Workers Council, recalls taking the train to New York City while she was still in high school to pose for *Cosmopolitan* magazine—only to find out later that she would not be paid for the job. The same thing happened when she worked as a presenter at the Met Gala.

Abuse Beyond the Financial

Models are also routinely put in physically dangerous or humiliating situations, such as being forced to change clothes in public areas, where it is not uncommon for someone to photograph them without their consent. Agencies frequently send models—who sometimes do not earn enough to buy meals—to dinners and clubs as entertainment for wealthy businessmen. In

such situations, models are clearly vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault.

“That sort of behavior has been normalized in the industry, and you are considered difficult to work with if you complain about it,” Ziff said.

When writing her thesis at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health, Sydney Giordano ’20MPH focused on labor exploitation in a workforce that is miles removed from the Met Gala: makers of garments in Bangladesh. Yet when she became the Model Alliance’s associate director, Giordano was struck by the parallels between models and seamstresses.

“Conditions are different; the socioeconomic conditions are different,” Giordano said. “But on both sides of the supply chain, there are issues around working for free or very low wages, delayed payments, pressure to work long hours, exploitative contracts, and a really uneven power dynamic between the companies and the workers.”

Initially, the FWA was written to cover fashion workers beyond models, including photographers and hair and makeup artists, Ziff said. Unfortunately, its supporters did not get everything they wanted, and the final bill is limited to models and would-be models.

The FWA is not Ziff’s first legislative battle. After she founded the Model Alliance in 2012, the organization helped pass the Adult Survivors Act (ASA), which established a one-year window for New York victims of sexual assault to sue their abusers, no matter when the crimes happened.

Under the ASA, Ziff filed a lawsuit accusing Fabrizio Lombardo, an associate of Harvey Weinstein, of raping her in a hotel room when she was 19. According to the suit, Ziff’s agency arranged her meeting with Lombardo.

Ziff also made a documentary, 2009’s *Picture Me*, with filmmaker Ole Schell, about the darker side of high-fashion modeling.

Enrolling in GS was a turning point in Ziff’s life that helped her reframe the frustrations of her fashion career from personal struggles to systemic issues that could be changed.

“Coming from the fashion industry to an academic environment where I was valued for my ideas, not just my measurements, was incredibly refreshing,” she said.

New Legal Protections

After more than a decade of organizing and three years of crafting the bill and communicating with state legislators, the Model Alliance won a huge victory in getting the FWA passed. It encodes the following protections, among others, into law:

- **Fiduciary duty.** While attorneys are required by law to act as fiduciaries, acting in their clients’ best interest, modeling agencies have in the past been free to take actions that don’t help their models at all. The FWA requires agencies to negotiate contracts in models’ best interest.
- **Contract transparency.** Agencies now have to disclose to models key details, including pay rate, before a job begins.
- **Power of attorney.** Giving the agency the power to sign contracts on a model’s behalf is now optional and revocable.
- **Safety.** Agencies can’t send models to jobs that pose an unreasonable risk of danger.
- **Fees and expenses.** Agencies must receive written approval before paying expenses that will later be charged to the model.
- **Nudity.** Agencies can’t create or use nude or otherwise explicit photos without the model’s voluntary consent.
- **Harassment and retaliation.** Agencies have to establish company policies prohibiting inappropriate behavior toward models and protecting models who report problematic behavior from retaliation.
- **Artificial intelligence.** An agency can’t create or use a digital replica of a model without written consent.

The provision on artificial intelligence replicas makes the FWA one of the first laws anywhere to address AI in a labor context. Already, models have found AI-manipulated



PHOTO: BRIANA ELLEDGE

versions of their faces used online without their consent.

Grant, who works in AI after having studied computer science at Columbia, praised that section of the bill as threading the needle between the potential of AI and necessary protections.

“Imagine a world where agencies don’t have to deal with models anymore,” Grant said. “They could just take your likeness and manipulate it for any brand. Requiring consent for that is a huge way of ensuring you don’t have situations where your digital replica is doing things that you would not want.”

Enforcing the Ground Rules

The Model Alliance also hopes that other jurisdictions will see these changes in New York and be inspired to protect fashion workers as well.

“We see the Fashion Workers Act as a template for what could be done in other states and fashion capitals around the world,” Ziff said.

“We see the Fashion Workers Act as a template for what could be done in other states and fashion capitals around the world.”

Sara Ziff '11

In New York, the Model Alliance has been busy educating workers that they now have an avenue for reporting violations to the state Department of Labor and connecting some with attorneys for potential lawsuits. For years, the organization has been fielding calls about abuses from the field through its worker support hotline.

“In the past, when people would come to us through our support line, it would feel like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Without the law on their side, there wasn’t a lot that we could do,” Ziff said. “But now when people come to us, we can say, ‘Yes! You do have rights and protections.’”

New York State Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon (center left), Sara Ziff '11 (center right), and model advocates at a June 2025 event recognizing the Fashion Workers Act and Worker Safety month.

GS WELCOMES NYC SCHOLARS

The BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars Program expands access to GS for high-performing community college students

Columbia University’s historic \$30 million investment in GS, announced in the fall of 2024, has already created game-changing opportunities for qualified students. Not only has this investment enhanced the financial aid available to GS students, it has also funded an exciting new collaboration with Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), one of the most diverse two-year schools in the United States.

Columbia has long encouraged high-achieving community college students—many of whom are transfer applicants from BMCC—to continue their education at GS. But with the launch of the new BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars Program, GS is helping to redefine the path from community college to an Ivy League education.

To qualify, students must be enrolled in an associate degree program and intend to graduate from BMCC. Students in their second semester at BMCC have the opportunity to apply to GS, and after completing their associate’s degree, accepted students will seamlessly transition to Columbia GS in the subsequent fall semester to pursue their bachelor’s degree.

The NYC Scholars in the program enjoy unprecedented opportunities for growth, with robust advising, early access to Columbia’s academic and support resources, and transformative financial support. They receive scholarship funding from GS that covers their full financial need for tuition and fees, as well as a stipend for housing, personal expenses, and other school-related expenses.

“This partnership embodies our shared belief in the power of education as a tool for social mobility and equity,” said BMCC’s President Anthony Munroe. “We are excited about what the future holds for our students and look forward to seeing them flourish as they transition from BMCC to Columbia GS.”

“The NYC Scholars program will allow us to more fully support BMCC transfer applicants in the future, making a Columbia education accessible to even more of New York City’s highest-performing community college students,” said GS Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90. “We plan to further expand the NYC Scholars program over time, adding other NYC community colleges that only award associate’s degrees.”

Meet the Inaugural BMCC–Columbia NYC Scholars

These five scholars are part of the first cohort of the groundbreaking NYC Scholars Program between Borough of Manhattan Community College and Columbia GS. Hailing from around the world and across the five boroughs, these students have shown the resilience and academic excellence that embody not just the spirit of the NYC Scholars program, but that of BMCC and GS as well. They began their studies at GS in the fall of 2024 and will graduate this spring.



Isabela Bandeira

Isabela Bandeira has loved English literature for as long as she can remember. At age 12, she started reading the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, among others. “I knew the stories in those books were part of a dream I never expected to fulfill,” she said. “So I read and wrote, and just like that I began to manifest the life I’m living now.”



Bandeira grew up in a low-income family in Brazil and moved to the U.S. when she was 16 with her father. Not knowing any English proved challenging, but she persevered. She practiced English at school and also through poetry, dance, and theater—“my passions,” she said—and by working at McDonald’s and as a babysitter and dog walker. When the pandemic struck, her family lost their jobs and needed to go back to Brazil. “I had to leave the ‘American dream’ behind,” she said. “I returned to Brazil feeling sad and hopeless, thinking my dream of pursuing English outside the country was over.”

But Bandeira didn’t give up—she kept writing and practicing English as much as she could. Even in the face of grief (she lost a special person in her life during the pandemic), she kept writing. “Grief led me to write as a way to heal, and my poetry gained popularity online, eventually allowing me to publish my book [a 2024 poetry collection titled *Moonlight*]. That success helped me save enough money to start studying at BMCC.”

Bandeira flourished at BMCC and dove into the community, including serving as president of Alpha Kappa Chapter, BMCC’s division of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society. The school’s motto “Start Here. Go Anywhere” resonated deeply with Bandeira, and she found herself drawn to it in challenging times. “Part of me always believed that, even when it seemed impossible,” she recalled.

Now at GS, her dreams have become a reality. “I thought I was too old, too late, with English that wasn’t good enough ... That little girl who had always dreamed of academia, research, and immersing herself in English and writing is so proud of herself,” she said. “GS allowed me to dream again. It taught me that no dream is too big.”



Natanel Cohen

Natanel Cohen spent his elementary and secondary years at ultra-orthodox yeshivas in Manhattan. His educational path left little room for secular subjects he was interested in, such as math, history, and science. By high school, he began questioning the narrow framework he was raised in and quietly sought

to expand his perspective—and help close the academic gaps that left him behind his secular peers.

College wasn’t initially on Cohen’s radar. It took a profound personal upheaval to shift perspective: his mother’s diagnosis of stage 4 melanoma. He witnessed his sister become their mother’s full-time caretaker while simultaneously taking classes at BMCC to earn her nursing degree. His sister’s determination inspired him to forge his own educational path and enroll at BMCC. “If it were not for my mother’s illness, strength in the face of adversity, and encouragement combined with my sister’s commitment to expanding her horizons, I would not have been inspired to grow beyond previous self-imposed limitations,” he said.

Alongside classes at BMCC, Cohen continued his job as foreman and office salesperson for a moving company. “This ambitious schedule, while leaving little room for error or respite, made my resolve stronger and allowed me to slowly understand how the once seemingly impossible educational pursuits of others are achievable,” he said.

Now at GS, Cohen reflected on the unpredictability of life and the way higher education will brighten his future. “Emerging from humble beginnings with roots in a tiny yeshiva in the Lower East Side to completing my associate’s degree to not only having been accepted to Columbia but being awarded the NYC Scholars Program scholarship is a major milestone,” he said. “I have faith that, despite my inability to foresee the morphing landscape of life, as I have found my way thus far, I will continue to do so, and it will be my education that will allow me to do it.”

Ime Epko

Born to Nigerian immigrants in the Bronx, Ime Epko grew up on Staten Island. A journalist passionate about classic hip-hop, she



returned to education to hone her professional skills after five years in the workforce. “I wanted to become a more ethical and refined journalist,” she said, “so I resumed my undergraduate studies at BMCC, earning an associate’s degree in writing and literature with a journalism concentration.”

After participating in the Black Studies Across the Americas program, Epko looked to pursue further academia—and GS was just the place. “As a nontraditional

student, I have often felt excluded from the conversation. However, I found solace in Columbia GS’s focus on serving students like myself.”

Columbia’s research-focused mission allows Epko to continue exploring African Studies while contributing to *Forbes* as a Hollywood/entertainment writer and running her own online publication. “The flexibility that Columbia GS offers is a perfect fit, allowing me to continue my studies and journalism career while staying based in New York City.”

In beginning her GS journey, Epko reflected on advice she received. “A wise woman once advised me to remain true to my essence,” Epko said. “I must refrain from losing sight of my personal values and gleaming goals, and instead, adhere to my authenticity in everything I do at GS. This experience is meant to enhance the best parts of myself.”



Sally Weitzner

Sally Weitzner is a Brooklyn native pursuing a degree in film and media studies from GS. She graduated from BMCC with a degree in animation and gained work experience as a 2D animator and character designer.

When she isn’t watching horror movies with her friends, Weitzner is sketching from life, which led her to GS’s diverse community. “I wanted to continue my study of visual storytelling in a community of peers with diverse experiences, which was an essential part of my time in community college,” she explained.

Irfan Rahman

Irfan Rahman’s journey began in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where he suffered from a chronic hip condition. Rahman often found himself studying from a hospital bed or on long bus commutes. The challenges did not stop when he arrived in the United States. “I took on multiple responsibilities, including working 12-hour shifts at Burger King, managing family needs, and eventually starting at BMCC,” he said.

Alongside classes at BMCC, Rahman pursued internships in data science and accessibility technology, which led him to GS. “My



experiences shaped my passion for using technology to solve real-world problems and made me eager to join a community that values resilience and diversity,” he said.

Rahman was drawn to GS for many reasons, but the community was a standout. “I applied to GS because it offers a supportive and inclusive environment for nontraditional students like me,” he added. “The flexible academic structure, dedicated advising, and strong computer science program make it

the perfect place for me to grow as a software engineer. GS also provides unparalleled research opportunities and a community of peers with similar unique journeys, which motivates me to pursue my goals and give back through impactful work.”

Driven by a deep desire to make a meaningful impact, Rahman hopes to use his growing knowledge of software engineering and data science to build tools that serve others. “At GS, I’m excited to continue developing solutions that combine innovation and compassion while learning from an inspiring community,” he said.



Introducing the Second Cohort of NYC Scholars

With the inaugural cohort set to graduate this spring, the second group of NYC Scholars only just embarked on their GS journey, having arrived on campus last fall. As with their predecessors, the new scholars bring extraordinary life experiences, dedication, and enthusiasm to the program.



Stephane Kakou '27

Majors: Political Science and Sustainable Development

Path to GS: Originally from Côte d'Ivoire, Kakou has long been interested in global development and research. He is the founder of UNIHEART global, a nonprofit initiative focused on impacting underprivileged communities through kindness.

"I am grateful to be part of a community that values resilience, service, diversity, and intellectual curiosity."



Shaheim Kellum '28

Majors: Small Business and Entrepreneurship (BMCC); Political Science (Columbia)

Path to GS: A first-generation college student from Brooklyn, Kellum returned to school following a 20-year absence while navigating health challenges, fatherhood, and housing instability. He graduated from BMCC with a 4.0 GPA and honors.

"Being selected as a BMCC-Columbia NYC Scholar affirms that stories like mine belong at Columbia. It tells my children and everyone watching that discipline, faith, and purpose can take you anywhere."



Htet Aung Lin '27

Majors: Multimedia Programming and Design (BMCC); Information Science, Human-Computer Interaction track (Columbia)

Path to GS: Lin came to the U.S. from Myanmar after the COVID-19 pandemic and a military coup disrupted his education. In restarting his academic journey at BMCC, Lin discovered his passion at the intersection of design and technology.

"This scholarship is more than financial support; it is recognition of grit, resilience, and the reminder that sometimes missing one opportunity opens the door to something even greater."



Caleb Ogonodi '27

Major: Economics

Path to GS: Ogonodi, a former fintech cofounder, began his studies in Nigeria, where he pursued a law degree. He came to the U.S. in 2023 looking to acquire the skills to help him fight systemic inequality across the globe.

"Being a BMCC-Columbia NYC Scholar means a lot to me. It's like Columbia tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'We believe in you; keep going.'"



Paulette Ceara Ortiz '27

Major: Psychology

Path to GS: Ortiz moved to New York from Puerto Rico at age 18. To make ends meet, she worked in restaurants, sometimes up to 72 hours a week. Her dream was to return to school, and through her perseverance she was able to become a full-time student again.

"[Being a NYC Scholar] changed the way I see myself—not just through accomplishments, but because it showed me that what once felt impossible is now within my grasp."

NEWS AND NOTES FROM GS'S UNIVERSITY PARTNERS AROUND THE WORLD

Updates from Abroad

“GS is called nontraditional. That doesn’t begin to describe it. It is borderless. Many of us changed careers, crossed oceans, raised children, overcame illness. Many of us might not have had the same opportunity at another place.”

Peter Gorman '25

Sciences Po, France: Welcoming a New President

In September 2024, Sciences Po appointed Luis Vassy its new president. Vassy, a former government official who previously served as the French ambassador to the Netherlands, is, like Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90, an alumnus of the school he now leads. He met with current Dual BA students on campus in May 2025 and discussed his vision for helping to transform Sciences Po. In a statement issued after his appointment was confirmed, Vassy said, “At a time when crises and upheavals are multiplying in France and around the world, our country needs an institution that is able to tackle them through knowledge, rather than through fear and isolation.”

While Vassy was stepping into his post in Paris, a change was coming to the Reims campus. For as long as the Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po has existed, students have had the option to focus their studies on different regions of the world. Students at Reims could learn about either North America or Africa during their two years on campus. However, courses for the Africa minor were taught exclusively in French, which presented an obstacle to anyone coming into the program below the B2 level required for these courses.

That changed when the Africa minor became available in an English-language track at the beginning of the 2025-2026 academic year. Previously, the Africa minor (and, more recently, the Latin America and the Caribbean minor in Poitiers) was the only track unavailable to non-Francophone students. Now, students with any level of French are able to study the Africa minor.

City University of Hong Kong: Expanding the Entry Process

After more than a decade of partnership in the Joint Bachelor’s Degree Program (JBDP), City University of Hong Kong and GS announced a first-year entry process open to graduating high school seniors looking to enroll in college in the fall of 2026. The JBDP had previously functioned as a third-year entry program, allowing high-achieving students in select majors in their second year at CityUHK to apply to spend their remaining two years of college at Columbia University.

Now, students can apply to join the program directly out of high school, which will allow students to reap the benefits of four years of dual enrollment in two of the finest universities in the world. First-year entry students in the JBDP will have access to all the resources Columbia has to offer throughout their first two years at CityUHK, such as the Center for Career Education, GS academic advisors, and Columbia’s vast electronic archives via its library system.



Tel Aviv University, Israel: Offering a New Major Track

The Dual Degree Program between Tel Aviv University (TAU) and Columbia University is offering a new major in data science. Previously, data science was available as a minor, but TAU will expand it to a major track for students entering in the fall of 2026. This is an exciting development for prospective students, who are increasingly interested in STEM-related fields while benefiting from the education in the liberal arts that they receive at both TAU and Columbia.

In addition to the new major, TAU has been working to expand Dual Degree students' STEM offerings by allowing them to access prerequisite courses at TAU that will enable them to complete a computer science major in four years at Columbia. While Dual Degree students have always had the option of majoring in computer science at Columbia, the major's large course load, coupled with requirements to complete both TAU and Columbia core courses, meant it often took students longer than four years to do so.

With computer science prerequisite courses now available at TAU, Dual Degree students will be able to tackle this major in the same four-year timeline as non-Dual Degree students at Columbia, leading to earlier graduations and lowering the burden of cost.

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland: Honoring a Class Leader

Peter Gorman '25, a neuroscience major in the Dual BA Program between Trinity College Dublin and Columbia University, was named valedictorian of the GS Class of 2025. Hailing from Dublin, Gorman excelled in the program. His many accolades included being named a Trinity Foundation Scholar, becoming a Bancroft Research Scholar at Columbia, and receiving two academic prizes at his Columbia graduation. He was awarded both the Bridges and Sturtevant Prize for highly original and fruitful research in biological sciences as well as the Jennifer A. Pack Prize for excellence in the study of psychology. Gorman is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the GS Honor Society, and is currently continuing his studies in neuroscience at Oxford, where he will obtain a PhD.

In his valedictory remarks, Gorman said, "GS is called nontraditional. That doesn't begin to describe it. It is borderless. Many of us changed careers, crossed oceans, raised children, overcame illness. Many of us might not have had the same opportunity at another place." His speech was quoted in the *New York Times*, and he received a standing ovation from his peers.

A large number of Trinity Dual BA students also received academic prizes or honors, which is a testament to the strength of the students in this program. Prizewinners included Celeste Allen '25, Daniel Shannon '25, Noa Shmueli '25, Arman Tavallaei '25, Ruby Topalian '26, and Roxanne Zaroff '25.



Above: Valedictorian Peter Gorman '25. Opposite page, from left: Sciences Po President Luis Vassy speaks to Dual BA students at GS; Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers (far right) and students at CityUHK.

On May 19, the School of General Studies celebrated the outstanding accomplishments of the 864 members of the Class of 2025. Featured speakers included Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90, Alvin Ailey Artistic Director Alicia Graf Mack '03, and valedictorian Peter Gorman '25, a graduate of the Dual BA Program between Trinity College Dublin and Columbia University.

PHOTOS BY DIANE BONDAREFF AND APRIL RENAE

CLASS DAY 2025





1. Graduates at the Class Day Ceremony.
2. Alicia Graf Mack '03 delivering the Class Day keynote address.
3. Class of 2025 valedictorian Peter Gorman.
4. Graduate Lisa Delgado Smith.
5. Graduate Brian Williams receives the Alumni Key Award.
6. Graduates Nasser Odettallah and Taylor Moniz.
7. Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 with two graduates.
8. A graduate and his well-dressed canine companion.
9. Two graduates before the ceremony began.
10. A graduate at the Class Day Ceremony.
11. Graduates line up in Lerner Hall.

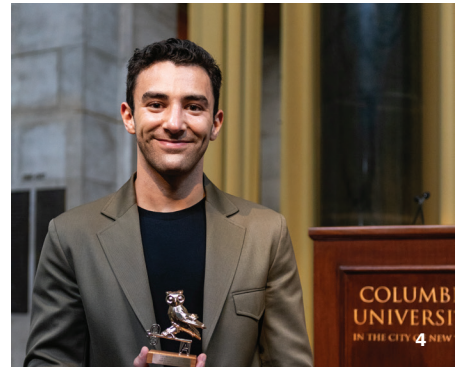


POSTBAC PREMED CLASS DAY 2025

On May 16, the Columbia University Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program celebrated the achievements of the Class of 2025. Among the speakers were Postbac Premed Dean James Colgrove '01MSPH, '04 GSAS; Jennifer McNeely '94CC, '99PBPM; and Stephen Fox '25PBPM.

PHOTOS BY DIANE BONDAREFF AND APRIL RENAE





1. Postbac Premed Dean James Colgrove '01MSPH, '04GSAS, addresses the Class of 2025.
2. Postbac Premed Dean Brian Allen and graduate and Dean's Citation recipient Jessica Minhas.
3. Postbac Premed Class Day keynote speaker Dr. Jennifer McNeely '94CC, '99PBPM.
4. Graduate Brendan Roth, Alumni Key Award recipient.
5. Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90 congratulates a Class of 2025 Postbac Premed graduate.
6. Four graduates at the Postbac Premed Class Day Ceremony.
7. Two graduates pose with their scrubs.
8. Postbac Premed student speaker Stephen Fox poses with his scrubs.
9. Two Postbac Premed graduates.
10. Postbac Premed Associate Dean Andrew Sunshine with graduate Busime Mimy Mudekereza and her family.



GS Bachelor of Arts Recipients

NEW GRAD NOTES

PHOTOS BY DIANE BONDAREFF AND APRIL RENAE



First-generation college student **Krista Kalaj** came to Columbia with a mission to explore every interest she'd sacrificed since age 13 to build a successful career as a fashion model. She embraced her creative side, serving as a Columbia GS Social Media Ambassador and having multiple works of poetry, photography, and filmmaking featured in the GS Arts & Research Collective. She also pursued analytical skills as a financial economics major, skills she put to use post-graduation working in portfolio valuations for private equity and credit in Miami.



As a high school student in Virginia, **Varun Mandgi** developed an interest in global law and politics working part-time at an immigration law firm and participating in a U.S. constitutional theory competition. Mandgi followed that interest to Paris and New York City through the Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po. As a GS student, Mandgi was an avid debater and part of the 2023 French National Championship-winning Jessup Cup Moot Court competition team. Mandgi is now pursuing a JD at the University of Chicago Law School.



A formerly incarcerated survivor of human trafficking and student-parent, **Ava Kamdem** was a standout scholar and community leader at GS. As a researcher, she was part of the inaugural cohort of Bancroft Research Scholars, worked as a research assistant at the Columbia Social Relations Lab and the Columbia Business School, and was named Researcher of the Month by Columbia Research. As an advocate, Kamdem founded System-Impacted Scholars and worked extensively with Columbia's Center for Justice. Post-graduation, Kamdem will continue to pursue her interest in creating equitable access to social capital.



Born in Puerto Rico, **Lisa Delgado Smith** came to New York City at age seven and found a lifelong home. She earned an associate degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology and forged a successful career in graphic design. Nevertheless, school—and specifically Columbia—loomed large in her dreams. Living nearby, she frequently spent time on campus, including during the 1968 campus demonstrations. In 2006, she took the leap and came to GS. While the Great Recession and health troubles forced her to take an educational hiatus, she returned in 2023 and, at 75 years old, had the distinction of being the oldest member of the GS Class of 2025!



Growing up in south Louisiana, first-generation college student **Armand Link** was surrounded by the living legacy of deep social, economic, and racial inequities: He recalled helping his grandfather, a tenant farmer, decipher receipts because his grandfather could not read. Link found avenues for learning through music, advocacy, and computer science. At Folsom Lake Community College, Link developed a passion for NLP (natural language processing), which he pursued at Columbia through innovative projects like the Black Language Oral Corpus of the South, comprising approximately 1,000 hours of speech from the Gulf South. He continues to work towards greater representation and accessibility at the Columbia School of Engineering, pursuing a master's in computer science.



After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps as an infantry assaultman and a combat marksmanship instructor, **Brian Williams** carried the same spirit of service into his time at GS. As vice president of Military Veterans of Columbia University (MilVets), Williams helped create the Veterans Excellence Support Fund, a University-backed initiative that provides permanent, targeted support for student veterans at GS. Post-graduation, Williams plans to pursue further service-related opportunities and is interested in seeking an MBA.

Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program Graduates



Busime Mimy Mudekerereza came to GS as an experienced health care professional and health equity advocate—she spent almost two decades working in the emergency department at New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center and is the cofounder of Amani Global Work (AGW), which supports health care systems in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Through the Postbac Premed Program, Mudekerereza was able to pursue her long-held dream of becoming a physician and is preparing for the MCAT and continuing her work with AGW.



After nearly 10 years in the tech industry as a distributed systems and cloud software engineer, **Stephen Fox** decided to take the leap into medicine via the Postbac Premed Program. He served as the student speaker at the 2025 Postbac Premed Class Day and is now attending Brown University's Warren Alpert Medical School after successfully linking to the program through the Postbac Premed Program's linkage opportunities.





Current position

Data Analytics Manager,
The Fortune Society

Free-time interests

Volunteering for organizations such as NYC Pride and the Olympic Games. “I provided linguistic and logistical assistance at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio, which were incredible experiences.”

meet

Zhexi Shan '22

2025-2026 GSAA Recent Alumni Committee Cochair

What was the path that led you to GS?

I grew up in Shanghai, and when I was in high school, my family moved to Hong Kong. During my high school years there, I was drawn to New York to attend college. After my gap years, I ended up attending a university in upstate New York. After my first year there, I took summer classes at Columbia, and then I applied to transfer to GS. It was my dream to go there, and I was so excited when I learned I'd been accepted.

Why was your GS education so meaningful to you?

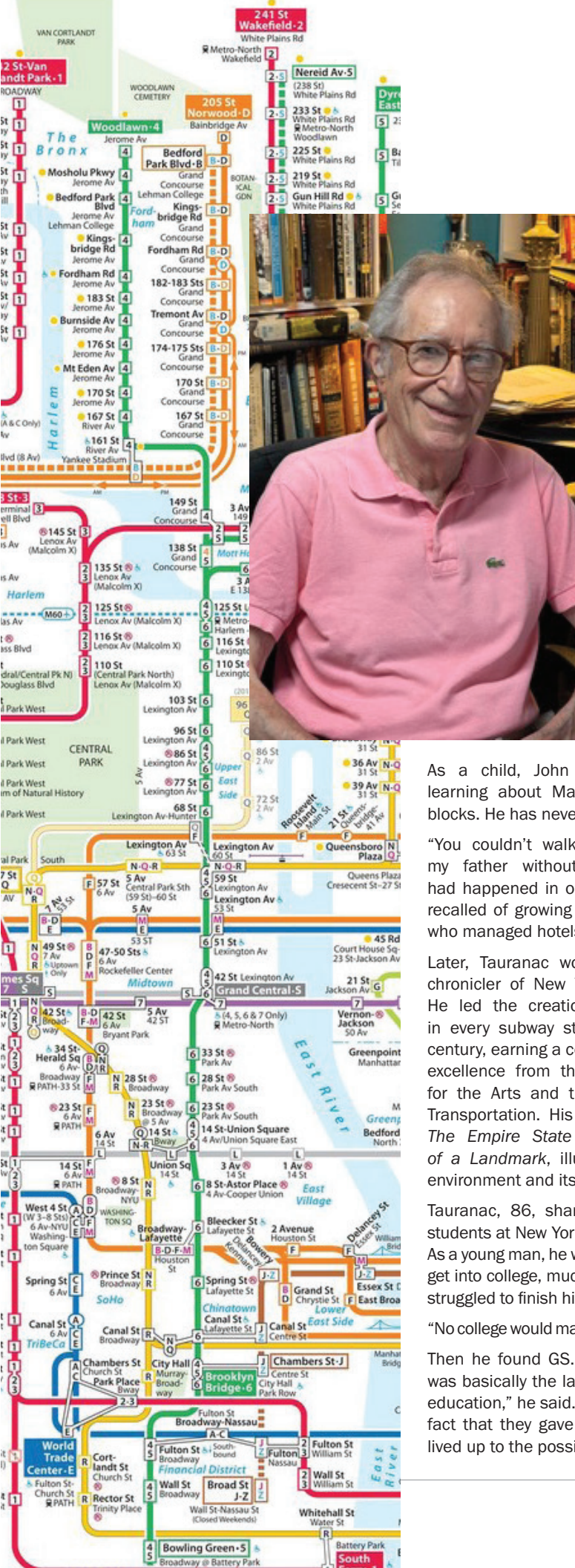
I entered GS in 2016 and graduated in 2022, having taken a couple of semesters off in the middle, with a double major in statistics and linguistics. For me, a big part of the GS education is the unique student body. People come to GS from all walks of life, whether they are military veterans, people who transfer, or people who have taken long breaks in their life. Through getting to know my GS peers, I learned lots of lessons from their life experiences. I also met the love of my life, Peter Trevino, at GS. We got married in the fall of 2020, and Dean Rosen-Metsch officiated.

Why is it important to you to give back to GS?

To say that GS changed my life is not an overstatement. I want to contribute to the School so more opportunities can be afforded to future generations of students. I am one of two cochairs of the Recent Alumni Committee. We support initiatives and organize events for recent alums. Recent alums have different struggles than alums who graduated a long time ago, and many are job searching. We often host career-focused networking events to introduce people to each other.

What accomplishments are you proudest of?

One that I am especially proud of was working for Duolingo, which started when I was living in Hong Kong. I helped them develop the Chinese for English speakers course and the English for Chinese speakers course. We had this passion to provide free Chinese language education to the world, and now millions of people have used the program.



Map Quest

John Tauranac '63 has made his mark as one of New York City's most thoughtful chroniclers

By Carrie Kirby

As a child, John Tauranac '63 started learning about Manhattan by walking its blocks. He has never stopped.

"You couldn't walk down the street with my father without hearing about what had happened in one of the buildings," he recalled of growing up with a single parent who managed hotels in the city.

Later, Tauranac would become a unique chronicler of New York past and present. He led the creation of the map posted in every subway station for the past half century, earning a commendation for design excellence from the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Transportation. His many books, including *The Empire State Building: The Making of a Landmark*, illuminate the city's built environment and its social history.

Tauranac, 86, shared these insights with students at New York University for 40 years. As a young man, he wasn't sure he would ever get into college, much less lecture at one. He struggled to finish high school in five years.

"No college would matriculate me," he recalled.

Then he found GS. "For people like me, it was basically the last real chance to get an education," he said. "Did I love GS? Yes. The fact that they gave me a chance—and I've lived up to the possibility."

Unsurprisingly, Tauranac's memories of Columbia tend toward the architectural. For his study spot, he chose the neoclassical grandeur of Low Memorial Library.

"The Columbia campus is glorious," Tauranac enthused. "The fact that the steps slope so there is a natural runoff of water—that was a specialty of [seminal architecture firm] McKim, Mead & White."

Tauranac advises new Columbia students to learn the city through independent study: "Just walk. You start to understand things viscerally." Tauranac should know: He walked every single block while creating *Manhattan Block by Block: A Street Atlas*.

The MTA adopted a new subway diagram in 2025, but Tauranac continues to revise and publish his own version, which shows details of the neighborhoods above the subway tunnels. His most recent book, *New York's Scoundrels, Scalawags, and Scrappers: The City in the Last Decade of the Gilded Age*, tells the story of 1890s New York.

In recent years, Tauranac has reluctantly left Manhattan for Connecticut, where he feels like "a fish out of water" in a land where one has to get in the car to pick up a quart of milk. But he returns every chance he gets.

"Give me God's concrete," he said.

**Aristotle Vossos
'20,'24SIPA, a graduate
of the Dual BA Program
Between Columbia and
Sciences Po, encourages
students to maximize their
experience at both schools**



**“Get Out There
and Live”**

Where did you spend your early years?

I was born in Athens, and my family moved to New York when I was three. Then we moved to Puerto Rico, then back to Greece, and then to Spain, where I attended the American School of Madrid.

How did you choose the Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po?

Sciences Po seemed like a good fit because of my international upbringing. And I was drawn to GS because I had a nontraditional background. The combination that the Dual BA offered allowed me to explore my many interests.

Why was your experience in the program so valuable?

After two years studying economics at I loved being exposed to students from different backgrounds. I was in classes with people who had lived all over, who had been in war zones, or who had been doctors, and I appreciated that. And the first two years at

Sciences Po's Reims campus really set me up for success—it allowed me to ease into being a college student (and by extension, an adult) and was incredibly rigorous academically.

Why did you decide to attend Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs for your master's degree?

I have core interests in international relations, policy, and economics, but I wanted to deepen two areas of interest: sustainability and data science. I decided to pursue a master's degree because I had gaps I needed to fill. And it felt right to return to Columbia to do it.

What have you been doing since earning your masters?

I am currently at 10a Labs, an applied research company specializing in AI. I also recently worked with Deon Policy Institute, a think tank focused on Greece. I coauthored a report on reforming Greece's military service and was lucky to have an article published in *Kathimerini*, Greece's largest newspaper.

How do you stay involved with Columbia?

I attend campus events, and I am an alumni ambassador. Whenever the alumni office needs someone to offer advice to students, I am happy to help.

What are your plans for the future?

I would love to earn a PhD one day, perhaps at Columbia again. In my free time, my interests include tennis and traveling—I want to hit my seventh continent, which will be Antarctica. I would love to live in a couple more countries before settling down, and I think living in Asia is my next target.

What advice would you give to students interested in the Dual BA?

Don't worry too much about what comes after the Dual; just enjoy it while you're there. I think it is very rare to have access to the breadth of options you have at Sciences Po and Columbia, so use them. Explore things, don't be afraid to ask questions, and don't just focus on academics. Soak up the social aspect and meet interesting people. Get out there and live.

Virtuoso Performance

Violinist Madeleine Manasse '24 chose the Postbac Premed Program to help her shift careers from music to medicine

By Kathrin Havrilla-Sanchez

Madeleine Manasse '24 is on her way to becoming the first doctor in her family after making the switch from violin performance to medical school, thanks to her time in the Postbac Premed Program at GS.

Manasse grew up in New York City in a family of professional musicians, a career path she also intended to pursue. She attended the Bronx High School of Science and participated in the Juilliard Pre-College program before obtaining her undergraduate degree in violin performance from the University of Southern California.

While an undergraduate, Manasse began experiencing tendinitis and cubital tunnel

syndrome, related to playing violin. She began learning about anatomy and healing by necessity, which led to her considering a career change so she could help others like herself. However, when she discovered the number of prerequisites for an MD or DPT degree, she decided she needed something to bridge that gap.

“I had always loved learning about the human body, but I never excelled in math and science, so I assumed a career in medicine was not available to me,” Manasse said. “I ultimately chose the Postbac Premed Program because of its reputation for successfully guiding nontraditional students through the medical school application process.”

After enrolling, Manasse tackled the program’s complex STEM curriculum head-on, finding herself in “one of the most resilient, intelligent, and downright interesting communities [I have] ever been part of.”

“The Postbac Premed Program challenged me to think critically, taught me how to approach problem-solving, and trained me to cope with learning high volumes of information—skills that many medical students don’t develop until they arrive at medical school, which put me ahead of the curve,” Manasse said.

Manasse is now pursuing her MD at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the University of Buffalo.

“I have unending curiosity for the human body, a strong desire to serve humanity, and a drive to keep learning and developing in my career,” said Manasse. “I am loving learning medicine.”



REUNION RECAP



The weekend kicked off with the beloved **GS Tea Party**, drawing a lively crowd of alumni eager to mingle and celebrate their return to campus. Later that evening, attendees reconvened at Columbia University’s Miller Theater for **A Celebration of the Performing Arts**, featuring dance performances and a book talk from acclaimed dancer and scholar Ariel Osterweis '06.

GS welcomed alumni across generations—ranging from a proud member of the Class of 1967 to its newest graduates—alongside current students and guests during its annual reunion weekend last spring.

PHOTOS BY DAVID DINI AND LUCAS HOFFEL



1. Isaiah Nagelkerk '25 with his fiancé, Sarah Hillestad, at the GS Tea Party.
2. Five attendees pose for a photo.
3. R.J. Jenkins delivers the Faculty Lecture.

The **All-Class Lunch** on Saturday gave guests an insight into the stories of some GS students who were in conversation with Senior Associate Dean Jill Galas Hickey. The students spoke about their journeys that brought them to GS, student leadership, and life on campus. More learning was had at the **Faculty Lecture** delivered by R.J. Jenkins, director of education at the Center for Veteran Transition and Integration (CVTI). Jenkins shared his experience with imposter syndrome, both working with students facing it and dealing with his own positioning as a civilian working in veteran advocacy.



Additionally, alumni, students, and friends of the School mingled at various mixers for veterans, dual and joint program affiliates, and Postbac Premeds, as well as at a special event for the Class of 2020.

The celebrations concluded on a high note with the **Reunion Dinner** and presentation of the Owl Award to GSAA Cochair Joshua Kraus '93 for his outstanding service to the GS community. Finally, alumni from all schools gathered for the **Starlight Reception** on Low Plaza, ending the evening with dancing, dessert, and celebrations with friends old and new.



4. Marie Tranz '18, Dominic Dupont '26, and Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers.



5. Ebonnie Goodfield '24, Davey Liu '24, Zhexi Shan '22, and Bruce Goumain '25 at the Reunion Dinner.

GENERAL STUDIES ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The GSAA works to enhance the GS experience, from the beginning of one's journey as a student through to one's life as a member of the worldwide Columbia University alumni community.

ALUMNI BENEFITS

GS undergraduate and Postbac Premed alumni are members of the Columbia Alumni Association (CAA) and the General Studies Alumni Association (GSAA) and are provided with a broad array of services, benefits, and discounts. These include a directory of alumni clubs, events, and interest groups, access to Columbia facilities, and support from the Center for Career Education (CCE).

ALUMNI AWARDS CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

RECOGNIZE A GS ALUMNA OR ALUMNUS

The GSAA strives to identify alumni who make a difference in their communities, whose career or volunteer work is noteworthy, or who contribute to Columbia in ways that enrich the GS community. Prestigious awards and honors are presented each year by both the University and the School of General Studies. Contact gsalumni@columbia.edu for more information or to submit a nomination for yourself or someone you know.

GET IN TOUCH!

Stay connected with the GS alumni community by letting us know where you are and what types of programming interest you. Events are held both in person and virtually. We would love to hear from you!

gsalumni@columbia.edu | 212-853-7850
Visit us online at gs.columbia.edu/alumni



GSAA OFFICERS

GSAA Board Cochairs:

Joshua Kraus '93, Brittne Rivera '14

GSAA Committee Cochairs

Awards: **Serena DeStefani '15, Sarah Walker '95**

Outreach & Communications: **Karlee Rodrigues '18GS, '20SOA; Evan Rork '23**

Programming: **Serengeti Timungwa '22, Cole Wagner '22**

Annual Fund: **Slyvia Oberwager '18**

Recent Alumni: **Ohad Klopman '22, Zhexi Shan '22**



A LANDMARK YEAR FOR CAREER ENGAGEMENT

This year marked a major milestone for career programming within the GS community, bringing alumni and students together in meaningful ways. In Fall 2025, GS hosted a record-breaking 13 career-focused events—the most ever in a single semester—designed to support students as they explore diverse professional paths and connect with alumni in various industries.

From our monthly **Dinner & Discussion** and **Lunch & Learn** series to virtual sessions and **Meet an Alum** conversations, GS alumni met directly with students to offer personalized career guidance and candid reflections on their own nontraditional paths. Speakers shared practical advice, real-world examples, and actionable tips for navigating careers across finance, consulting, marketing, communications, law, and tech. Many also opened doors by sharing industry contacts and helping students better understand the day-to-day realities of different professions.

The reach of this year's programming was truly global. The speaker roster saw GS alumni from New York, Texas, California, Florida, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and Ireland, and included both early-career professionals and seasoned leaders, ensuring students could learn from a wide range of perspectives and career stages. Many GS



alumni also opened doors by sharing industry contacts and helping students better understand the day-to-day realities of different professions.

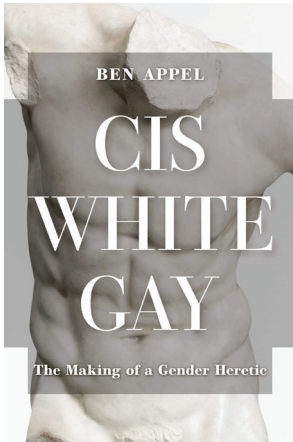
A standout highlight was a special evening hosted by Michael Novak '09, artistic director of the Paul Taylor Dance Company. GS students and alumni gathered at Lincoln Center for an exclusive experience that included reserved intermissions for networking and a private backstage tour led by Novak himself—an unforgettable behind-the-scenes look at the intersection of artistry and leadership.

Together, these events strengthened the bonds of the GS community and reaffirmed the powerful role alumni play in shaping the next generation of graduates.

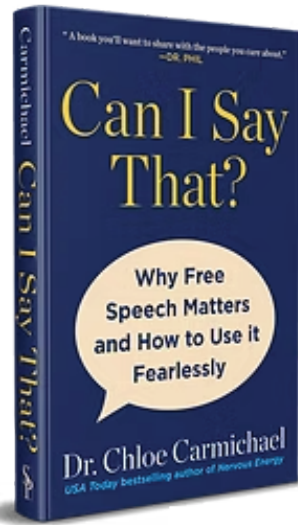


Alumni Bookshelf

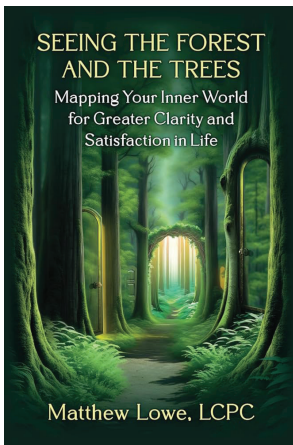
Discover five recent works written by GS graduates



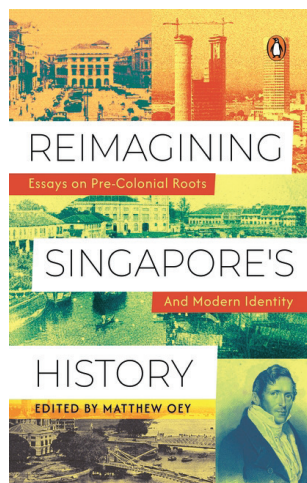
A newly published memoir from **Ben Appel '20**, *Cis White Gay: The Making of a Gender Heretic*, traces his journey growing up in a restrictive Christian cult. After working as a hairstylist for over a decade, the journalist and author discovered a renewed sense of purpose in LGBTQ+ activism and enrolled at GS to pursue creative writing.



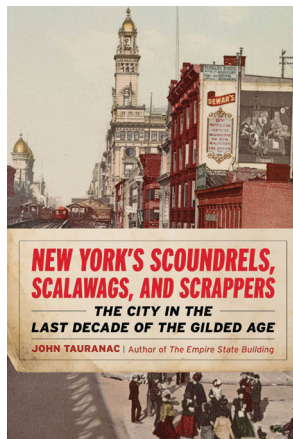
Clinical psychologist and best-selling author **Dr. Chloe Carmichael '06** released her latest book, *Can I Say That? Why Free Speech Matters and How to Use It Fearlessly*, in which she discusses the value of speaking your mind. By reframing free expression as a mental health and resilience issue, she explores the connection between open dialogue and mental well-being, and how free speech can help people connect and solve problems together.



Psychotherapist **Matthew Lowe '05** published his first self-help book, *Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Mapping Your Inner World for Greater Clarity and Satisfaction in Life*. In this collection of essays, Lowe engages with the complexities of life, in particular language, limitations, emotions, time, relationships, and therapy. Using his professional experience as a guide, he reveals the power of seeing the big picture and the smallest details of life's journey.



Reimagining Singapore's History is a collection of essays edited by **Matthew Oey '24** that brings together several of the nation's leading historians to discuss how Singapore's "history" has been expanded and revised over the last few decades. The volume and its themes are based on a conference Oey organized as part of Columbia History Lab Asia. Oey, a 2025 Fulbright recipient who grew up in Singapore, adapted the book's introduction from a final paper he wrote for Professor Adam Tooze's International History course. Read more about Oey on page 8.



Author and mapmaker **John Tauranac '63** published *New York's Scoundrels, Scalawags, and Scrappers: The City in the Last Decade of the Gilded Age*, highlighting the grittiest New Yorkers of the 1890s. Tauranac, who learned about New York by walking its blocks, has published many books illuminating the city's architectural and social history. He even led the creation of the map that was on display in every subway station for the past 50 years. Read more about Tauranac's impact on New York (or, as he calls it, "God's concrete") on page 37.

Class Notes

1980s

Jean-Emmanuel Shein '88, a marketing manager at Uniqlo, served as a panelist in the February 2025 Alumni in Conversation Series: Careers in Retail and Fashion.

2000s

Thomas Reardon '08 worked with a team of researchers to design a new wristband that can control a computer with hand gestures. Their research was published in *Nature* and the *New York Times*.

Film producer **Michelle Rejwan '08** is developing a live-action movie for the Walt Disney Company based on Gaston, the villain from the animated classic *Beauty and the Beast*.

2010s

Sara Ziff '11 was named one of the world's most influential rising stars by *Time*.

Rebecca Walden '16 and **Holly Curran '18** performed in the 13th annual Lake Tahoe Dance Festival.

Antoine Sander '16 (above, left in photo) and **Elias Forneris '20** (above, right in photo), both alumni of the Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po, completed their PhDs from Jesus College at the University of Cambridge. Sander earned a PhD in politics. His dissertation, "Social Media, Radical Democracy, and the Popular Public Sphere: Digital Politics in Contemporary France," was a recipient of the 2025 Lisa Smirl prize for best PhD dissertation in politics. Forneris completed a PhD in history and plans to publish his thesis, "French and Belgian Political Ideas in Wartime Britain, 1940-1944," as a book. After four years pursuing their doctorates side by side, it was a special moment to graduate together.

Filmmaker **Karlee Rodrigues '18, '20SOA** and her sister Marlee Rodrigues appeared on the podcast *The Heart and Hustle of Portugal* to discuss their latest film, *Os Sonhos Continuum*.



Michael Rovner '18 was promoted to vice president of Goodfuse Communications, a human-to-human (H2H) boutique communications agency.

2020s

Pritika Swarup '21, founder and CEO of wellness skincare brand Prakti Beauty, joined Karen Finerman on the *How She Does It* podcast. Swarup talked about her journey from fashion model to Columbia student to entrepreneur.

Gianna Campa '24 co-authored her first academic paper, "Mapping Violence: Police Use of Force and Gender-Based Violence in NYC," which was published in the Fall 2025 edition of *Violence Against Women*.

Shayna Gersten '24 was named a Matthew Isakowitz Commercial Space Scholar, giving her an opportunity to advance her aerospace career through policy-focused work with commercial space companies in Washington, D.C. Her passion for space policy was sparked during her internship at NASA's Office of International and Interagency Relations, where she gained experience in space diplomacy, international collaboration, and space law.

Madeleine Manasse '24 and **Amber Albert '26**, two Postbac Premed Program alumni, both matriculated to the Jacobs School of Medicine at SUNY Buffalo.

Ama Munkhbayar '24, originally from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, was awarded the prestigious Weidenfeld-Hoffmann Scholarship to pursue an MSc in Comparative Social Policy at the University of Oxford.

Sara Wahedi '24 (above, top right), CEO of the civic technology and AI policy startup Civaam, recently completed her MPP at the University of Oxford and is now stepping into a new role at the Oxford Institute of Technology and Justice.

Taylor Richardson '25 (above, bottom right) reprised her role as Bridget in season three of HBO's *The Gilded Age*, which premiered last summer.

Acclaimed French chef, author, educator, and artist **Jacques Pépin '70, '72GSAS** turned 90 last year. He celebrated with 90 birthday parties around the country. Orchestrated by the Jacques Pépin Foundation, the parties were held everywhere from famed metropolitan restaurants to a local Irish pub near Pépin's Connecticut home.



Kenton Kilmer '20 Honored for Innovation

Investment-technology company Addigence, cofounded by **Kenton Kilmer '20** (above left), was recognized for its innovative work with the New Solution Product of the Year prize at the 2025 Hedgeweek U.S. Awards.

"The GS spirit—the tireless pursuit of identifying and empowering excellence from nontraditional backgrounds—continues to inspire both my personal journey and Addigence's mission," Kilmer said. "While this award recognizes innovation in investment management infrastructure, at its core it represents something deeper, imbued with that GS spirit: a step toward expanding access to expertise and talent through a transparent and efficient platform."

In Memoriam

Marie Winn '59 passed away on Dec. 25, 2024. Born in Prague, Winn emigrated with her parents to New York in 1939. She became a journalist and published books for young readers, among other works. She was perhaps best known for telling the story of Pale Male, a red-tailed hawk who made his home atop a Manhattan apartment building. Winn chronicled the bird's behavior in her 1998 book, *Red-Tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park*, which inspired a generation of wildlife advocates. She continued to pursue her interest in New York City nature with *Central Park in the Dark: More Mysteries of Urban Wildlife* (2008).

Joan J. Ambrose '63, P: '87CC passed away on April 18, 2024. A leading real estate professional, Ambrose was president of Ambrose MarElia, a division of Douglas Elliman. She was also an award-winning dog breeder and the former president of the Havanese Club of America.

Karl Mins Finger '64 passed away on Jan. 1, 2025. Finger was a recording artist, folk singer, guitarist, and leader of folk dances from around the world. He appeared on radio and television in the U.S. and abroad and lectured widely on folk music's role in history and social movements.

Lucille Roussin '69, '71GSAS, '85GSAS passed away on Oct. 16, 2025. Roussin graduated from Columbia for her undergraduate and graduate studies and attended Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. She used her law degree to fight for stolen antiquities and looted art from the Holocaust era. Among many other achievements, Roussin worked on the Presidential Commission for Holocaust Assets and was admitted to the Supreme Court Bar.

George F. Heinrich, MD, P: '13CC, '16CC, '20 passed away on June 19, 2025. He mentored generations of medical students at New Jersey Medical School for over 30 years. He was a proud husband and father of two Columbians, and a great supporter of GS and the Postbac Premed Program.

Invested in Education



Business trailblazer Bob Hammer '65, '67BUS is devoted to giving back to the GS community

By Kathrin Havrilla-Sanchez

Entrepreneur N. Robert “Bob” Hammer '65, '67BUS credits Columbia with giving him the foundation he needed to succeed in the business world—and expresses gratitude through his long-standing and generous support of GS.

Hammer’s academic journey took several twists: First he pursued an engineering degree, then history, but neither was the right fit—until he decided on business. He applied to GS with plenty of transfer credits but needed a foreign language, so the New York native moved to Paris to learn French. However, when he received a draft notice in 1963, he realized he “had to get into school really fast.”

After receiving his bachelor’s degree from GS and his graduate degree from Columbia Business School, Hammer embarked on a versatile 50-year business career. He founded his current company, Hammer Ventures, in 2019 to identify and invest in companies with strong, highly differentiated AI technology foundations. Prior, he spent 20 years as CEO of Commvault after its spin-off from AT&T. Hammer also served as chairman, president, and CEO of Norand Corporation, Telequest Corporation, and Material Progress Corporation.

A constant in Hammer’s life, however, has been his commitment to giving back. In 1982, he and his wife, Ann—whom he met at an art appreciation night class at Columbia—formed the Hammer Family Charitable Foundation Inc., which focuses its support on education.

“Having the right kind of educational background has meaning in the marketplace, and in my mind, I would not be where I am today without my foundation at GS,” Hammer said.

Hammer’s contributions to the School include two endowed student scholarships and a recent donation to name the lobby of the new GS residential building.

“Bob’s GS story is so deeply connected to the School. He found his path here, built the foundation for an extraordinary career, and has never forgotten the role this community played in his life,” said Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch '90. “His generosity reflects a heartfelt belief in the power of education to change lives, and we couldn’t be more grateful for all he has given to GS and our students.”

For Hammer, each person’s decision to give back must come from the heart, and for him, education is a worthwhile cause.

“You can’t put a price on the impact that educational institutions have on society—they are islands of civilization in a chaotic world,” said Hammer. “Giving people the financial assistance they need to go to college means they can build a rewarding life for themselves and their families.”



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES RESIDENCE HALL

COMING FALL 2026

Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch, GS Class of 1990, announced a transformative \$30 million investment by the University to enhance financial aid for the highest-need GS students. This bold commitment not only strengthens scholarship support but also lays the foundation for one of the School's most critical priorities: the acquisition and renovation of a building that will allow GS to create dedicated residential housing for GS students—a first in the School's history. Under Dean Rosen-Metsch's leadership, annual financial aid and scholarship support at GS has tripled, opening doors for more students from nontraditional backgrounds to thrive at Columbia. Building on that progress, this investment signals the beginning of an exciting new chapter for GS—one marked by growth, innovation, and renewed momentum. Designed to inspire matching philanthropic support, GS is now focused on addressing long-standing housing challenges and continuing to expand scholarship opportunities, ensuring that GS students gain access not only to a world-class education but also the resources and community they need to succeed.

This moment marks a turning point—a powerful investment in the future of GS, and in the extraordinary students who define it.

For more information about supporting the residential building at GS, please contact Jill Galas Hickey, Senior Associate Dean of Development and Alumni Relations, at jg426@columbia.edu

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