World Class CUNY Students Win Nation’s Top Academic Awards

Fulbright scholars Carlsky Belizaire and Karissa Caputo
WITH THIS SPECIAL ISSUE of Salute to Scholars magazine, The City University of New York proudly celebrates graduating seniors and recent alumni who won some of our nation’s most prestigious and competitive academic awards in 2015.

These honors include 15 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships, 17 Fulbright Fellowships for research and teaching abroad, federally funded Goldwater and Truman Fellowships that encourage undergraduates to continue onto graduate work, and Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, which supports graduate study by talented and inspiring immigrants and first-generation Americans.

These and the other academic honors mentioned in this magazine reflect the high caliber of CUNY students and of the academic opportunities that this University provides.

CUNY students’ interests, drive and achievements underscore the transformative value of a CUNY degree. This is public higher education at its best, delivering on the University’s historic mission to provide accessible, affordable, high-quality academic opportunities. Our graduates earn acceptance at leading graduate and professional institutions where they pursue law, medicine and the full range of arts, sciences and social sciences. They are welcomed quickly into the work force, contributing their skills and talents to the betterment of our society.

I am proud to recognize the remarkable CUNY students profiled in this special edition, as well as all members of the Class of 2015. They enrich our city, our nation and our world.

All best wishes,

James B. Milliken
Chancellor
Evgeniya Kim
Macaulay Honors College at
Hunter College

An Irrepressible Global Do-Gooder
THROUGH A CHILDHOOD of migration, repression and exile, Evgeniya Kim found the elements that would shape her outlook on life.

She was born in Uzbekistan, where Russian was her first language. There, Kim says her family adjusted as an ethnic minority even as they struggled to retain their cultural values.

“Koreans are a tiny minority in Uzbekistan so it was important to hold on to my Korean heritage even though we did not even speak Korean,” Kim said.

“When you are a minority – racially, ethnically, religiously as was the case with my family – it is easy to become marginalized, especially when the country is poor and corruption is commonplace. My father had to work really hard as a farmer to provide for our family and my mother stayed at home even though both of them had engineering degrees.”

At the age of 14, Kim and her family immigrated to the United States, where they were granted asylum. After graduating from Benjamin N. Cardozo High School in Queens in 2006, Kim enrolled at Macaulay Honors College at Hunter College and majored in international relations.

“What I loved the most [about Macaulay] is the diversity of the student body that made me feel right at home, especially because of my own unique background,” she said.

Kim, 27, is one of four CUNY women awarded the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans. As a fellow, Kim will receive up to $90,000 for graduate studies at the Yale School of Management where she is currently pursuing her MBA.

In Uzbekistan, she joined the national junior tennis team and bonded with players she met during international tournaments.

“When I was just a kid, playing tennis internationally, I started traveling around Central Asia and had my first big tournaments in India and Indonesia. That’s when I met so many players from all around the world and fell in love with the international experience,” she said.

While at Macaulay, Kim continued to expand on her global perspective. She studied in Greece and also interned at the Open Society to address human rights issues in Uzbekistan. Through volunteer work with a non-profit organization, she also traveled to Thailand, Russia, Korea and Switzerland. She recently came back from an MBA trip to South Africa.

Combining her love of international development and business, Kim began working at the Soros Economic Development Fund, analyzing the impact of the fund’s investments on 21.4 million people across 20 countries. As a future career, Kim hopes to become a consultant for organizations that have a similar global impact.

“I loved how diverse our projects were,” Kim said. “From a financial services project in Mexico, agriculture deal in Ghana to a hospital in India and a port in Tanzania, I felt that our work reached those that were most in need.”

AWARDS AND HONORS

Lauren Blachorsky
Macaulay Honors College at CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Alyssa Faye Blumenthal
Macaulay Honors College at CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015

Karissa Caputo
Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, '15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Ebrahim Afshinnekoo
Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, '15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Lauren Blachorsky
Macaulay Honors College at Baruch College, '14
Yeshiva University, MD, 2019

Ebrahim Afshinnekoo
Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, '15
Jonas Salk Scholarship, 2015

Stacy Aguilar
Macaulay Honors College at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '18
Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship, 2015

Carlsky Belizaire
Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, '15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015
Phi Beta Kappa, 2015
Wooyoung Cho
Macaulay Honors College
at Queens College, ’15
Yale University, PhD, 2021

Kathryn Marie Cox
Macaulay Honors College
at Queens College, ’15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Sean DesVignes
Brooklyn College, ’16
Beinecke Scholarship, 2015

Konstantin Dukhovny
Macaulay Honors College
at Baruch College, ’16
Colin Powell Fellowship Award at Baruch College, 2015

Amal El Bakhar
Macaulay Honors College
at Hunter College, ’11
Soros New American, 2015

Sarah M. Franco
Macaulay Honors College
at Queens College, ’18
Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship, 2015

Paula Garcia-Salazar
Macaulay Honors College
at City College, ’15
Immigrant Justice Corps Fellowship, 2015

Ilana Gelb
Macaulay Honors College
at Baruch College,
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, ’16
Critical Languages Scholarship, 2015
Truman Scholarship finalist, 2015

Zachary Gershon
Macaulay Honors College
at Hunter College, ’16
Goldwater Scholarship, 2015

Sankha Ghatak
Macaulay Honors College
at City College, ’14
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Melanie Ho
Macaulay Honors College
at Baruch College, ’15
New York City Urban Fellows Program, 2015
White House Internship, 2015

Evgeniya Kim
Macaulay Honors College
at Hunter College, ’10
Soros Fellowship, 2015

Anastasia Korelkova
Macaulay Honors College
at Baruch College, ’15
Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015

Anna Kozlova
Macaulay Honors College at
Brooklyn College, ’15
Jonas Salk Scholarship, 2015

Brian Lambert
Macaulay Honors College at
Hunter College, ’15
New York City Urban Fellows Program, 2015

Jake Levin
Macaulay Honors College at
Brooklyn College, ’16
Truman Scholarship, 2015

Bianca Malhotra
Macaulay Honors College at
Hunter College, ’15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Anton Mararenko
Macaulay Honors College at
College of Staten Island, ’15
Jonas Salk Scholarship, 2015

Natasha Masub
Macaulay Honors College at
Brooklyn College, ’15
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Melody Mills
Macaulay Honors College at
Baruch College, ’14
Columbia University, MA
Human Rights Studies, 2012
Word Up!

CARLA SPENSIERI’S GRANDFATHER didn’t know how to read. Her father dropped out of high school because it was too far from his family’s farm in rural Italy; after emigrating in 1964, he became a contractor and real estate developer. Her mother’s family left Cuba in 1959 in advance of the impending revolution.

“Ever since I was little, I’ve been motivated to make my parents proud of me and to bring honor to the Spensieri-León family,” says Spensieri (Hunter College, B.A., Italian Culture and Civilization, ’14; Queens College, M.A.T., Childhood Education, ’15). “My family created a new life in the United States,” and her 2015 Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship is “a happy reminder that everything lost along the way was so that we could gain everything we now have.”

Language is central to her life. Her parents converse in English. She speaks to her mother in Spanish, who, having lived most of her life in the United States, usually answers in English. Her father became fluent in Spanish while managing Latin American construction workers. He didn’t talk with his daughter in Italian until she showed significant interest in her late teens; now he will joke “I don’t understand” if she responds to him in English.

Spensieri intends to add Portuguese to her repertoire during her Fulbright year while teaching English to prospective English teachers at a public university in Brazil. Portuguese “is not the final frontier, but the next step. I plan on learning French, Chinese, Arabic – at least 10 languages. My dream is to connect with people all over the world. You learn so much. Plus, I nerd out on grammar and etymology. I love what words mean,” she says.

She accelerated Hunter’s normal two-year graduate education program into one year, taking three courses in the summer, five in the fall and four in the spring – all while fulfilling her student observation requirement at three public elementary schools in Queens and babysitting for two families. “I like to be busy. Busy is my normal.”

Spensieri began her bachelor’s at St. John’s University and studied in its program in Rome before transferring to Hunter’s Italian program. “Private education was too expensive, and the value of public education was greater,” she explains.

After her Fulbright, she may add a bilingual education or TESOL (teacher of English to speakers of other languages) extension to her existing New York State elementary certification.

Spensieri says she’ll probably teach at a New York City elementary school before possibly venturing on to schools across the world. She also likes to write both fiction and nonfiction, which opens further possibilities. And then there’s the option of conducting research, perhaps in an education think tank, “where you can test your ideas and potentially make great change.”

She knows just the kind of students she wants. “When you’re a teacher, you don’t want to teach students whom you can give a book to and they’ll learn,” Spensieri says. “You want to teach the struggling learners who really need your help.”
THE FIRST TIME Xavier Medina remembers meeting his mother was when he was 7, getting off the airplane from Ecuador in 1993. “She left when I was 2 and would call and send pictures,” he says. “She left for economic reasons, to build a better life for our family.”

Medina didn’t realize that he had entered the country illegally until he applied to college. “I was accepted at good four-year schools, but being undocumented, I couldn’t apply for scholarships and didn’t have the resources to pay myself. I took a break, worked and enrolled at LaGuardia [Community College], where my immigrant status didn’t matter and everything came together.”

Now Medina (LaGuardia Community College, A.A. Liberal Arts-Social Science, ’15) has won a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, which provides about 85 of the nation’s top community college students with up to $40,000 a year for up to three years of baccalaureate study. Medina will attend Columbia University and major in political science.

Through LaGuardia’s honors program, he has twice presented on lesser known aspects of immigration at the Northeast Regional Honors Conference, which attracts two- and four-year college students.

At Niagara Falls in 2014, he described the Bracero Program, which between 1942 and 1964 let Mexican laborers temporarily work in the United States, primarily in agriculture. “My premise was presenting the inefficiencies of power between nations,” he explains. “When Mexico sits down with the United States, it always has the short end of the deal.”

At the 2015 conference in Gettysburg, he analyzed NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, through its impact on Mexican hog farmers. “They could not compete with the cheaper pork that flooded the Mexican market via transnational U.S. hog corporations and, as a result, had to close or sell off. They laid off thousands of Mexican workers who later crossed into the U.S. to work for American hog companies, which was ironic. When NAFTA started, it was supposed to benefit all the countries involved, but that didn’t happen, because both sides were thinking only of the corporations, not the human element.”

He praises LaGuardia’s honors program. “It’s such an amazing experience to take classes with professors who are so passionate about what they’re teaching,” he says, particularly Karen Miller in urban studies, James Wilson in English and Karlyn Koh, the honors program director. Meanwhile, he and other honors students provided peer assistance to other students.

For the moment, Medina is protected from deportation and can work under President Barack Obama’s 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order, but he finds the situation perplexing. “I know very little about Ecuador. I grew up knowing and loving this country.”

His family keeps him centered. “Once I came here to the U.S., I was raised by my mother and sister, who have influenced me in many ways – especially by supporting my goals and pushing me in the right directions.”

With the Jack Kent Cooke award, he’s further on his way.
Setting the News on Fire

THE VERY NAME “The Fuego” implies what the online news service aims to do: mix English and Spanish to fire up young Hispanic Americans.

“English and Spanish cohabit in conversation among Latinos, and news products don’t necessarily have to be in one language or the other,” says María Sánchez Díez, a Spaniard who won a 2015 Foreign Press Association grant to further the project. She has been developing The Fuego at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, from which she expects to graduate with an M.A. in Entrepreneurial Journalism in December 2016.

“Latinos are one in five young Americans, but only 1 percent of news is about them,” she says. “I believe this underserved community deserves the same access to the news that everyone else has been having for years.”

Her service, now in the beta stage, will aggregate news from around the Web in both languages and feature original reporting. “Latinos are very diverse and, as we get more people involved, we’ll provide news on their home countries in a way they can relate to.”

The Fuego will target Latinos who were born in the United States. “They have a dual identity. Many are bilingual. Major newspapers and TV networks like Univision and Telemundo serve their parents in Spanish, but there’s a gap for young Latinos who are in-between identity.”

Sánchez Díez attends the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism as a Fulbright Foreign Student Fellow. This U.S.-funded program enables foreign graduate students, young professionals and artists to study and conduct research in the United States. She notes that competition for Foreign Fulbrights has been especially fierce in economically distressed Spain, where, Eurostat reports, 54 percent of young people were unemployed as of April 1, 2014.

She came with a deep background in print and online journalism. Sánchez Díez launched and was digital editor-in-chief of Condé Nast Traveler Spain magazine (Traveler.es). In the only pan-European competition for Internet content, the site won two silver Lovie Awards (Best European Travel Site and Best Editorial Work) and a special mention in the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences’ Webby Awards competition (Best Design).

She reported for Soitu.es, a now-defunct digital media hub that won the Online News Association excellence award for a non-English site in 2008 and 2009.

She freelanced for El País, Spain’s largest-circulation daily newspaper, co-writing the music and travel blog “Motel Americana.” She managed the online short film festival Notodofilmfest and coordinated social media strategy for the PhotoEspaña photography festival. In her predigital days, she reported for Mexico’s El Mundo de Tehuacán.

Sánchez Díez says she chose to attend the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism because it offers the first master’s in entrepreneurial journalism. “In 10 years, the world of journalism as we used to know it will be gone. CUNY is focused on new skills and, it works like a startup. The professors are amazing and very helpful, especially to foreign students who come not knowing about the city, the culture and the country.”
WHAT IF THE ORESTEIA — the ancient Greek plays about the triumph of jury-based justice over murder and revenge — took place in Ireland?

Keelie Sheridan (Brooklyn College, MFA, Acting ’13) intends to reimagine that trilogy during her George J. Mitchell Scholarship to The Lir, Ireland’s National Academy of Dramatic Art, and Trinity College, Dublin, where she will work on a second MFA — this time in directing — in 2016-17.

The highly competitive scholarship, sponsored by the U.S.-Ireland Alliance, covers postgraduate study in Ireland or Northern Ireland. The 12 Mitchell winners for 2016, selected from 270 applicants, were announced in November 2014.

Since age 14, Sheridan has worked at farm stands, at babysitting and, in Brooklyn, as a commercial photographer, teacher and adaptive arts specialist for clients with developmental disabilities. She was chosen Miss Brooklyn in 2009 and Miss NYC in 2010 and competed both years for Miss New York State in the Miss America competition. She also has landed a fairly steady stream of acting work.

Her family lived in about 20 houses before she was 18, when she moved to Brooklyn. Her college career also was peripatetic, including SUNY Fulton-Montgomery Community College and Borough of Manhattan Community College; six years after earning her high school diploma, she got her B.A. in acting from Empire State College in 2010.

But for her master’s, “It came down to Brooklyn or Rutgers, and Brooklyn felt like home,” she says. “My thesis was about the process of preparing for an acting role at the Whitman Theater. I played Loretta in ‘Featuring Loretta,’ a one-act play by George F. Walker. It’s a great character, a woman who finds herself in a tough situation.”
A Bias Beater

ANGGLELIA (ANGEL) SUTJIPTO
(CUNY Baccalaureate, Genocide Studies, ’13) will learn how other countries have dealt with discrimination and resistance with the 2015 Humanity in Action Fellowship.

Sutjipto joins a select group of students and recent graduates from the United States and Europe. They will meet in Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, Paris and Warsaw this summer for a monthlong exploration of countries with a history of discrimination against minorities and the resistance that emerged. Humanity in Action, an international educational organization, seeks to nurture future leaders interested in remediying injustice.

Sutjipto was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, and migrated to the United States in 2003, at age 12. Shortly thereafter, her temporary visitor’s visa expired and she became undocumented. When she got to CUNY, she was eligible for in-state tuition, but not federal or state tuition assistance. As a result, she babysat, tutored and applied for scholarships, while her mother worked to pay for each semester’s tuition fees. Sutjipto also asked professors to place textbooks on reserve in the library because she could not afford to buy them. “It was quite a struggle, even with CUNY’s low tuition,” she says.

In her sophomore year at Hunter College, she took a class that shifted her focus toward preventing genocide and mass atrocities. “It was a very special course which allowed me to work with Holocaust survivors,” she says. “I appreciated being able to spend time with the survivors. One of them asked me if genocide could ever be prevented, and that question has stayed with me ever since.”

Through the CUNY Baccalaureate Program, she crafted a degree to explore that question. Her faculty mentor was political science professor John R. Wallach, founder and chair (2010-2013) of the Hunter College Human Rights Program.

Sutjipto’s interest in genocide prevention led her to become the projects coordinator at Cardozo Law Institute in Holocaust and Human Rights. The institute aims to strengthen laws, norms and institutions to prevent mass atrocities. Despite being undocumented, she is protected from deportation and can work under President Barack Obama’s 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order, an executive order which a future president may revoke.
Jazzing on the Black Experience

April 4, 2015. A South Carolina police officer shoots the fleeing Walter Scott in the back. Soon after, Brooklyn College junior Sean DesVignes, already nationally known for his poetry and 2015 recipient of a $34,000 Beinecke Scholarship for graduate study – an award given to 20 “young men and women of exceptional promise” – writes “Quittin’ Time.”

Music happens when change doesn’t, it erupts and boils over, and in these troubling times, it’s the only thing that makes me weep, all other avenues of despair have been explored.

In 1960, drummer/composer Max Roach and a stellar band channeled the black experience, from Africa to the Americas, from slavery to reconstruction to African nationalism, in a landmark, explicitly political jazz album rooted in civil rights, “We Insist.”

“I summoned the bones of Max Roach to reinterpret his album in the light of extrajudicial killings of black people,” DesVignes says. He mentions Albert Ayler, who a few years after Roach’s album coerced his saxophone into atonal “humanlike screams and yells. That’s something I gravitated toward, because how do you write screaming, how do you write frustration?” DesVignes manages in “Quittin’ Time.”

... I encouraged Roach
to use more accidentals, sharps and flats
that took the shape of takedowns
mutating into chokeholds, wallets mistaken
for pistols, a mildness of color,
as a part of Roach’s band, one would enact
a loudness war against the officers’ skin...

With Black and Trinidadian roots, DesVignes grew up in Brooklyn and learned jazz from his grandfather. He began writing poetry when he was 13. He started college at Fashion Institute of Technology, then shifted to Brooklyn College in 2012. A poetry slam winner, he coached the college team to national prominence at the 2013 and 2014 College Union Poetry Slam Invitational competitions and won best new poet in 2013. He won a 2013 scholarship to Cave Canem, the premier retreat for African-American poets.

Meanwhile, he says, Brooklyn College provides him with “a strong foundation in the canon. Shakespeare, Chaucer and the romantic poets are my favorites.”
The Mexico Chronicles

ON OCT. 2, 1968, POLICE AND MILITARY TROOPS in Mexico City shot into a crowd of unarmed students who had jammed Tlatelolco Plaza to protest an earlier attack at a national preparatory school. At least 40 students died, perhaps many more. Thousands were beaten and jailed. Countless students disappeared.

“It was a period of intense transformation in the history of the city,” says Jeffrey Peer, a third-year doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center. With a 2015 Fulbright grant, he intends to study how that tumultuous era, as well as the decades that followed Mexico’s revolution, which started in 1910, were narrated in newspaper essays known as the crónica urbana.

“These essays range from personal reflections and anecdotes to reflections on the city, itself, to stories about events and celebrities – all aspects of middle-class life in Mexico City.”

Working in the national archives at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Peer will focus on two major essayists, Salvador Novo López (1904-1974) and José Joaquín Blanco (born 1951). Named Mexico City’s official chronicler, Novo was a writer and UNAM professor. Blanco, an UNAM student around the time of the 1968 massacre is a novelist and translator.

“One of the main themes” of the essays he’s studying “is how explosion of the population in the metropolis changed peoples’ lifestyles, especially for the middle class,” Peer says.

That theme holds true for the 1970s and 1980s, when Blanco began extending his reach. Peer earned a B.A. in literature at Bennington College in 2006. He was attracted to the CUNY Graduate Center “because of the wonderful comparative literature program.” He now teaches writing at Baruch College.
Championing Justice for Immigrants

GROWING UP with a Colombian mother in Jackson Heights, a Queens neighborhood that’s one of the most diverse in the nation, Laura Sofia Rodriguez says she “always felt part of a community of immigrants, even though I was born here.”

Nearing her 2015 graduation from Emory University School of Law, Rodriguez (City College, B.A. in Spanish, concentration in Latin American Literature and History, ’11) says she heard about the Immigrant Justice Corps and “knew it would be my dream job.”

She is one of two CUNY alumnae and new law school graduates to win a 2015 Justice Fellowship from the Immigrant Justice Corps, joining Nabila Taj (CUNY School of Law, ’15). Three CUNY baccalaureate graduates won Community Fellowships to conduct outreach and legal intake for immigrant-law organizations.

Robert A. Katzmann, the chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, founded the Corps in 2014 because too few attorneys were providing affordable representation to immigrants. His initiative grew out of a study that found immigrants with a lawyer were almost six times more likely to win their cases than those without, and that incompetent legal providers for immigrants often swindled their clients and botched their cases. The corps this year awarded 35 fellowships.

Rodriguez is assigned to Immigration Equality in Lower Manhattan, the only national organization that primarily represents LGBT/HIV-positive clients on immigration matters. “Immigration Equality literally saves the lives of people who are persecuted in their home countries based on their status as LGBT/H,” she says. It also works on policy and legislative reform.

Her two-year fellowship can be renewed for a third year. “I’ll go to immigration court on matters including asylum and removal proceedings and do appellate work in federal court, which is really exciting.” The agency primarily handles clients from Jamaica, Russia and Mexico.

An undergraduate history class on the fall of communism put Rodriguez on the path to a legal career. “The professor made us think critically and be analytical about what we were reading and not take what’s written at face value. I enjoyed that intellectual challenge.” Realizing that the law required the same sort of rigorous thinking, she interned at a local immigration law firm as an undergraduate “to see beyond the ‘Law and Order: SVU’ shows. When I saw what the practice of law is really like, I knew that’s what I wanted.”

At Emory, Rodriguez interned at the Executive Office for Immigration Review in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico and the Latin American Association in Atlanta. “Every time I talk with clients, no matter what their background, mostly indigent, I hear my mom, who was a housekeeper in Manhattan for very wealthy people and struggled hard to give me a great future,” she says. “When I hear clients going through similar issues, I’m motivated to do my best. I feel personally invested in what I do and feel really lucky to have found an area of law I can be truly passionate about.”
Outthinking Brain Proteins

NEURONS – NERVE CELLS that both send and receive electrical signals – communicate through a complex signaling system that includes a protein called alpha-synuclein. Scientists know that mutations in the gene that produces this protein can cause familial Parkinson’s disease. They also know this protein is found in the brains of people with all forms of the disease.

Dalila Ordonez (Hunter College, B.A., Biopsychology ‘13), a doctoral student in Harvard University’s Molecules, Cells and Organisms Program, intends to discover precisely how alpha-synuclein leads to nerve degeneration. Her research is supported by a 2015 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

Working with Mel Feany, a professor in the Department of Pathology at Harvard Medical School, Ordonez studies fruit flies that have been genetically modified to overexpress alpha-synuclein, which recreates the clinical features of Parkinson’s disease. Just like humans, fruit flies with this condition develop problems with movement and lose nerve cells that are essential for survival.

“I’m looking into genes that have homology to humans,” Ordonez says, using a term referring to genes that have a similar function. “If what we find is true in the fruit fly, it’s likely that we’ll see the same in a mouse and in humans.”

She hypothesizes that alpha-synuclein causes toxicity by misregulating another protein, actin, which is found in all nerve cells. When actin goes awry, it interferes with the workings of mitochondria, the parts of cells that generate energy. If this turns out to be true, Ordonez explains, researchers will have a new model for alpha-synuclein dysfunction in Parkinson’s disease, which could open up additional avenues for treatment.

The National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship is the most prestigious for graduate studies in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. This federal grant provides $138,000 over three years for doctoral-level research.
Sabina Pringle
City College, '14
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Daniella Rivera
City College, '15
University of Texas, PhD

Laura Sofia Rodríguez
City College, '11
Immigrant Justice Corps Justice Fellowship, 2015
Emory University School of Law, 2015

John Sebastian Ruano-Salgueiro
City College, '14
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Kai Simmonds
City College, '16
LAGRANT Foundation Scholarship, 2015

Johanna Ventour
City College, '16
New York Women in Communications Forum Award, 2015

Elise Amanor
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '13
Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Master in Research in Sociology and Demography, 2016

Hogai Aryoubi
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '13
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Tola Brennan
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
CUNY School of Journalism, Master in Journalism, 2017

William Cheung
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '14
MacCracken Fellowship, 2015
New York University, PhD in German Studies, 2020

Veronica Nicolle Chin Hing
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '16
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Richard Gamarra
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Columbia University, Master of Public Health in Epidemiology, 2017

Ilana Gelb
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '16
Critical Languages Scholarship, 2015
Emmanuel Gordon
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2014

Tatsiana Hliadkaya
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
New York University, Doctor of Dental Surgery, 2018

Peter Kowaleswska
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '14
Judge I. Leo Glasser Scholarship, 2015
Brooklyn Law School, JD, 2017

Khaair Morrison
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Howard University, JD, 2018

Javier Picayo
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Critical Languages Scholarship, 2015
Union Theological Seminary, Interdisciplinary M.A. in Psychiatry and Religion and Interreligious Engagement, 2017

Sebastian Restrepo
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '14
Huayu Enrichment Scholarship, 2015
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2014

Gareth Rhodes
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '11
Harvard University, JD, 2018

Vandana Saras
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Leslie Epstein Global Fellowship in Fiction, 2015
Boston University, MFA in Creative Writing, 2016

Anggileia (Angel) Sutjipto
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '14
Humanity in Action Fellowship, 2015

Joshua Trinidad
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '13
Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellowship, 2015
Columbia University, Master of International Affairs, 2017

Elmore Zuniga
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '15
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Sebastian Restrepo
CUNY Baccalaureate Degree, '14
Huayu Enrichment Scholarship, 2015
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2014

Polina Nazaykinskaya
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Soros New American, 2015

Gregory Pardlo
The CUNY Graduate Center Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 2015

Jeffrey Peer
The CUNY Graduate Center Fellowship, 2015

Kristen Clark
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Bianca Flowers
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Winner in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Jagadisa-devasri Dacus
The CUNY Graduate Center, 18
National Institutes of Health (NIH) Undergraduate Scholarship, 2015

Jordana Lovett
The CUNY Graduate Center, 18
2014-15 "Careers in Immunology Fellowship" from the American Association of Immunologists (AAI), 2015

Joshua Minihan
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Guggenheim Fellowship, 2017

Polina Nazaykinskaya
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Soros New American, 2015

Rachael Levy
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Danny Lewis
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Nishan Bhaumik
CUNY School of Law, '15
Equal Justice Works Fellowship, 2015

Molly Coe
CUNY School of Law, '14
Equal Justice Works Fellowship, 2014

Catalina De La Hoz
CUNY School of Law, '15
Clerkship with the NY Court of Appeals, 2015

Cristina Flores
CUNY School of Law, '17
Flor de Maga Student Leadership Award, Puerto Rican Bar Association of New York City, 2015

Elizabeth Koo
CUNY School of Law, '15
Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellowship, 2015

Joseph Jaafar
CUNY School of Journalism, '15
Full scholarship to the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, 2015

Soros New American, 2015

CUNY School of Journalism, Master of Arts in Journalism, 2016

Huayu Enrichment Scholarship, 2014-15 "Careers in Immunology Fellowship" from the American Association of Immunologists (AAI), 2015

Joshua Minihan
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Guggenheim Fellowship, 2017

Polina Nazaykinskaya
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Soros New American, 2015

Gregory Pardlo
The CUNY Graduate Center Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 2015

Jeffrey Peer
The CUNY Graduate Center Fellowship, 2015

Kristen Clark
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Bianca Flowers
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Winner in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Jagadisa-devasri Dacus
The CUNY Graduate Center, 18
National Institutes of Health (NIH) Undergraduate Scholarship, 2015

Jordana Lovett
The CUNY Graduate Center, 18
2014-15 "Careers in Immunology Fellowship" from the American Association of Immunologists (AAI), 2015

Joshua Minihan
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Guggenheim Fellowship, 2017

Polina Nazaykinskaya
The CUNY Graduate Center, 17
Soros New American, 2015

Rachael Levy
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Danny Lewis
CUNY School of Journalism, '14
Finalist in Society of Professional Journalists Region 1 Mark of Excellence Awards, 2015

Nishan Bhaumik
CUNY School of Law, '15
Equal Justice Works Fellowship, 2015

Molly Coe
CUNY School of Law, '14
Equal Justice Works Fellowship, 2014

Catalina De La Hoz
CUNY School of Law, '15
Clerkship with the NY Court of Appeals, 2015

Cristina Flores
CUNY School of Law, '17
Flor de Maga Student Leadership Award, Puerto Rican Bar Association of New York City, 2015

Elizabeth Koo
CUNY School of Law, '15
Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellowship, 2015
Jacqueline Meese  
CUNY School of Law, '16  
Law Clerk to New York Court of Appeals Judge Jenny Rivera, starting fall 2017, 2015

Stephanie Rivera  
CUNY School of Law, '15  
New York State Service Excelsior Fellowship, 2015

Brendan Rush  
CUNY School of Law, '15  
U.S. Attorney General's Honors Program, 2015

Somalia Samuel  
CUNY School of Law, '14  
Bertha Institute Justice Fellowship, 2014

Nabila Taj  
CUNY School of Law, '15  
Immigrant Justice Corps Fellowship, 2015

Carlos Babiloni  
Hostos Community College, '16  
Newman Civic Fellowship, 2015

Jody Perez  
Hostos Community College, '15  
USA Today Phi Theta Kappa All-New York Academic Awards, 2015

Jolisel Vargas Lopez  
Hostos Community College, '15  
USA Today Phi Theta Kappa All-New York Academic Awards, 2015

NYC Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2015

Stephanie Azzopardi  
Hunter College, '15  
Goldwater Scholarship, 2016

Tiffany Benjamin  
Hunter College  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Naxhije Berisha  
Hunter College  
Goldwater Scholarship, 2015

Latoya Bethune  
Hunter College  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Hugo Genes  
Hunter College  
 Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015

Naomi Greene  
Hunter College, '15  
CDC/CSTE Applied Epidemiology Fellowship, 2015

Diane Kogan  
Hunter College  
Jonas E. Salk Scholarship, 2015

Dalia Ordoneye  
Hunter College  
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Esther Rong  
Hunter College  
Jonas E. Salk Scholarship, 2015

Benjamin Ruisch  
Hunter College  
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Anggielia Sutjipto  
Hunter College  
Humanity in Action Fellowship, 2015

Alexander Teachey  
Hunter College  
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Erika Wang  
Hunter College  
Jeanette K. Watson Fellowship, 2015

Julie Zhu  
Hunter College  
Soros New American, 2015

Eleneore Zuniga  
Hunter College  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Zeeshan Ali  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Oxford University, Course in Foundations of Diplomacy, 2015

Marlin Almonte  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Teach for America, 2015

Elise Amanor  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Master of Business Administration in International Relations, 2017

Nataniel Aravov  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '16  
Sidley Pre-Law Scholars Initiative, 2015

Ozzama Ayesh  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York University, Master's Degree in Global Affairs, 2017

Erick Amokwey Barksdale  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '16  
Teach for America, 2014

Akeem Benn  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '12  
Brooklyn Law School, JD, 2018

Hector Bernal  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York University, MSW, 2017

Daniella Blatter  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Law School, JD, 2018

Markie L. Bledsoe-Grant  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '16  
Internship Award from the Bergen County Police Department, 2014

Nicholas L. Burns  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Master's Degree in Digital Forensics and Computer Security, 2017

Amel Butt  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
London School of Economics and Political Science, MA in International Relations, 2017

Karlito Cadet  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, MPA in Public Policy and Administration, 2017

Janiri Carrasco  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2014

Ariana Castillo  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
NYC Coalition of 100 Black Women Spring Break Role Model Program, 2015

Victoria Ceru  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Touro, JD, 2018

Auguste Chanson  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Touro Law Center, JD, 2018

Crystal Charles  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '12  
University of Albany, State University of New York, Public Administration & Policy Ph.D. Degree Program, 2019

Frantzy Clement  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Presidential Management Fellows, 2015

John Corrado  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, JD, 2018

Elena Dain  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
New York Law School, JD, 2017

Tia Daniels  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '19  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015

Benedicta Darleh  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Coalition of 100 Black Women Role Model Program, 2015

Georgetown University, JD, 2018

Angela Degen  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '17  
Half-tuition scholarship to participate in the 2015 NY State Summer Writers Institute at Skidmore College, 2015

Xholia Derhemi  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
New York Law School, JD, 2018

Johnny D. Derogene  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
The Sidley Prewal Scholars Initiative, 2015

Kathryn Siruya Dinyal  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '13  
University College London, MSc in Crime and Forensic Science, 2015

CUNY 2015 AWARD RECIPIENTS 13
Protecting the Coastline

On a geology class field trip in 2014, two College of Staten Island students – 2015 Goldwater Scholarship winner Sean Thatcher and classmate Victoria Rivelli – discovered something geologically new about the exhaustively studied Palisades cliffs, along the west flank of the Hudson River.

Examining an outcrop of sedimentary rock that had been newly exposed at a construction site in North Bergen, N.J., they spotted sedimentary structures in the sandstone that shouldn’t have been there. And when they and lecturer Jane Alexander, the sedimentology teacher, presented their findings at a Geological Society of America conference, they rocked the place.

“We’re still analyzing rock samples that we took back to the lab to determine chemical variations associated with the Palisades Sill intrusion,” he says, referring to the formal name of the igneous rock that, as molten lava, flowed into fissures in the earlier sedimentary rocks.

Footnote: The only reason the class visited that site (a parking lot for a new bank) was that it was wheelchair-accessible. That’s a must for Thatcher, who became quadriplegic after fracturing his neck in a diving accident six years ago, when he was 18.

“I don’t let the wheelchair slow me down,” Thatcher says. “I refuse to stop living. I like to be productive and get things done. I think that using a wheelchair has actually enhanced my ability to think outside the box.”

Thatcher expects to graduate in 2017 from CSI’s selective Verrazano School honors program with a major in biology and a minor in geology. He says he took the geology class to “get a better understanding of the environment and its complex interactions.”

In his Goldwater application, he proposed a research project that would help him continue developing expertise in protecting and enhancing coastal ecosystems, which are under attack by human activity and climate change. His proposal, studying how fertilizer affects the growth rates of dune grass, would take place in CSI’s greenhouse.

Thatcher will spend this summer at the CUNY Graduate Center on a CUNY Pipeline Fellowship, which supports students who intend to earn Ph.D.s and teach in their fields at the university level. His pipeline project involves redeveloping the coastal ecosystem with sand dunes, coastal wetlands and other natural approaches to protect human communities from future storm surges, like those that swept across Staten Island during Hurricane Sandy.

“As a society, we need to redevelop coastal areas to better prepare for rising sea levels,” he says. He prefers taking the natural approach, rather than investing in mammoth barriers that have been proposed to protect New York’s harbor. While there may be a role for sea walls, he prefers “natural structures that cost little for humans to build, but support valuable biodiversity. What’s better to protect homes than green space?”

The Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, established by Congress, is the premier federally funded undergraduate scholarship that supports students who are headed toward doctoral study in the natural sciences, mathematics and engineering. The one- and two-year scholarships cover tuition, fees, books and room and board up to $7,500 a year.
CARLSKY BELIZAIRE, the son of Haitian immigrants, has always been drawn to Asia. “I’m intrigued by exploring different cultures, different people, different languages,” he says. “I’m thoroughly American, but I’m used to a Caribbean culture and western philosophies, so it’s great to see how the other half of the world lives.”

As an undergraduate at Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, Belizaire used Macaulay’s Opportunity Fund for winter-session study in China and Japan. Graduating with a B.A. in political science, he intends to explore another Asian nation, Taiwan, in greater depth with a 2015 Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship.

“I’ll be jumping into the deep, because I haven’t studied Mandarin,” he says. “I’m going to learn as much as I can before I leave.”

Belizaire foresees a career at the intersection of government and politics, possibly with a degree in law or public policy.

Through Macaulay, as a freshman he interned in the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Vehicular Crimes Unit, helping with trial preparation.

In the summer after his junior year, he interned in the Capitol Hill office of Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Queens) through CUNY’s Edward T. Rogowsky Internship Program in government and public affairs. “It broadened my life goals. It was life-changing.”

During his senior year, he joined the CUNY Service Corps to work at the Urban Justice Center, a nonprofit anti-poverty agency that provides legal and advocacy services to vulnerable New Yorkers. “I help the attorneys. Now we’re filing cases against the New York City Housing Authority, which hasn’t made critical repairs in some of its buildings,” he says.

Belizaire says his sensitivity to other people was heightened through Queens College’s Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding. “I’m a dialogue fellow [facilitator] in discussions we host on campus on tough issues, like Arab-Israeli conflicts, race relations in the United States and the identities society places on us,” he explains.

“Our point is to bring together people of various cultures and ideas so that we can have constructive and safe conversations.”
Her Chinese New Year

GROWING UP ON LONG ISLAND, Karissa Caputo dreamed of living in a Chinese environment. At Jericho High School and at CUNY, she took every opportunity to study Mandarin so she’d be ready. Now her time has come for a year of immersion.

With a 2015 Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to Taiwan, Caputo (Macaulay Honors College at Queens College, B.A., Spanish Education, minor, Mandarin, ’15) will plunge into Chinese language, history and culture.

"I want to be a foreign-language teacher," she says. As a student teacher, she taught Spanish at Floral Park Memorial High School, and she graduates with New York State certification to teach it. She also hopes that when she returns from her Fulbright, "I’ll pass the state exams and also will be certified to teach Mandarin. I’m also interested in TESOL," or teaching English to speakers of other languages.

When she was applying to colleges, she chose Queens because it offered strong foreign-language programs. “I didn’t know about Macaulay Honors College until the tour guide went over the requirements. I was happily surprised when I got accepted.”

She used her Macaulay Opportunities Fund, a grant that Macaulay Scholars can apply to a wide range of educational options, to perfect her Spanish through a Hunter College study trip to Argentina. And in Summer 2014 she made it to China for six weeks of study of the language and mainland culture at Shanghai University. Taiwan, she notes, will be markedly different from the mainland.

Despite speaking Mandarin in academic settings, “I definitely struggled over the summer,” Caputo concedes. But, she says, “I grew more confident. My Chinese is nowhere near perfect, but as long as I’m able to communicate with someone, that’s OK for now.”

She says that when she wrote her personal essay to apply for the Fulbright, “My main theme was hope.”

She adds, "In my study of Mandarin, I learned the modern word for ‘hope’ used to mean ‘to look into the distance with expectation.’ I think that’s the perfect definition."
Fishing for Sustainability

GOOGLE “HEALTH BENEFITS OF SALMON” and you’ll find articles listing seven or 10 reasons to eat it. Beneficial omega-3 fatty acids always top the list. In the wild, salmon get omega-3s by eating smaller fish and insects, which get them by eating microscopic, free-floating plants called phytoplankton.

But fewer salmon and other fish come from the wild. Habitat destruction, pollution, climate change and overfishing have diminished ocean fish populations. Since 2013, fish farms have served up more than half the seafood on the world’s tables, but not without controversy. Farmed salmon raised on artificial diets have less of those cherished omega-3s, while fish farms are faulted as environmentally unsustainable.

Which brings 2015 Fulbright Fellowship winner Nathaniel Sibinga, to flies.

“Fishing in the wild can’t produce enough to meet demand, so fish farming is here to stay, whether people like it or not,” says Sibinga (Brooklyn College, M.A., Biology ’15). “The question is: Can we find a way to farm fish in a more environmentally friendly way?” He hopes that novel food sources will bridge the gap between factory-style fish farms and “whatever the fish equivalent of a grass-fed cow is.”

With his Fulbright, Sibinga will join AquaFly, a study led by the Norwegian National Institute of Nutrition and Seafood Research. As its name implies, AquaFly feeds salmon proteins and fats that are derived from insects that ate omega-3-rich plants. His laboratory research at the University of Bergen will examine how fish metabolize a beneficial plant protein.

After earning the equivalent of an associate degree at tuition-free Deep Springs College, a highly regarded nontraditional school in rural California where no more than 26 students also work on a ranch, Sibinga got his bachelor’s in marine biology at Brown University.

There, he delved into the fundamental difficulties surrounding management of ocean fish stocks. “It’s not as though you can ethically prevent subsistence fishing communities in the Philippines or Mexico or even Japan from trying to find something to eat. You have to give them a viable alternative.”

Sibinga’s research led him to Brooklyn College Distinguished Professor Emeritus Martin P. Schreibman. He champions urban aquaculture (growing fish in small-scale city locales) and aquaponics (using fish waste to fertilize hydroponic vegetables, which grow in water, not soil). Could Schreibman’s approach hold the key to reducing overfishing?

Schreibman, semi-retired, was reluctant to take on another student. But Sibinga emailed, phoned and then “started showing up at his office until I convinced him to let me work with him.”

Over the past three years, they’ve grown tomatoes and cucumbers in concert with tanks full of fish, raised composting red worms as a potential fish food and investigated feeding protein-rich duckweed – a pond-killing scourge – to farmed tilapia.

For that project, Sibinga harvested buckets of duckweed from the Prospect Park Lake and carted it on the subway back to Brooklyn College. In his lab, he turned duckweed into pellets that the resident tilapia adored.

“I’ve been here a long time,” Schreibman says, “and Nate is one of the best students who have come along. He’s quite the star.”
SCIENTISTS AGREE that greenhouse gases are changing Earth’s climate. Carbon dioxide is expelled when creatures breathe, vegetation rots and Arctic soils defrost. Nitrogen, more than three-quarters of our air, pollutes when oxidized by combustion and other processes.

But what if carbon and nitrogen could be pulled out of the atmosphere and locked up as minerals? Johnathan Culpepper (Medgar Evers College, A.A., Mass Communications, ’06; B.S., Environmental Science ’09) will explore that idea with a 2015 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Working with civil and environmental engineering professor Michelle Scherer at the University of Iowa College of Engineering, Culpepper intends to research iron’s potential to sequester carbon and nitrogen. Iron is the fourth most abundant element on Earth, after oxygen, silicon and aluminum. It easily reacts with other elements, forming stable compounds both on land and in the oceans.

“I hypothesize that there is a unique iron pathway that influences and is interdependent on the better understood carbon and nitrogen cycles,” Culpepper says. (“Cycles” refers to the natural exchange of elements among living things, soils, rocks, oceans and atmosphere.) “There is limited understanding of how iron minerals interact with carbon and nitrogen,” he explains. He questions why the surfaces of iron oxide minerals can lock up organic carbon; how iron oxide interactions preserve carbon in water and soil; and how carbon and nitrogen compounds can rapidly attach to iron surfaces.

Born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, Culpepper worked his way through Medgar Evers as an international student by selling his art, from paintings to logo designs. As an undergraduate, he mentored high school chemistry and physics students in the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry program (CSTEP), guiding teams to first- and second-prize victories in statewide competitions. He worked as a chemistry lab technician and interned in a NASA-funded atmospheric research project; his job was to prepare all apparatus and chemicals used to detect ozone using helium-filled balloons.

After earning his bachelor’s, Culpepper “wanted to give back” to the Medgar Evers community. For three years he taught English writing, mathematics and general science to adults in POISED for Success, which is funded by CUNY’s Research Foundation. He also taught 100- to 200-level undergraduate courses in English composition and writing, algebra, trigonometry, pre-calculus, art history, physics and general and organic chemistry.

Now married, the father of two daughters and becoming a U.S. citizen, Culpepper says he “wants to become a professor of environmental engineering in a research-intensive institution.” His target is “elemental cycles and interactions within our soil, water and atmospheric systems.”

The National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship is the most prestigious for graduate studies in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The federal grant provides $138,000 over three years for doctoral-level research.
Making City Government Work

GROWING UP IN LAGOS, Nigeria, a fast-growing area with more than 21 million people, James Oladipupo Williams was used to an urban crush. What threw him after he arrived in New York in 2011 was the very notion of a city government that was responsible for the nuts and bolts of urban life.

“Nigeria’s federal government presides over the largest economy in Africa, with a GDP growing at about 7 percent,” says Williams (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, B.S., Public Administration, ’15). “Most projects happen at the state level. Localities are reduced to performing a function of political mobilization, not local governance.” As a 2015 New York City Urban Fellow, he’ll get an insider’s view of how a U.S. city government works. When he returns home, probably after earning a master’s in public policy or public administration, he says, “I want to create a more representative government for the Nigerian people and enhance their development.”

The nationally competitive Urban Fellowship, a $30,000 nine-month program, introduces participants to local government and public service. Fellows work in a New York City agency, take seminars in urban issues and travel to Albany and Washington, D.C., to discuss government structure and finance with public officials.

Through CUNY’s Edward T. Rogowsky Internship Program in Government and Public Affairs, Williams already has a sense of Congress. He interned with Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-Brooklyn-Queens) in summer 2014. He helped with reviewing legislation, answering constituent mail and researching policy issues.

An aunt in New York suggested that he look into John Jay for his college education.

Williams speaks with hope about oil-rich Nigeria, which is beset with chronic challenges. Since gaining independence in 1960, it has seen repeated military coups, but on May 29, 2015, Nigeria was slated to see its fourth consecutive democratic transfer of presidential power.

“We’re not expecting magic, but there is hope that this new government can really move the country forward,” he says.
From BMCC to NASA

ONE DAY, WHEN HUMANS travel to Mars, they may explore the planet with a remote-controlled glider bearing sensors designed by Joshua Tanon (Borough of Manhattan Community College, A.S., Engineering Science ’15).

During a 2015 NASA aerospace engineering internship at Edwards Air Force Base in California, Tanon will join a team of top-flight college students to create those sensors and prepare them to fly by the end of the summer.

Why a glider? Mars’ atmosphere is less than 1 percent as dense as Earth’s and engines are heavy. A superlight, unpowered aircraft with a wide wingspan could generate enough lift to ride Mars’ faint air currents.

Why Joshua Tanon? “As a kid, I used to lie in the backyard watching planes and hoping they’d land in my backyard,” he says. “In high school, I got this ambition to become a fighter pilot from a video game” – a dream that hasn’t gone away. “I have a passion for wanting to serve. If I can’t fly planes, learning about aerospace engineering would allow me to fix them.”

After graduating from Bronx Community High School, Tanon enrolled at Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology in Queens. In 16 months he graduated licensed to maintain aircraft and their engines. “I learned the ins and outs of aircraft – body, engines, the differences between turbojet and reciprocating engines and how to fix both. I liked working with my hands and seeing how things work.” He worked a stint as an aircraft mechanic.

But there was more to learn. In Fall 2012 Tanon enrolled in BMCC’s engineering science program and, soon after, in Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP, a CUNY initiative that helps community college students earn degrees faster than usual. “My ASAP advisor was there very step of the way – a very personal connection that had me graduate on time,” he says.

Tanon studied mechanical structures like bridges, buildings, cars and, of course, planes. “BMCC gave me a theoretical approach to everything in engineering,” he says. He also became president of the Physics and Nanotechnology Club on his way to becoming a Phi Theta Kappa scholar.

At press time, he had not decided where he will study for his bachelor’s degree.

“Without ASAP, I don’t believe I would have applied to top engineering schools nor NASA,” he says. “As an ASAP student leader, I show students the door. My story is a testament to what ASAP did once I walked through that door.”

The NASA internship runs for 10 weeks and, when Tanon boards the airplane for the trip to California, he’ll be making his first flight after years of dreaming of being aloft. With a laugh, he says, “That’s pretty shocking, considering my ambitions.”
Dumitru Efros  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
CUNY School of Law, Law, 2018

Zunira Eliab  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
CUNY School of Law, Law, 2018

Crystal Escabi  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Law School, JD, 2018

Alexis Gervasini  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York City Teaching Fellows, 2015

Mia Gomez  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Central Connecticut State University, MA in Criminal Justice, 2017

Jellisa Chamalie Grant  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Northeastern University, CUNY School of Law, JD, 2018

Kristi Greenberg  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '10  
Marist College, MPA, 2016

Emily C. Green  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Hunter College, MSEd in Early Childhood Education, 2017

Jonathan Illera  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Queens College, Master’s degree in mental health counseling, 2017

Simone Isaac  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Women’s Forum of New York Education Fund, 2014

Palakpreet Kaur  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '16  
Western New England University School of Law, JD, 2018

Evlira Kiriiko  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Boston University, JD, 2018

Peter Kowalewska  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Brooklyn Law School, JD, 2018

Taisha Lazare  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Washington University in St. Louis, JD, 2015

Alex H. Levitz  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
John H. Stamler Memorial Scholarship, 2015

James Love  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
American Political Science Association Minority Fellowship Program, 2015

Shebit Manchanda  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
New York State Summer Writer’s Institute at Skidmore College, 2015

Kieran Meagher  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Scholarship to attend New York Law School, 2015

Edward Walter Mone  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Chestnut Hill College, PsyD, 2020

Farah Montinard  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Syracuse University, MA in International Relations with a concentration in Peace, Security and Conflict, 2016

Sebastian Ovalle  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
University of Iowa, JD, 2018

Ana Paredes  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, 2015

Susan Pimentel  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '12  
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, 2015

Leslie Palanco  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Rutgers-Newark, JD, 2018

Jasmine Rasheed  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '16  
New York Coalition of 100 Black Women Spring Break Role Model Program, 2015

Samuel Reinfeld  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York University Institute of Technology, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, 2019

Kadeem Lorenzo Robinson  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Law School, JD, 2018

Danyel Rodriguez Del Orbe  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Immigrant Justice Corps Fellowship, 2015

Eugenia Salcedo  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
University of California, San Francisco., PhD in Chemistry and Chemical Biology, 2019

Mayuri Saxena  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '13  
Presidential Management Fellows, 2014

Syed Talha Shahbaz  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
NYC Teaching Fellows Program, 2015

Jillian Amanda Shartrand  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
St. John’s University, JD, 2018

Janaina Siguenza  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice, 2017

Eulalia Sullivan  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
American International College, 2018

Garychka Sylvain  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
The Ohio State University, JD, 2018

Raymond Tejeda  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Law School, JD, 2018

Stacy Liliana Vargas  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
New York Coalition of 100 Black Women Role Model Program, 2015

Laquasia Wilkins  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '14  
Teach for America, 2014

Curtis Williams  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Lehman College, Counseling, 2017

Shawn Williams  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '15  
Brown University, PhD in Molecular Biology, Cellular Biology and Biochemistry, 2020

Hadassah Yisrael  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, '17  
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2015
IN HIS WIDELY ACCLAIMED poetry collection, *Accepting the Disaster*, Joshua Mehigan takes on grave topics filled with tragedy, suffering, and death. But, the dark message of his poems comes veiled by the musicality of rhyme and meter.

As an example, Mehigan’s narrative poem “The Orange Bottle,” uses uncanny, tender rhyming verse to tell the story of a man who stops taking his medication and suffers a psychotic episode before being arrested and sent to a mental hospital.

> The clear orange bottle was empty.
> It had been empty a day.
> It suddenly seemed so costly and uncalled for anyway.

For Mehigan, part of his joy in writing poetry is the thrill of composition, playing with words and language, and also rhythm and meter. However, he also uses poetry as a vehicle to discuss societal problems and issues in contemporary life.

> “In writing poetry, there are ideas that I have about the world that I would like to get into people’s heads, subtly,” he said.

Mehigan, a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center and teaching fellow at the College of Staten Island, was named a 2015 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry. Appointed on the basis of “prior achievement and exceptional promise,” Mehigan joins 174 Guggenheim winners that include ten poetry Fellows. His first book, *The Optimist*, was a finalist for the 2004 Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry and winner of the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize. His most recent book, *Accepting the Disaster*, was cited in the Times Literary Supplement, The New York Times Book Review, and elsewhere as a best book of 2014. Critics have called him “one of our finest emerging poets.”

Mehigan’s poems have also appeared in The New York Times, The New Yorker, Smithsonian, and several anthologies.

When asked how he became interested in poetry, Mehigan said he started writing when he was about 10 and attributes his poetic beginnings to childish self-absorption.

> “It wasn’t because I loved literature. It wasn’t because I loved writing. It was mainly just to try to impress people probably,” Mehigan joked. “But, eventually, I woke up and realized there is something to this.”

For inspiration, Mehigan goes to favorites who have also tackled difficult subjects such as W.H. Auden, Jorge Luis Borges, Edgar Bowers, Gwendolyn Brooks, and John Clare. Although his poetry focuses on dark topics, Mehigan explains that he doesn’t dwell in constant sadness.

> “I’m obsessed with death. It’s true. I am,” he said.
> “So if I’m walking down the street and see something in a particularly poignant way that demonstrates some interesting thing to me about death or my fear of death, then it will find its way to a poem. But it’s not like I walk around weeping,” he said with a laugh.

While he has enjoyed teaching at the College of Staten Island, Mehigan is grateful for the Guggenheim award, which he will use to focus on his next collection.

> “I’ll take off a year from school and it will allow me to live, so that I can work. So that I can write poems. And that is really and truly, an amazing gift,” he said.
Fighting the Good Fight Against Violence

ASKED HOW SHE CAME to create her own major in violence, conflict and development, Ilana Gelb mentions her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor who had kept silent about her experiences until she felt she had to respond to a Princeton professor's lecture in a course she was auditing.

That opened the floodgates, launching Gelb, her mother and grandmother on an six-year, three-generational speaking tour, often in schools, churches and synagogues; their presentation has broadened to encompass the horrific spectrum of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Gelb, who expects to earn her bachelor's degree in 2016 from the CUNY Baccalaureate program and Baruch College, spent spring 2015 studying abroad in Hunter College's Latin American development studies program. In Costa Rica, she taught English in a slum to adults who hadn’t finished high school, while she studied sustainable development, human rights and gender studies.

Her next stop is Jaipur, India, where she will use a 2015 U.S. State Department Critical Language Scholarship to study Hindi; the federal program aims to increase the number of Americans who speak languages that are not common in the States. For fall 2015, she will move on to Varanasi, also known as Benares, the holiest of the seven sacred cities in Hinduism and Jainsim. Besides taking classes and continuing language studies, she will work with Guria, a nonprofit organization that fights the sexual exploitation of women and girls. She will work in Guria's afterschool childcare program, which serves children who are growing up in the red light district. She also will conduct research into human trafficking and second-generation prostitutes.

This will be her third trip to India. The first was in a gap year following graduation from high school in Westchester County that focused on the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in sustainability. “I fell in love with India,” she says. She returned in 2013 in the summer after her freshman year to work with Guria.

After that experience, she and a friend, Eleni Efstathiadis, a Macaulay Honors College and CUNY baccalaureate student majoring in global health, started an anti-trafficking organization at Macaulay called Avasara (“opportunity” in Hindi). “We’ve been doing educational programming and consciousness-raising at monthly meetings and conferences,” she says. “We invite survivors, people from NGOs and governments. The May event is on the psychology of victimization. The events are free and open to the public.”

Gelb mentioned two influential professors. Zoë Sheehan Saldaña, a professor of fine and performing arts at Baruch College, “was very supportive of my studies of gender-based violence and genocide.” At Hunter College, adjunct Phelim Kine, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Asia Division, “brought a concrete sense of what it is to work in human rights” in his course in religion and ethnic conflict in Asia.

After graduation, she says, “I want to continue to work in the area of mass violence and trying to prevent genocide and gender-based violence.”
Speaking Up for Diplomacy

JOSHUA TRINIDAD has pursued languages for pleasure. Now, with a federally funded 2015 Charles E. Rangel Graduate Fellowship, he will prepare to put them to work as a Foreign Service diplomat.

Thanks to the grant, Trinidad (CUNY B.A./Hunter, World Languages and Literatures/Translation and Interpretation ’12) will pursue a master’s at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs. The top-tier fellowship program includes two internships, one on Capitol Hill this summer and one in an embassy overseas next summer.

“I’m going to grad school to study international relations, because even though I have a linguistic background and have lived in France, Japan and Colombia, I don’t have a firm grasp on how foreign policy, the State Department and the American government work. I’m shifting gears,” he says.

Born in Miami and raised by grandparents in Puerto Rico, Trinidad spoke Spanish as a child, but lost it back in Florida before his academic quest led him to recapture it while also taking up French and Japanese.

He started at the public Florida Gulf Coast University in 2002, but financial difficulties forced him to leave to work full time. Two years later he was in New York City, working, establishing residency for in-state tuition and saving money. He started at Hunter College part-time in 2006 while providing full-time customer support for a software company.

The CUNY Baccalaureate Program attracted him “because I couldn’t settle on just one language to study. With French and Spanish, I could major in Romance languages, but I had to get Japanese in there.”

He enhanced his Spanish with a winter session in Puerto Rico financed by a $1,000 CUNY B.A. Terrence L. Tenney Scholarship for Language Study.

He also won three other federal grants. A Benjamin Gilman International Fellowship took him to Paris to study French, Japanese and translation in 2011-2012, while he simultaneously taught high school English for the French Ministry of Education. He followed that up with a Critical Language Fellowship, studying Japanese in Kyoto, Japan in the summer 2012; he had started learning that language in high school, when he was obsessed with anime. A 2013-2014 Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship sent him to the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia in Bucaramanga.

In 2014 he won a private Kathryn Davis Fellows for Peace Scholarship to study Japanese full time at Middlebury College. “You have to sign a pledge to speak only Japanese, hang out only with people in your program and only watch TV in Japanese. You can get so fluent in two months!”

Trinidad says he is aiming for the State Department’s public diplomacy track. Public diplomacy work includes giving speeches in the local language, doing public relations abroad and organizing cultural and academic events. “I’m really excited about getting into a career that brings about positive change.”

The 30 Rangel Fellowships this year encourage members of historically underrepresented minority groups to serve as Foreign Service officers. They agree to work as diplomats for at least five years after graduation.
Putting Aesthetics in Context

IF YOU'RE SHOPPING in Afghanistan, don’t make the western-ethnocentric mistake of calling that lovely rug for sale in the market a work of art. Rugs, in the Afghan conception of aesthetics, are purely functional. Oil paintings are art.

Hogai Sarbeland Aryoubi (CUNY B.A., Anthropology of Cross-Cultural Aesthetics ’13) explored such differences as an undergraduate. Now, as she prepares to plunge into a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship in Turkey, she looks forward to teasing out similar differences in cultural perception in a new country.

“I’ve always been interested in teaching abroad,” she says. “I went to Istanbul last summer on a tour through Europe and the Middle East. I loved Turkey and wanted to fully immerse myself in the culture, so I applied.”

When she was 10, Aryoubi and her family arrived in Washington, D.C., on refugee visas from Afghanistan, and she stayed in the area through high school. When it was time for college, she headed to New York, first to Pace University and then to the CUNY Baccalaureate program. “What I wanted to study was available nowhere else. At Pace, I had over $50,000 in loans for two years and I’m still paying them off, but at CUNY I had to borrow only $2,000 to pay for materials.”

Aryoubi adds, “I loved CUNY, because I wanted a quality education at a diverse public university that is accessible and affordable, and when I graduated I posted it on my profile. It’s like I graduated from New York City. I loved my mentor, Dr. Regine Latortue, a former professor and chair of the Africana Studies Department at Brooklyn College, and am still in touch with her by email.

“Because she taught anthropology-based classes, she understood my interest in how the perception of aesthetics varies according to culture and helped me create my unique CUNY B.A. program.”

After graduating from CUNY, Aryoubi joined Teach for America. She now teaches 10th-grade English and handles a caseload of special education students at Cesar Chavez High School for Public Policy in Washington, D.C. This spring she is to receive an M.S. in educational studies from Johns Hopkins University.

After completing her Fulbright, she expects to pursue a doctorate in education. Unless, that is, “Cuba opens up. I’d like to teach there for a year, too.”
“TRANSLATION brings us something different, a perspective that we don’t have in English,” says Fulbright Award winner Eric M.B. Becker (Queens College, MFA, Creative Writing and Literary Translation ’15).

Becker, 31, was a journalist in Missouri, the Metropolitan Opera’s senior website manager and assistant managing editor at the literary journal “Asymptote.” In February 2015, he became editor of “Words Without Borders,” a monthly magazine of works in translation; April’s issue focused on Tamil literature and May’s on Palestinian works.

“In the past translators said, ‘Let’s yank it into idiomatic English,’ but today there’s more attention to respecting the original,” says Becker. “Translators need to ... try to reflect the connotations and histories of the words used in the original.”


Couto’s stories “concern how memory around national events is formed, along with the desire to forget. Mia is a poet, so I have to pay attention to the rhythm of his sentences, as well as to what they’re saying.”

With his Fulbright, Becker will travel to Brazil to work on two translations. One is a story collection by Eric Nepomuceno, himself the translator of Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez into Portuguese. The other is a historical novel by Edival Lourenço, “Naqueles morros, depois da chuva” (“Amid those hills, after the rain”), which traces the rise and fall of an 18th-century soldier of fortune.

“Translation is much more than translating the words on the page; it’s translating the context in which the characters are living to readers who may not have any familiarity with the country,” Becker says.

For more information see ericmbbecker.com.
MORE WOMEN THAN MEN tend to get out and vote — and that generally holds true across ethnic groups. In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible females who voted (64 percent) exceeded that of eligible males (60 percent), and the actual number of female voters was higher, too, census data show. Among African-American women, however, the gap in turnout is larger than that of any other racial group.

In his senior thesis, Jamel Love (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, B.A., Political Science ‘15) analyzes American National Election Survey Study Data (ANES), the major academic source of election information, to explore a possible explanation of the increasing African-American gender gap. “Because African-American women are attaining degrees at much higher rates than their male counterparts, this may explain the rising gap in voter turnout,” he says.

Next fall, Love intends to enter a political science doctoral program at Rutgers University, which will waive tuition and provide a five-year, $23,000 annual stipend. In 2015 he also won a $4,000 grant from the American Political Science Association’s Minority Fellowship Program.

“I’d like to do research concerning the ways different groups engage the political system and what motivates them to do so,” he says.

Love has been a Ronald E. McNair Scholar in a program funded by the U.S. Department of Education to prepare students from underrepresented groups for graduate study.

Love says his long-term goal is to teach political science at the university level and to ultimately produce research that influences policy benefiting society’s most vulnerable groups. “As a professor I hope to serve as a resource for other young minority students who may not have resources or support to succeed in professional fields,” he says.
LIKE EVERYONE SERVING in World War II, Jacob Levin’s grandfather had to wear combat boots. As a pilot, that proved problematic. His boot got stuck under a pedal during a training exercise, causing the plane to crash. Family lore says he walked away uninjured and wrote to his commanding officer about what had happened. The result was an Army-wide directive that pilots could wear less cumbersome dress shoes. His grandfather, safely shod, went on to fly dozens of missions in Europe.

“We’ve been in public service for some time,” jokes Levin, one of just 58 winners of a 2015 Harry S. Truman Scholarship. The federally funded $30,000 grant supports juniors and seniors who agree to work in public service for three of the seven years after earning their graduate degrees.

A junior known to most as Jake, Levin expects to graduate in 2016 from Macaulay Honors College at Brooklyn College with a double major in political science and philosophy and a minor in history.

He says public service is “hard-wired” into his genes. His mother is a clinical social worker, his father a teacher and his other grandfather was a Justice Department attorney. Serving his college community, he was recently re-elected to Brooklyn College Student Government.

Levin’s public service journey began with constituent casework. During a yearlong internship with Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, he helped veterans with benefits, discharge status upgrades and other issues. He also coordinated a team of interns who helped Gillibrand select her nominees for the federal service academies from more than 650 applications. For his Truman application, he prepared a policy proposal aimed at improving hiring practices at the Veterans Affairs Health Administration.

Although most of Levin’s political experience has been in New York, he says, “My political education began growing up in New Hampshire.” He keeps his legal residence there because, “my liberal vote means more in New Hampshire than in New York.”

Levin’s biggest public service accomplishment to date is creating TEDxCUNY, a University-wide version of the idea-spreading TED Conference, whose provocative talks have garnered billions of online hits. “I said: ‘CUNY has incredible ideas. Why don’t we have our own conference to share them with the world?’”

With support from CUNY central and Macaulay Honors College, he secured a license from the TED organization that makes TEDxCUNY the nation’s only TEDx university conference to unite and represent multiple campuses.

At its November 2014 debut, 13 speakers discussed “access”: accessing your mind, community, world and future. The conference reached capacity, and there have been more than 40,000 views at http://www.tedxcuny.com/videos. Levin is now organizing the fall 2015 TEDxCUNY conference.
Acting with Humanity

TENSIONS, ALWAYS HIGH between India and Pakistan – two nuclear-armed countries that have fought several wars – peaked in 2008 after Pakistan-based terrorists wreaked slaughter and destruction in Mumbai. “Cricket diplomacy” helped cool things down.

In 2011, India’s prime minister invited Pakistan’s president to join him at a Cricket World Cup semi-final match. Away from the pitch, India eased its visa policies in disputed Kashmir and Pakistan released an alleged spy it had held for 27 years. Relations warmed even more in 2013, when Pakistan’s cricket team traveled to India and, in as close to a diplomatic ending as possible, won 2-1. When the teams met again in 2015, almost one billion people cheered around the world.

“Sports has the capacity to impact diplomatic relations in a way that nothing else can, particularly between countries that have had a contentious relationship,” says Valeria Munt (Brooklyn College, B.A., political science, French and Spanish literature ’08; City College, M.A., international affairs ’15).

Humanity in Action, an international nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization, has awarded her a Diplomacy and Diversity Fellowship. Over four weeks in the spring of 2015, the 24 fellows – all American and European graduate students – were scheduled to meet government, business and academic leaders in Berlin and Washington, D.C. Their goal, in the organization’s words, was to “consider ways of promoting constructive diplomacy in a changing world through innovative and inclusive approaches to national and international issues.”

Munt’s master’s research into sports diplomacy made her a natural for this coveted fellowship. “Cricket,” she observes, “has not solved the deeply rooted rivalry they’ve had since independence from Britain in 1947, but it did help them start communicating.” She also delved into the “Ping-Pong diplomacy” in 1971-1972, which opened the door to President Nixon’s historic visit to Cold War adversary China.

Munt learned English in her native Peru before coming to the United States – “which has so many opportunities” – and to Brooklyn College, where she completed her triple-major bachelor’s degree in four years. She became a U.S. citizen in 2011 and intends to marry another CUNY alumnus, Vitali Angelyniauk (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, B.A., ’15).

Munt has had several internships: with U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, U.N. Women and the U.S. State Department’s consulate in Barcelona.

Munt now works in community relations in the district office of state Sen. Gustavo Rivera of the Bronx, who told her about the Humanity in Action fellowship because of her interest in international relations. In 2009, when Rivera worked for U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, he was one of 20 politically active young Americans to join 20 Dutch counterparts in Humanity in Action’s Pioneers program, where they considered issues like technology, politics and social media. The Dutch government sponsored Pioneers to celebrate the 400th anniversary of discovery of the Hudson River.

Munt says that eventually she wants to shift into a job in international relations, “which is not only what I’ve studied, but also what I’m passionate about.”
33CUNY 2015 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Poetry from Life

FOR PULITZER PRIZE WINNING POET Gregory Pardlo, the complex issues of identity form the crux of his work. In his brilliant collection, *Digest*, he writes about sometimes struggling through his varied roles in life as a new father, Brooklyn resident, and black man in America.

However, his poetic journey begins with a voice from the past, the voices of his ancestors in a poem entitled “Written by Himself.”

> I was born in minutes in a roadside kitchen a skillet whispering my name. I was born to rainwater and lye; I was born across the river where I was borrowed with clothespins, a harrow tooth, broadsides sewn in my shoes.

“One of my concerns, early on in the inception of this book, was that this material is me. So that the discourses that make up our literary traditions become my identity,” Pardlo says.

“And this poem takes material collaged from abolitionist literature, from slave narratives, from canonical Afro-American literature. They’re images that scholars or even casual readers of slave narratives will recognize,” he says.

Pardlo, a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center and former assistant professor at Medgar Evers College, won this year’s Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Judges cited his “clear-voiced poems that bring readers the news from 21st Century America, rich with thought, ideas and histories public and private.”

In *Digest*, Pardlo tackles an astounding array of subjects from race to philosophy to family relationships. He also includes poetic references to literary greats like Ralph Ellison, Chinua Achebe and Cervantes.

“I wanted to look for ways to integrate my scholarly interests and my creative interests,” he says. “So, a lot of the poems in the book are in conversation with other books.”

Pardlo also writes extensively about Brooklyn and explores how gentrification has transformed the fabric of his neighborhood. However, Pardlo says his poems describe people and places in Brooklyn that have largely been ignored by contemporary writers.

“And it seemed to me that all the clichés about Brooklyn that are literary clichés were usually referencing coffee shops in Boerum Hill or Cobble Hill and Park Slope. That wasn’t the Brooklyn where the most meaningful intersections and interactions between communities and across communities was happening.”

Currently, Pardlo is working on his dissertation, which focuses on the visual agency of African American poets and writers in the early twentieth century.

“That is, what did black authors, in their texts, give themselves permission to report seeing, having seen or witnessed,” Pardlo explains.

When asked what advice he would offer to aspiring writers and poets, Pardlo says: “Make the work itself the thing you enjoy. Make that the reward.”

“What got me through a lot of the fallow times was just the sheer joy of writing a poem and pursuing it against my own sort of resistances, my own fears and inhibitions,” Pardlo says.
CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK-1847
HUNTER COLLEGE-1870
BROOKLYN COLLEGE-1930
QUEENS COLLEGE-1937
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY-1946
BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1957
QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1958
CUNY GRADUATE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY CENTER-1961
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1963
KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1963
JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE-1964
YORK COLLEGE-1966
BARUCH COLLEGE-1968
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1968
LEHMAN COLLEGE-1968
HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE-1970
MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE-1970
COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND-1976
CUNY SCHOOL OF LAW-1983
MACAULAY HONORS COLLEGE AT CUNY-2001
CUNY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM-2006
CUNY SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES-2006
THE CUNY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH-2008
GUTTMAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE-2011